

Twitter Thread by Pat Walls



Pat Walls
[@thepatwalls](#)



I'm doing an AMA on @IndieHackers.

Drop some questions in there! Happy to answer anything, esp around building side projects with a full-time job :)

<https://t.co/da4Ael9TnE>

AUGUST 20, 2019

I'm Pat Walls, I built my side project StarterStory to profitability and quit my full-time engineering job.

Hey everyone!

My name is Pat Walls and I am the founder of **StarterStory** - a website like Indie Hackers that helps people start businesses.

With very little experience in blogging or starting a business, I bootstrapped StarterStory on nights and weekends to now \$5k/month and 80k monthly visitors.

After about a year working on the project, I made the decision to leave my full-time job.

I also launched **24hrstartup** - the largest streamed online hackathon of all time.

Nowadays, I'm working StarterStory and **Pigeon** - a CRM for Gmail to help bloggers, freelancers, and salespeople to spend less time on email and land more sales.

AMAs
Meet successful founders and ask them anything.

Pat Walls
[@patwalls](#)

[starterstory.com](#)

Founder
 Pigeon for Gmail (\$290/mo)

Founder
 Starter Story (\$4.2K/mo)

@IndieHackers My high level plans for Starter Story.

3

I know you're currently doing a lot with Pigeon But I'm interested in what the future plans for Starter Story. I notice you have logins?



harrydry · 7 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

Yes, I've had logins for a while now. You can do some basic stuff like upvoting and commenting.

As far as future for Starter Story, the one big thing that I love is scaling out the content operation. I want to not only do more interviews, but do different content as well.

This month we are on track to publishing 60 pieces of content, a record high. I have brought on a small team (outsourced) that is starting to run more of the day to day, publishing, and behind the scenes so that I can focus on rolling out new ideas. Pigeon is a big help with this, as well as a lot of the automation we're building.

Some people might scoff at this - thinking it's too much content, blog spam, whatever - but I don't see it that way. As an "editor" - I try to not be too opinionated about that kind of thing as I know that the content is helping a lot of people. What you find useful may not be useful for someone else, and vice versa.

My goal is that one day Starter Story is a big entrepreneur/business media company along the likes of Forbes, Fast Company, Hacker Noon, or Indie Hackers. That is sort of my long term vision, that Starter Story will have a big impact like that. Very high level, but that's the direction I plan to go with it, and it's like a 10-20 year vision.

Some more short term things are to build more content around all of the structured data we have. For example, we have 500 tools and I'd like to expose those more on the site.

I want to build a better tagging system so I can build content around "10 successful jewelry businesses" - a lot of ppl ask me to build a search, favorite stories, etc.

@IndieHackers On almost quitting

cc: @daviswbaer

3

How did you become so cool? 🤔

Also, in the very earliest days of StarterStory, were you ever close to just giving up on it?



DavisBaer · 7 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

Yes!! It's a great question.

I've actually wanted to write a blog post/video about this.

Although things are kind of blurry from that time, there are two instances that have documented when I was close to quitting.

Mar 8, 2019, a month after launching, an old email conversation with @louisswiss:

Starter Story is kind of on autopilot as I've exhausted all of my promotional outlets and now starting to work on some new ideas.

And a **monthly update blog post** from around the same time:

Overall, I felt pretty unmotivated this month. I found it hard to put serious time into the project, and found myself looking for new ideas (possibly starting another business).

I started working on new ideas, but I never stopped posting new interviews. That's what always got me out of those funks. Just kept putting in work every day.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

[@IndieHackers](#) [@daviswbaer](#) How I find so many businesses to interview

2 Hey Pat, love your YouTube videos - keep up the great work 👍

Curious how you find companies to interview. Do you reach out to them? Do they come to you? What's your sales pitch?

All the best



doublejay · 5 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1 I don't have exact numbers but I would say it's about 80% outbound, 20% inbound/referral.

How have I found companies to interview? I've sent cold emails to over 6000 businesses, found them by scraping websites and directories like the Mixergy podcast. Then I find their email with Email Hunter API.

But I no longer really do that by myself - I have some outsourced help on this. Some people helping with lead research (finding great businesses to interview) and some people finding names and emails. I'm working on scaling this it's fun!

Here's a **screenshot of my cold email**.

I do get some inbound because I advertise the opportunity to share your story in as much places as I can, and I ALWAYS ask every interviewee if they know anyone else who wants to share their story.

Thanks re: YouTube - what do you want me to make videos about next?



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer On balancing different projects

2

How do you balance the amount of time you're spending on each project?



stephsmith · 5 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

Good question.

I think the balance between projects just happens based on my goals/todo list. I set monthly goals, weekly goals, and then each day I do some high-level time blocking.

So if I want to get X and Y done for Starter Story next week, and Z for Pigeon then it will just happen naturally.

I guess that's sort of obvious and probably doesn't answer anything. Maybe better answer is about how I determine what to work on for each project?

I don't really have a great answer for this.

I try to dig deeper into what absolutely NEEDS to get done. I read this book called 'The One Thing' which basically just says do the most important thing now, and only that until it's done so you can move on to the next 'one thing'.

I really try to internalize that but obv get sidetracked a lot. It has really helped me though. It has helped me become better at finishing what I start, and overall just feel really productive with that mindset.

For example, it inspired me and helped me to hire on a small team of outsourcers to take on the day to day work at Starter Story. At the time, that was 'the one thing' I needed to do to free up 2 hours of my day and idk how I could live without that now.

Sorry, this answer is sort of contrived as I still need to work on this a lot tbh.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer Why I'm working on Pigeon when it would be more rational to put all my time into Starter Story.

2
Hi Pat! Have you ever considered dedicating 100% of your time on growing Starter Story (which is clearly a winner) instead of launching other products?

Also, why don't you add a podcast or a YouTube channel? I'm sure they would be an instant hit 😊

 andreabosoni · 6 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1
Yes, I think about this all the time.

There are a lot of reasons:

- I've always wanted to build a SaaS. To prove myself that I can do it because I failed at it before.
- I love the process of learning to build a SaaS product. It's new to me.
- I want to diversify my income streams with an MRR model.
- I get bored with one project.
- I'm really passionate about Pigeon, maybe more so than Starter Story. Maybe Pigeon was the product I should have been building the whole time.
- I think the time constraints are a good thing. Building Pigeon essentially forced me to bring on help for Starter Story, and that has been an amazing learning experience and will grow the site even more down the line.

I'm sort of self-conscious about this because @csallen asked the same question to me on the podcast and I didn't give a good answer.

I don't know, it just feels right to me and I don't know if I could do it any other way.

I once saw this question asked to Gary Vee (cringe I know) but his answer is that as entrepreneurs we are just crazy and do irrational things, and that's OK. That always stuck with me!

 patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer On the lifestyle change going from full time to free time overnight.

1
How would you compare your work/life balance from salary to indiemer? Maybe work/life balance is not what I'm aiming for, maybe lifestyle?

 fgasperi · an hour ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1
It's amazing.

I never did consulting and always had a job my whole adult life - so the feeling of freedom I had after I quit was pretty unreal. I went from full time to free time overnight basically.

Every day, I get to work on my own shit. I make my own schedule. I'll work in the morning, then go for a run/exercise for a couple hours, midday.

I don't really think in terms of 'the weekend' anymore. I can take a day off when I want. I can travel to New York and live there for a month, or overseas.

But also, I have a lot more stress. I feel that it could all fall apart tomorrow. The lows are really low and the highs are really high. Rejection stings harder.

Wouldn't trade it for anything.

 patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer Some thoughts about automation.

1

Hi Pat, I loved your recent article about how you automate social media posting!

How do you determine what types of tasks are best suited to automate? I know a lot of indies (myself included) have spent time prematurely automate all the things vs spending time in other areas of the business. How do you strike the right balance?



dpap31 · 5 hours ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

That's a good question which I don't know if I have the right answer but I'll say what's worked for me.

I do everything manually at first. Literally no automation. My 'automation' to start would be as simple as setting a recurring calendar event or email reminder trigger to do something.

I don't mind doing the manual work. It's fun for me to learn a new 'thing'.

I also think manually doing the task is important because (1) you learn smaller nuances that are important and (2) you realize if it's even worth doing.

So, for example, I manually posted to reddit for probably months. That helped me figure out titles, the angle, the copy, more subreddits I could post to, etc.

Automation is really complicated and often you need to build dashboards/process/people around that can only be learned through the manual pain.

And as you see things working, then you get to automate it which is really fun to watch "the work fall off your plate" and watch robots run your startup every day.

P.S. Great to hear from you man. We need to catch up.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer Will a better boss (at your full time job) help you with your side project?

I'm not happy at my current job (mostly because of management issues), but on the other side my side biz is still at zero MRR... So I'm considering finding a new job while I continue my IH'ing journey, but I do get worried that the transition will become a distraction from making progress on my Business. Would love to hear your take on this. 🙏



cgbeas · 2 hours ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

Hearing that my videos inspired you to wake up early is like the coolest thing, man. Lately, I haven't been uploading for reasons I can't really put my finger on, but you saying this inspires me to make more videos.

First of all, if you get giddy about working on your side project on mornings and weekends, then you already won. That's how I was, just totally in the zone when I had time to put in the work on the side project. Most people can't even motivate themselves to do that, yet they still want to build an indie business.

I also left a job (for another job) because of bad management. I had to get out of there. The new job was a way better situation, and it helped me a lot. Starting a new job might be worthwhile, but, like you said you might have 1-2 months where you gotta prove yourself.

I didn't make any money on Starter Story for 4 months after launch, so I wouldn't worry so much about 0 MRR.

Launch your shit if you haven't already, keep documenting your journey, and most importantly have fun.

I often reminisce on those times when I had a full-time job + side project. It's really badass to have a successful side project, and like you said, you will learn to become a more productive person for it which will help you a lot down the line when you go full-time indie hacking.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer Do you ever feel that the journey will be too long and painful, will it ever end?

I sometimes have a feeling that creeps in - that it is such a longgg journey. Did you ever feel this way, and wanted to drop off ? Is it worth it in your opinion(apart from the money) ?

Best

Misha



Pritisha · a day ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1

Your website looks great! And I think it's a great idea / good niche.

When I launched Starter Story, I literally copied the Indie Hackers layout and the tiles to a T. Since then, I've slowly tweaked stuff and now it sort of has its own feel.

I sometimes have a feeling that creeps in - that it is such a longgg journey. Did you ever feel this way, and wanted to drop off?

This is a great point. In another answer here I talk about quitting and show you that I was pretty close to doing so, so I've definitely been there. Def check that one out.

Re: the long journey. Over the past year, I've changed my mindset on this. Nowadays, I get excited about how long the journey will be. Learning to love the process every day and the painfully "slow" growth. I get excited that this might take 20 years.

I'm not really interested in the "end" or any short term outcomes anymore. What happens when I hit \$10k/month? Absolutely nothing. You just keep failing, learning and growing. What happens if you sell your business? You just go start a new business.

If you're feeling this way, I'd recommend reading the stories/biographies of other successful entrepreneurs or even looking at successful creators and how long they were working before they got "big". It's really inspiring and helps put things in perspective.

Is it worth it in your opinion?

It is 100% worth it. Keep doing those interviews.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

[@IndieHackers](#) [@daviswbaer](#) Starter Story revenue breakdown, and my thoughts on sponsors.

5 You said \$5k/month how does the money come from and what is your monetization strategy.
I don't think you sell ads.

 TheMaker · 7 days ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1 Here's the breakdown:

- Sponsors: 80%
- Premium memberships: 10%
- Affiliate Revenue: 10%

My monetization strategy has been to find a long term sponsor (<https://klaviyo.com>) and work out a deal where they sponsor the newsletter + site for 6-12 months at a time.

There are loads of ways to monetize a blog/content site. You can sell courses, sell datasets, build a community, use an ad network, write content optimized for affiliate revenue, and tons of other ways.

The monetization that has worked well for me (and what I like the best) is finding a sponsor who is "on board" with the mission of the business. @harrydry did a great job with this as well.

I focus on long term sponsors. I'd rather sign a 1-year contract for \$1000 than a one month contract for \$200, because the process of locking down sponsors sucks, is time-consuming, and can lead to lost time (i.e. you spend 2 weeks "unsponsored" and you essentially lost money. This also allows me to focus on growing the site which is a win win for your sponsor and for you when you go to renew the contract.

 patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer Is having a newsletter a big deal in reaching/growing your audience?

1
Hey Pat - i'm looking at starting up a blog/newsletter myself. What platform do you recommend for newsletters? And have you found newsletters to be effective in reaching/growing an audience?



aaronwatershow · 17 minutes ago · [-] · **REPLY**

1
I'm going to go against the grain on this one.

I think newsletters are less important than people make them out to be. Traffic from my newsletter accounts for like 4% of my overall traffic, and my newsletter is over 8k.

I saw open and click rates decline like crazy as well as the list grew.

Having a newsletter is still important though. But I would focus more on the blog side.

This is just my personal experience tho. There are many examples of the opposite.



patwalls · a few seconds ago · [-] · **REPLY**

@IndieHackers @daviswbaer That's it! There are some more responses in there that I didn't screenshot.

<https://t.co/da4Ael9TnE>

Super fun and rewarding to write all these answers. What I love about this AMA is that it basically outlines a ton of blog posts and YouTube video ideas!