

HOW TO GO
FROM CREATOR OR
INFLUENCER
TO BUSINESS AND
BRAND OWNER

you are the algorithm

BY ADAM CORDNER



You Are The Algorithm

**Moving From Creator to Business Owner, and Working
Unbound**

PUBLISHED BY: Adam Cordner

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Introduction

Learning To Live Unbound

I left the corporate world at possibly the worst and best time you could pick.

Right as COVID hit.

On paper, it made no sense. I had just hit big milestones for the company I was working for. I was the “safe pair of hands.” The guy you send into big rooms to calm down nervous executives and somehow walk out with a deal and a selfie.

I had already been doing a version of what this book is about. Long before “creator” or “influencer” were job titles people put on LinkedIn without cringing, I was basically doing that inside other people’s brands.

I was the evangelist. The storyteller. The slide deck in sneakers. I built trust in markets, showed up in cities, spoke at events, helped shape narrative, created content before we even called it content. I watched my work move numbers. Pipeline. Revenue. Brand perception. All that good stuff.

And then I would go home, look at my payslip, and feel that quiet disconnect.

The company was growing. The logo was shining. I was proud of the work. But inside, there was this constant little tug saying, “You are building something big for someone else, and you are not building anything with your own name on it.”

When COVID landed, that voice stopped being a whisper and turned into an alarm.

So I left. It was hard. I loved the people I worked with.

I would love to tell you it was a perfectly timed, spreadsheet approved, deeply spiritual decision. It was not. It was a mix of exhaustion, instinct, and a very simple thought.

If the world can shut down this fast, I may as well take a risk on myself.

What followed was the weirdest professional identity crisis of my life.

I was not a consultant. I did not feel like one of those.

I was not a “proper” business yet either.

I was something in between. Half creator. Half executive. Half feral.

I built consumer brands from scratch. MANWASH being the loudest example. I put my own money on the line. I tested everything I talk about in this book. Audience, brand, partnerships, performance. I learned how it feels when your “idea” is also your inventory bill.

At the same time, I moonlighted as a software executive for hire. Companies would bring me in to fix growth, shape GTM, build sales motions, get stuck deals moving again. I was the gun you bring in when you are too close to your own mess to see it.

On three separate occasions, I even went back to full time employment.

I thought, “Maybe I am overthinking it. Maybe I just need a good role, a good boss, and a good package. Then I will settle down.”

Each time I tried to re enter civilisation, the same thing happened.

On the surface, I could do the job. I know how to sell. I know how to build teams. I know how to talk to boards and keep a straight face when someone suggests a seventeen stage approval process.

But inside, I was always **staring out the window**.

Once you have lived in the wild, it is very hard to pretend you are happy in a cubicle, even if the cubicle is a well paid one with nice coffee.

Some people thrive there. There is a reason civilisation exists. It is safe, warm, and full of structure. You know when your next pay will land. You know which meetings you are supposed to be in. You know who is above you and who is below you on the org chart. There is comfort in that.

It is just not me.

The more I tried to squeeze back into that world, the more obvious it became that I had crossed a line I could not uncross. I was not “Adam the employee” anymore. I was Adam the asset. Adam the brand. Adam the fractional, slightly feral, outcome focused operator who kept accidentally treating jobs like short term advisory gigs.

I will be honest, this has not always made me popular.

Some corporate leaders I have worked with have probably found me frustrating. Yes, I am talented. Yes, I can move the needle fast. But I am also the guy mentally mapping the exits while we are in the all hands. I am always half aware of the door that leads back outside.

That is the tension of working unbound.

You get addicted to results, not rituals. To outcomes, not optics. To value, not vanity.

Fast forward five years from that first jump and this is now my normal.

I make my living as a fractional executive focused on growth. I do not sell hours. I sell outcomes. If I am in the room, it is because something important needs to move and we are all clear about what that is.

I run a consumer brand that exists in the real world, with actual products on actual shelves and real people putting it in their showers.

I mentor founders, startups and stalled companies that are trying to get to the next level of revenue and growth without losing their minds or their integrity.

I did not get here by manifesting or waiting for the universe to DM me.

I got here by being brutally **honest with myself**.

I am good at certain things. Strategy. Sales. Story. Translating complexity into simple moves. Seeing where money is leaking. Spotting the one thing no one wants to say in the room.

I am terrible at other things. Detailed operations. Long term maintenance. Anything that involves twenty layers of approvals and a project plan that looks like a spider web.

So I started saying yes to the stuff I am genuinely good at. And no to the stuff I suck at. Over and over. Even when it cost me opportunities. Even when it made me “difficult” in systems that prefer agreeable generalists.

This whole book sits on top of that decision.

Work unbound, for me, is not a lifestyle aesthetic. It is not “digital nomad with a laptop on a beach.” It is the hard, sometimes lonely choice to build a life around the value you actually bring, instead of trying to contort yourself into a shape that makes everyone else comfortable.

I have lived most of what is written in these pages.

The fear of leaving something safe.

The confusion of not fitting any existing job title.

The guilt of feeling like you “used” a creator.

The burnout of being the in house performer who never owns the stage.

The relief of finally treating yourself like the business you have secretly been all along.

I have also learned one thing that I come back to every time I get wobbly.

Create anyway.

Create when no one is watching.

Create when the likes drop.

Create when the brand deal disappears.

Create when the campaign flops.

Create when your friends do not get what you are trying to build.

Because **value always attracts**, eventually.

Maybe not on the timeline your ego would prefer. Maybe not in the format you expected. But if you keep making things that are honest, useful, or beautiful, and you are brave enough to organise a business around that, the right people find you.

I am not “finished.” I do not feel like some perfectly resolved character at the end of a movie. I still get scared. I still overthink. I still stare out the window more than is probably reasonable.

But I am working unbound. I am building on my own terms. I am living a version of the life that, ten years ago, I would have quietly called impossible.

If there is a point to telling you all of this, it is simple.

I am not writing this book from the safety of a tenure. I am writing it from the same wild you are thinking about stepping into.

I am in it with you.

Vincent van Gogh is the patron saint of “too early, too different, too underpaid.”

He was a Dutch painter, born in 1853, who spent only a little over a decade making art and somehow produced more than two thousand works, including around eight hundred and sixty oil paintings, many in the final two years of his life.

He painted fields and stars and chairs and faces with a kind of desperate honesty that did not fit politely into the art market of his time. While he was alive, he sold almost nothing. The one famous sale we know by name is *The Red Vineyard*, snapped up for a few hundred francs by another painter not long before Vincent died.

Today, of course, he is everywhere. *Starry Night* on mugs. Irises breaking auction records. Sunflowers drawing queues around the block and whole exhibitions selling out in advance. He is now one of the most recognised artists in history, the kind of name that even people who “do not like art” still know. But he did not live to see that.

He died at thirty-seven, after years of mental illness and poverty, believing he had largely failed.

The first time I saw one of his Sunflowers in person, I stopped. Completely. The room kept moving, but I did not.

I had seen the image a thousand times in books, on posters, on hotel walls, but standing in front of the real thing is different. It is thick and alive and a bit awkward, all those yellows fighting for space on the canvas. It looks like someone wrestling with light and colour and their own head at the same time. For a moment you feel like you are standing in the same room as the person who made it, and you remember that when he painted those petals, no one was lining up to see them. He was just a man in a small room,

painting something he believed in, and paying for it with his health and his bank balance.

That is the part of his story that **matters** for us.

As creators, and by that I mean anyone who brings new things into existence, the emotional costs are real. You pour yourself into work that may or may not land. You produce, again and again, often with very little immediate proof that it is worth it. You live in that strange limbo where some days you feel like an artist and some days you feel like a factory worker who happens to own a tripod.

There is a quiet danger in that limbo. When you start to feel like “the painter” but never “the artist.” The hired hands, not the author. The person filling the brief, not the person setting the direction. You post and post and post, and somewhere along the way you begin to forget that what you are making has real value, not just in likes, but in the way it moves people, shapes culture, and drives actual business outcomes for other people.

Van Gogh is the extreme, tragic version of what happens when value and recognition get completely out of sync. The work was good. The timing, the market, the support system were not. He did not get to own his value while he was alive. That gap between what something is worth and what the world is willing to pay in the moment can break a person if there is no structure around them.

This book is my attempt to make that gap smaller for you.

You already have the hard part: the urge to make things and put them into the world. I am not here to teach you how to be creative. Rick Rubin is right. One of the great rewards of making is the act of sharing, and every time you finish something and release it, you weaken the hold of your insecurity a little more. You already know how to do that part.

What we are going to do together is build everything around it. The language to talk about your value. The systems and structures that mean you do not have to wait for a century and a few art historians to be “discovered.” The business habits that let you be both the painter in the room and the person who owns the gallery.

You will still have hard days. You will still have posts that die quietly. You will still have moments where you feel like you are shouting into the void. That is part of the job. But my hope is that, by the time you get to the end of this, you will never again confuse “low immediate recognition” with “low value,” and you will have a practical way to make sure your work looks after you in your lifetime, not just in some museum gift shop after you are gone.

Before we jump into the rest of the book, a quick word on how this thing is built.

I have written it to be scrollable.

You do not have to sit down, light a candle, and read it in perfect order like some sacred text. Think of it more like a long message thread from someone who has been where you are, broken it a few times, and is now texting you back with hopefully useful answers.

You can:

- Skip to the chapter you need right now
- Flick back and forth between sections
- Revisit certain parts the way you re read DMs when you are looking for that one line that hit you last time

Some sections are more story. Some are more “do this, then this.” Both matter. On some days, you will need a bit of reassurance. On others, you will want a concrete script, a system, or a way to talk to a brand without shrinking.

Use this book like you use your messages.

Dip in. Screenshot bits. Come back later when something suddenly makes more sense.

If a handful of paragraphs become pearls of wisdom you keep returning to, then it is doing its job. The rest is optional extra credit.

I felt dirty...

When I started my company, MANWASH, I already knew creators and influencers were becoming seriously valuable.

We had built a strong brand. We knew exactly the kind of person we wanted for user generated content. Someone real, funny, a bit cheeky, who actually looked like they used the product and did not live inside a filter.

So we jumped onto one of those creator platforms, filled out the brief, and found someone. She nailed it. Shot great content. Filmed reels we later turned into ads. They were funny, sharp, and bang on for our audience. Exactly what you hope for when you hit “approve creator.”

Those ads went on to make us hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue.

Awesome, right?

For us, yes. For her, not so much.

Because on that platform, she got a percentage of the fee we paid. That grand total, after all the value she created, was about 250 dollars.

That was it.

No upside. No bonus. No rev share. Just a tiny one off payment in exchange for assets that helped change the trajectory of our brand.

I am a businessman. I like profit. I like good unit economics. But I am also not blind. I spent years being that person in a different context. The dancing

monkey in the corporate world. Flying around, presenting, pitching, helping close deals that brought in millions, and taking home about one percent of the value I helped create.

I changed that for myself.

And I want you to change that for you.

You might not describe yourself as a creator or influencer out loud.

But you definitely feel like someone who is building something in public.

And if you are honest, it feels a bit like this.

You are already posting, shipping, collaborating. People know who you are. But you still feel like you are winging the business side.

You have had wins. Brand deals. Customers. A community that actually cares. But your income still feels more like weather than a plan.

You refresh your stats more than you would like to admit, and every time the algorithm sneezes, your heart rate goes up.

You are tired of feeling like a performer on someone else's stage, owned by platforms, trends, and other people's rules.

You can sense there is a bigger opportunity in what you have built, but you do not quite have the language or the levers to pull.

You want to be known for something clear, not just "good vibes" or "posts a lot."

You want to negotiate without that little voice saying, “Just be grateful they asked.”

You are sick of feeling like background noise while less talented but more strategic people cruise past you.

Maybe you are a fashion or beauty creator who is done with chasing whatever sound is trending this week.

Maybe you are a founder or a CMO who knows your audience is valuable, but you cannot seem to turn it into predictable, grown-up money.

Maybe you are just over being the algorithm’s intern.

Underneath all of it is one feeling:

I know there is more here. I just need a way to stop thinking like a busker and start thinking like a business.

If that is you, this book is written exactly for that knot in your stomach. The mix of excitement, frustration, and “I am not starting from scratch, but I am not where I should be yet.”

You might be wondering, “Alright, who is this guy and why should I trust him with my career?”

Fair question.

You have probably been pitched before. Another expert with a shiny funnel, a promise of ten times growth, and a course you will never finish. So when I show up talking about brand, money, and creators, you are allowed to feel a mix of curiosity and side eye.

You want someone who has actually been in the trenches, not just on Twitter.

Someone who has done more than record carousels about “mindset.”

Someone who can speak both creator and business without talking down to you.

You are looking for proof that I am not here to sell you more tactics. I am here to help you unlock value you already have, your audience, your story, your positioning, and turn it into something predictable, grown up, and yours.

You want to feel like the person writing this has:

Worked real jobs, not just “personal brand since 19”.

Built and advised brands from zero, with actual customers and risk.

Helped people like you go from “I post content” to “I run a business”.

Lived the messy in-between of leaving corporate, building things in public, going back, realising it does not fit anymore, and choosing the wild anyway.

Values ambition, honesty, courage and a bit of adventure, the same way you do.

Underneath it, you are thinking:

If I am going to trust someone, it better be someone who has lived this, not just packaged it.

That is the bar you are holding me to as you read this. Good. Keep it there.

So who am I?

I have spent more than two decades in and around big brands, agencies, and software companies. I have sat in the boardrooms where executives obsess over “the customer” while the real customer is at home, on a cracked phone screen, listening to you.

I have watched brands burn through media budgets that would make your eyes water, while the creator who actually moves the needle gets treated like a nice little add-on.

I have also spent the last several years outside those boardrooms, in the wild. Leaving corporate right as COVID hit. Building my own consumer brands. Making my living as a fractional executive focused on growth. Getting paid for outcomes, not hours. Mentoring founders and stalled companies who are trying to turn attention into actual revenue. Watching the same patterns play out from both sides of the fence.

With The Zaaz Collective (I’ll explain later), I was introduced to something dangerous. I could finally see what was really happening in the numbers. Not just likes and reach, but how comments, conversations and creator content translated into sales, sign ups and real behaviour. Once you have seen that at scale, you cannot unsee it. You realise most creators are doing unpaid R&D and sales work for brands that still treat them like line items.

I have also had unfair help. My mentor, Shane Atchison, has spent years at the top of the digital, advertising and marketing food chain, building and running agencies and leading companies that work with some of the biggest brands on the planet. Shane’s question is always the same: “Does this move the business or not?” That question has haunted every campaign I have ever been involved in, whether I was the guy on the stage, the guy behind the dashboard, or the guy betting his own money.

Then there is MANWASH, the brand where I stopped talking about this stuff in theory and started betting my own money on it.

We hired a creator. Modest budget. Simple deal. They posted. The content landed. The numbers moved. Not a tiny bump. A real shift.

I watched the dashboards, the orders, the comments, the way their audience trusted them enough to follow them straight to our checkout. It was like plugging a power cable into a house that had been running on candles.

And my first honest thought was not “this is genius.” It was “I have underpaid this person.”

I had seen brands write six-figure cheques for campaigns that did not move sales at all. I had watched, as an employee and as a consultant, the way creators quietly carried entire funnels on their backs while being paid like a nice-to-have.

Now I was running a brand that got a measurable jump from one creator who was paid less than the catering budget on a bad agency workshop.

I felt like I had used someone. The creator was happy. From their point of view, it was a good deal. From my point of view, knowing what I know about value and upside, the gap was massive.

I have lived that gap. I have caused it. I have been on the wrong side of it as an employee. And I have spent the last few years trying to close it—for myself, for the brands I work with, and for the creators who are finally starting to realise just how much they are really worth.

That is the disconnect this book is here to deal with.

On one side, corporations and agencies with decks full of words like “community” and “creator partnerships.” On the other side, extremely talented creators, influencers and operators who can change the course of a business for the price of a half decent dinner.

Some days, it feels like you are doing everything the internet told you to do.

You are posting. You are engaging. You are jumping on trends you do not even like.

Yet your bank account still looks like you just started, and your business feels more like a side quest than the main storyline.

You are drowning in advice.

Post here.

Start this.

Repurpose that.

Everyone is yelling about consistency. Very few are showing you what actually moves the needle for you.

You get brand deals, sure, but they are rarely on your terms. You say yes because it is money, while a quiet voice in your head whispers:

If they are willing to pay this, what am I really worth?

You do not want to be just another creator in the feed. You want to be seen,

and paid, as a legitimate business owner. But that leap from “I make content” to “I run a brand and a business” feels annoyingly vague.

And in your quieter moments, the fears creep in.

What if I stay internet famous and real life broke?

What if someone with half my talent but more strategy takes the spot that should have been mine?

What if this moment passes and I never really cash in on what I have built?

That feeling, the mix of exhaustion, frustration, and “I know there is more than this,” is exactly why I am writing this.

I have watched too many talented people stay stuck in the grind, chasing likes and short term deals, never quite crossing the line into owning what they have built.

This is my attempt to fix that, or at least give you a fair shot at fixing it for yourself.

A guide to help you claim your value, build something that lasts, and finally feel like you are in control of your career, your money, and your future. Not the algorithm. Not the brands. Not the noise.

Right now, you might secretly be wondering:

When do I stop feeling like a content hustler and start feeling like a proper business owner?

By the time you finish this book, a few big things will shift.

You will have the clarity and confidence to stop introducing yourself with “Oh, I just do a bit of content,” and start owning “I run a brand and a business.” You will know what you stand for, who you are for, and why you stand out in any feed, without having to scream for attention.

Money wise, you will learn how to turn your audience and expertise into consistent, grown-up revenue, not just random spikes and “exposure.” No more internet famous and real life broke. You will understand how to price, package and stack offers so that there is an actual engine behind your content, not just vibes.

When it comes to brand deals, you will stop walking into conversations hoping they do not notice you are winging it. You will know your value, how to negotiate on your terms, and how to tell the difference between a quick hit and a partnership that actually builds equity and long term upside.

You will start to see the hidden value in what you have already built, your story, your audience, your positioning. You will learn how to use the same kinds of strategies big brands pay agencies for, without needing a 50 page deck or selling your soul to every trend.

Most importantly, you will build simple, durable systems around your work. You will get back control of your time, your energy, and your direction. Less panic posting, more deliberate creating. Less “I hope this works,” more “I know what this is doing for my business.”

This is not a book about working harder.

It is a book about making sure the work you are already doing actually adds up to something real. So that you know, deep down, you are not just playing the game. You are quietly, calmly, learning how to run it.

Think of this less like advice, and more like the process I drag my clients

through, lovingly, when they say, “I am sick of winging it.”

Here is the journey we are going on together.

First, we validate your identity so you stop busking and start owning a brand. We get clear on who you are, what you stand for, and who you are really for, so you stop feeling like a talented street performer hoping someone throws coins, and start showing up like a name people remember.

Then we dive into audience intelligence, beyond likes and follows. We look past vanity stats and into real signals. Who is paying attention. What they care about. Why they move. Less “my reach is down” and more “I know exactly who I am building for and how they behave.”

Next, we tackle brand partnerships. You will learn how to know your value, set your terms, and negotiate like a grown up business. Brand deals will start to feel like strategic moves, not scraps you are grateful to be thrown.

From there, we unlock monetisation. We turn your audience and expertise into real revenue streams. Products. Services. Memberships. Partnerships. Content becomes the front door to a business, not the whole business.

Finally, we build grown up operations around all of it. Tools, habits and decision frameworks that help you think like a founder, not a busker waiting for a lucky break. You will become less dependent on platform mood swings, and more grounded in your own systems.

And... I’ve thrown in some old school principles for sales, marketing and artistic composition.

By the end, you will not just understand this process. You will have started living it.

And that is when things get interesting.

The Creator's Turning Point: From Passion to Purpose

Talk that accidentally ended my corporate career.

Before we get into whys and mission statements and all the rest of it, let me tell you about the talk that accidentally ended my corporate career.

At the time I was working in tech. Proper company, proper logo, proper policies written by people who have probably never smiled in a group photo.

My unofficial job description was “evangelist” before that was a cool title. I was the guy they sent out to get people excited. The walking, talking slide deck. If there was a roadshow, a customer event, a panel, a webinar, a lunch, a breakfast, a barbecue in a car park, I was there. I was basically a creator before “creator” was a thing. Making content, telling stories, building trust, just without the fun bits like ownership or ad revenue.

We were sponsoring an event, and as part of the package they offered us a keynote spot. I had done a few talks before. Enough to know I liked it. Enough to know there was something there I could build on if I ever stopped filling in expense reports.

This one was overseas. I was the only one from my company going. No boss in the room. No committee hovering over my slides. Just me, a long flight, and an idea I had been working on quietly for months.

On the plane I thought, you know what, stuff it. If I am going to do this, I am going to actually say something. Not just read bullet points with the company logo in the corner and the approved adjectives.

So I built the deck I really wanted to give. My ideas. My take on where things were going. The messy truth you do not usually put on stage when you are “representing the brand” and trying not to get gently fired.

I sent it to the organiser, half expecting them to reply with “love the energy, can you please remove everything interesting.”

They loved it.

In fact, they bumped me from a regular slot to opening the whole event.

So now I am the first speaker, in a country that is not mine, with a talk that is a lot more “me” than “corporate,” and no one from head office around to tackle me off the stage.

Perfect.

Humble brag, I nailed it. It was probably the best talk I had given up to that point. Not because the slides were fancy, but because it was the first time I was not hiding behind brand guidelines. I was just being myself, on purpose, in public. The unofficial creator finally got to be the actual creator.

Afterwards, people kept coming up.

“Can you come speak at our event”

“Could you present this to our team”

“We would love you to do a version of this at our conference”

A few even offered to cover flights, hotels, fancy dinners. All the usual “we

value you deeply, but ideally you will do it for free and a gift bag” stuff.

Then one organiser said, “What is your speaking fee”

I froze for a second, because at that point I did not have one. I had a salary. I had a job title. I had a LinkedIn profile that said important sounding things. I did not have a number for me.

So I just said it (because I think I’m funny).

“Fifty thousand.”

In my head I was already preparing for them to laugh, or at least negotiate me down to a nice bottle of wine and a LinkedIn endorsement.

They said yes.

In that moment I had two very clear thoughts.

First, “Holy shit, they are going to pay me fifty grand to talk.”

Second, “What does this say about the value I have been giving away for free all these years”

That was the high.

The low came shortly after, when my company found out.

Suddenly there were emails. Meetings. Words like “breach” and “conflict” and “intellectual property.” Apparently the ideas in my head, that I had lived and worked through for years, were now somehow theirs. Which is a

bold move, claiming ownership of thoughts generated on aeroplanes at 2 am.

They did not celebrate that someone wanted to pay serious money to hear from one of their people. They warned me I was stepping out of line.

That was the day something clicked.

I realised I had spent years being the face, the voice, the unofficial in-house creator, the evangelist who helped make other people and other companies a lot of money, while my own value was capped at whatever number sat on my payslip.

I had been “posting” in the corporate world. Giving away my best thinking inside other people’s brands. Hoping someone would notice and reward it.

And now, finally, the market had noticed. It put a number on it that did not match my employment contract.

Fifty thousand for under an hour on stage.

That was not an ego moment for me. It was a data point. A very loud one.

It told me that, whether I liked it or not, **I was already a brand**. I was already creating assets. Talks, ideas, frameworks, IP. I just had not been professional about it. I had not defined what I stood for, who I was for, or how this should work as a business that took care of me, not just everyone else.

From that day, I started a different journey. One where I treated my ideas, my voice, and my work as something worth protecting and building, not just something I handed over to the highest logo.

I started becoming a professional at being my own brand.

That is why I care so much about this next part.

Because you are probably in a version of that moment right now. Maybe not with a fifty thousand dollar speaking offer, but with smaller signs that your work is worth more than the crumbs you are getting.

People ask for your time.

They copy your ideas.

They use your content to sell their stuff.

They benefit from your audience, your credibility, your sweat.

The question is not whether you have value.

The question is whether you have decided what that value is for, who it serves, and how it pays you back.

That is what your “why” is really about.

Not a cute line for your bio. Not a tattoo quote. A clear, grown up decision about why your work should exist as a business, not just a hobby that accidentally feeds everyone else.

Once you see yourself as the brand, not just the person behind the content, everything changes.

You stop just posting, and you start professionalising.

So, with that story in mind, let us talk about your why. And then, very quickly, about how you stop giving it away for free.

Recognizing the Creator's Dilemma

You can get surprisingly far on vibes.

Passion. Curiosity. Late nights editing on the couch. Saying yes to anything that feels fun and might maybe one day pay.

And then there's a moment where that stops working.

It's rarely dramatic. More like: you, a bank balance that doesn't match your effort, and a quiet thought you can't unhear:

Either this becomes something real, or I need to stop lying to myself.

That's the turning point.

This chapter is about recognising that moment, without spiralling, and turning it into a plan you can actually live with.

What is the Creator's Dilemma

Let's name the problem properly.

You care about the work.

You care about the craft.

You actually like your audience.

And you'd also like to pay rent without having to whisper sweet nothings to the notification gods.

Welcome to the creator's dilemma.

On one side is passion: the love of making things. The thrill when a piece lands. The DMs that hit you with the best kind of weight: "This helped."

On the other side is reality: bills, time, energy, and the mildly annoying fact that the electricity company doesn't accept "reach" as a payment method.

This tension isn't new. We've just swapped churches and patrons for platforms and algorithms.

Michelangelo was a genius, but he was also basically on an eternal client revision loop. Deadlines. Scaffolding. More tweaks because someone powerful wanted one more tweak. He made masterpieces, yes. He also spent a lot of his life producing under pressure.

That's the part people leave out when they post the quote graphic.

Same tension now, just with better lighting and worse posture.

You know there's art in you.

You know there's something only you can do.

But there's a constant pull to keep churning for the feed, for the brand, for the algorithm.

Most creators I meet are stuck right in the middle.

They're doing real work that creates real value for platforms and brands, but their own "business" is held together with hope and caffeine.

Sound familiar?

Your calendar is full, but your invoice list isn't.

You're busy, but you couldn't explain your business model in one clean sentence.

You're "on" online, but offline you're quietly wondering how long you can keep this up.

And to make it harder, the system around you isn't exactly built to protect you.

Platforms love it when you post yourself into the ground for free.

Brands love paying once for content that keeps working for them in the background.

Agencies love sitting in the middle taking a tidy clip.

You become the engine powering everyone else's revenue, while your own feels like an afterthought.

You feel like the person on the scaffold, not the person whose name ends up on the wall.

That's the dilemma.

You're not "just" a creator. You're a business that's been trying not to act like one, while serving businesses that absolutely know they are.

The turning point is when you stop pretending.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Here are three small moves that pull you out of "vibes-only" mode without killing the joy:

Write your one-sentence business model.

"I help ___ achieve ___ by ___, and I get paid through ___." If it takes a paragraph, you don't have a model yet. You have a hustle.

Pick one thing you stop doing for free.

Not everything. Just one. A boundary you can hold without resenting anyone.

Create a "proof of value" list.

Five bullets of outcomes you've created (sales, sign-ups, retention, trust, education, behaviour change). Not vanity metrics. Impact. Signal over noise.

You don't need a rebrand. You don't need a 47-step monetisation funnel.

You need the next right step toward stability, on your terms.

And yeah... it'll feel a bit grown-up.

That's the point.

Defining Your 'Why': Personal Mission Statements

This is where a lot of creators roll their eyes.

Not the “why” talk again.

Fair. The internet turned “find your why” into a motivational poster you'd ignore at the dentist.

But that's not what we're doing here.

You're not writing an inspirational quote for Pinterest. You're writing a mission statement for an actual business. Something that can hold you steady when the numbers are weird, the DMs are quiet, and you're wondering if you've just invented a very expensive hobby.

MrBeast has a line I love: “

“you're crazy until you're successful, then you're a genius.”

This is for the “crazy” stage.

Not for the comments section. Not for your bio. For you.

Because your “why” isn't a slogan. It's the answer to a blunt question:

Why should this exist as a business, not just a hobby?

And yes, “to make good money doing work I care about” can be part of the answer. We’re not allergic to money here. We just don’t want money to be the only steering wheel.

A cleaner way to think about it

Your personal mission sits at the intersection of three things:

- Who you care about
 - What you’re actually good at
 - What creates real value on the other side
- That’s it. No incense. No vision board required.

Some examples:

“I help everyday guys feel like they’re not idiots in the bathroom.”

That’s basically MANWASH in one line.

“I help mid-sized fashion brands turn quiet followers into loud customers, without cringe marketing.”

“I make tech less scary for normal humans, so they can stop feeling left behind.”

Your version should be simple enough to say at a barbecue without sounding like a LinkedIn post.

A useful template is:

“I help [specific people] get [specific outcome] in a way that [your

differentiator].”

If it makes you cringe, good. That usually means it's honest. We can tidy the wording later.

Here's the bit most people miss

Your mission statement doesn't have to be public.

You don't need to slap it in your bio, engrave it on a rock, or build a brand campaign around it. You can, if that helps. But the main job of your mission is to guide you, not impress anyone.

It's there so that:

When a brand comes with a shiny offer that feels slightly off, you can name why.

When you're tired and doubting yourself, you remember what you're actually building.

When you plan content, products, or partnerships, you can check: does this serve my people the way I said I would?

This isn't about limiting you.

It's about giving your work a spine. A direction. So when opportunities show up, you're choosing based on fit, not just excitement... or exposure... or the dopamine hit of being “picked.”

Because here's the truth:

If you don't decide your why, someone else will.

Usually, a brand manager with a brief that quietly translates to: “Just get us attention.”

And if you're not careful, you wake up one day and realise you've built your whole career around someone else's mission instead of your own.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Write three versions of your mission statement:

- . The simple one (barbecue-safe)
- . The money one (how it turns into grown-up income)
- . The boundary one (what you won't do, even if it pays)

You're not locking it in forever. You're just giving yourself something better than vibes to steer with.

Moving from Posting to Professionalizing

Professionalising: Building the Back Office Behind the Front Stage

I don't even know if "professionalising" is a real word.

But for our purposes, it means this:

Taking your work seriously.

Not in a "be more corporate" way. In a "stop running your business like a group chat" way.

Because right now, if you're honest, you might be living in **post and pray** mode:

You make things.

You throw them online.

You hope.

Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. And apart from mild emotional whiplash, there isn't much difference in how you approach either outcome.

Professionalising doesn't mean you turn into a boring corporation with a mission statement nobody believes and meetings about meetings.

It means you build a **back office** behind the front stage you already run.

You're already doing the hard part. You're showing up, creating, shipping.

This is just the part where you make it... predictable.

What “professionalising” actually looks like

Think of someone like Rob Dyrdek.

On paper: skateboard kid, TV chaos, memeable energy.

Behind the scenes: structures, companies, deal terms, equity, IP, a portfolio.

Still Rob. Still ridiculous.

Just with spreadsheets and ownership behind the stunts.

That's the shift we're talking about.

Not changing your personality.

Changing your **setup**.

Here are a few rewires that change everything.

From “content” to “assets”

That reel isn't just a reel.

It can be:

- a **sales asset**
- a **trust asset**
- a **discovery asset**

And when you start seeing it as an asset, you ask better questions:

- Where else can this live?
- How long can this work for me?
- How do I measure its effect beyond vanity stats?

This is how you stop living week to week on whatever the feed decides to reward.

From “I’ll see what comes in” to “this is my offer”

Professionals don’t wait to be told what they’re allowed to sell.

They decide.

Sponsored content is one offer, sure. But it can’t be the only one, unless you enjoy the emotional stability of a trampoline.

Other common offers:

- newsletter placements
- UGC packages
- consulting / strategy sessions
- digital products
- memberships or live events

If you can't list your offers on one page, you don't have a business yet.

You have a reaction.

From “DM me for rates” to “here’s my structure”

You can still be flexible.

But having baseline rates, terms, and boundaries changes the whole energy.

It says “I take this seriously” without you needing to write a speech about it.

And it stops the slow bleed of discounting yourself into quiet resentment because someone “doesn't really have budget but it'll be great exposure.”

Exposure is fine.

Rent is finer.

From “the brand knows best” to “I know my audience”

Agencies charge good money to pretend they understand your people.

You actually do.

You see what lands.

You feel when something's off.

You know when your audience is rolling their eyes.

Professionalising means you use that.

You don't hand it over and hope the brief isn't cringe. You say:

“Here's what works with my people. Here's what doesn't. And here's why.”

That's not being difficult.

That's being valuable.

A small move that changes your week

You don't have to overhaul your entire life this week.

Just make **one professional move**:

- a simple rate card
- a one-page “about + offers” doc
- a basic content calendar that ties to your offers (not just whatever sound is trending)

Professionalising isn't about wearing a suit.

It's about acting like the owner of the thing everyone else is already profiting from.

I'm afraid of balls

Peeking Around Fear

I used to think I knew pain.

I grew up in it. Ice hockey, American football, rugby. Sports where you basically pay for the privilege of being legally assaulted in front of a crowd. So later, when I decided I should “stay fit without all the injuries,” I picked what looked like the sensible option.

Lacrosse.

In my head it was a tame version of hockey. Bit of running. Bit of stick work. None of the full-contact carnage. Maybe a bruise. Maybe a pulled hammy. Cute.

What I actually walked into was organised warfare.

Lacrosse is the most violent team sport I've ever played. People sprinting at full speed, swinging carbon fibre sticks at each other, while firing what is basically a rock in disguise at close to 100 miles an hour.

And because I'm older now and my recovery time comes with sound effects, I tried to be smart.

I volunteered to be goalie.

For practices.

The logic was simple. How bad could it be? A few shots. Help the team. Everyone loves the guy who steps up.

Then our actual goalie quit...

Suddenly it wasn't practice. It was games. Real shots. Real consequences. And me, in a helmet, a chest guard that felt like polite cardboard, and tracksuit pants that were absolutely not designed to stop anything travelling 100 miles an hour.

I have never felt fear like standing in that goal, watching grown adults wind up a shot, knowing the ball is coming for some part of my body I'm quite fond of.

Every instinct in me wanted to flinch. Turn away. Close my eyes. Step out of the way and rebrand it as "tactical repositioning."

And this is where business shows up.

We talk about "fear of failure" like it's abstract. Like it's a thought. A mindset.

In that goal, fear wasn't abstract at all.

It had a speed and a direction.

It was a small hard thing flying at me, and it was going to hurt if I did nothing.

That's exactly what the next step in your career feels like.

Launching your own offer.

Leaving the salary.

Putting your name on a product.

Saying your real rates out loud.

You know it could hurt. You know there's risk. Your instincts tell you to flinch, delay, look away, stay where you are.

Not because you're weak.

Because your brain treats the unknown like a 100-mile-an-hour ball aimed at your ribs.

The only reason I didn't walk out of that goal and retire to low-impact yoga is because this wasn't my first time meeting fear.

I'd felt it walking into my first big corporate pitch.

I'd felt it the first time someone asked me to speak in front of hundreds of people.

I'd felt it when I thought about leaving the safety of a salary.

I'd felt it the first time someone offered to pay real money for my own ideas.

Same feeling. Different stadium.

So I used the same trick I'd learned in those moments.

Peek around the fear long enough to see the ball.

Not the story in my head. Not the “what if this hits me where it really hurts.” Just the ball. Where it actually is. Where it’s actually going. What I actually need to do next.

The second I did that, something shifted.

I stopped being a terrified bystander in goals and started becoming a goalie.

Still scared. Still very aware of how much this could hurt. But now I could see. I could track it. I could move with intention instead of bracing for impact.

Leaving corporate life felt exactly the same.

On one side was pain-fear:

What if I fail?

What if I never make that money again?

What if everyone thinks I’m an idiot for leaving a “good job”?

But if I looked past that fear for just a second, there was the ball:

The ability to control my financial freedom.

To be paid properly for the value I brought.

To build something that was mine.

Same emotion. Same flinch. Same urge to step aside.

Different choice.

This section is really about that.

Fear of pain and fear of the next step are the same muscle. One leaves bruises on your legs. The other leaves bruises on your ego and your bank account.

The goal isn't to pretend you're not scared.

It's to learn how to peek around the fear long enough to see what's actually coming at you, what it could give you if you face it, and who you have to become to stand there anyway.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

When you feel yourself flinching, don't ask "How do I stop being scared?"

Ask these three questions instead:

- **What's the ball?** (What's the actual thing I'm avoiding?)
- **Where is it going?** (What's the real consequence if I do nothing?)
- **What's one save I can make today?** (One small action that proves I'm in the game.)

You don't need to become fearless.

You just need to become the kind of person who can see clearly while you're scared.

The Emotional Shift: Overcoming Fear and Resistance

Stepping Up Is Emotional, Not Just Logistical

Here's the bit most business books skip.

Wait. Is this a business book?

Either way, we need to talk about the part that doesn't show up in spreadsheets.

Because stepping up isn't just logistical. It's emotional.

You're not only changing what you do.

You're changing how you see yourself.

And the moment you say, out loud, "I run a brand and a business," you can expect a swarm of voices to show up like they've been waiting in the wings:

Who do you think you are?

You're not big enough yet.

You don't know what you're doing.

People will laugh.

What if you fail publicly?

If you've heard any of those, congratulations. You're a functioning human.

That reaction is normal.

My "calm" isn't a lack of emotion

People tell me a lot that I seem unbothered.

Cold. Too calm. "Nothing seems to bother you."

There's a little truth in it... but not because I'm less emotional.

I'm just very aware of what my emotions try to make me do.

These days, when something hits me, my default move is boring on purpose:

I feel the spike

I notice the story it's trying to tell me

I take a breath

and I ask: **Is this fear giving me information, or just trying to run the show?**

That's it.

It's not glamorous. It's just a small pause between the emotion and the decision.

You can do the same with your next step.

Because when you think about things like:

- raising your rates
- saying no to a bad brand deal
- calling yourself a founder
- launching your own offer

...your body will have an opinion.

Tight chest. Racing thoughts. A full catastrophe movie in your head where you end up living under a bridge, but tastefully, because you're a creator.

If you go on autopilot, those feelings decide for you.

You stay small.

You stay "nice to work with."

You stay underpaid.

But if you build the habit of noticing first, you give yourself a shot at a different outcome.

Three things that helped me

1) I stopped waiting for fear to disappear.

It doesn't.

The sequence is usually:

Do it scared.

Survive.

Feel more confident next time.

We keep waiting for "confident" to arrive first like an Uber.

It's not coming. You're walking.

2) I realised I was already carrying the downside.

Late nights. Pressure. Inconsistency. The stress of not knowing what next month looks like.

If I'm going to feel that anyway, I'd rather feel it while building something that can actually take care of me.

3) I started telling the truth.

To myself:

Yes, I do want to make real money from this.

No, I'm not okay being the last one paid every time.

To others:

This is my rate.

This is how I work.

Here's what I bring, and here's what I don't do.

Was it uncomfortable? Yep.

You can feel the old stories pushing back:

Who do you think you are?

Don't rock the boat.

Be grateful for whatever you get.

But here's the question that matters:

Is it more uncomfortable to feel that for a few minutes while you send the email...

...or to look back in five years and realise you stayed stuck when you didn't have to?

Fear doesn't mean stop.

Fear usually just means: **this matters.**

Your job isn't to delete the emotion.

Your job is to notice it, breathe once, let the first wave pass, and then choose the action that serves the life you're trying to build — not the story your fear is trying to protect.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Next time you feel the spike, don't negotiate with it. Do this instead:

- **Name it:** "This is fear."
- **Question it:** "Is it information or control?"
- **Choose one action:** Send the rate. Make the offer. Say no. Publish the thing.

You don't need to become fearless.

You just need to stop letting fear drive.

Success Stories & the Reality of First Failures

Version One Usually Falls Over

Let's talk about first attempts that fell over.

Because if every “version one” worked, we wouldn't have half the stuff we take for granted now.

WD-40 literally got its name because the first thirty-nine attempts failed. Water Displacement, formula number 40. Thirty-nine straight “nope, not quite” moments before they landed on the thing that now lives in every shed and fixes everything from squeaky doors to low-level life crises.

James Dyson went through thousands of vacuum prototypes. Not ten. Not fifty. Thousands. Years of “nearly... but not yet” before the world decided cyclones in a vacuum cleaner were genius and not just a fancy way to inhale Lego.

Early aviation was basically “how do we not immediately crash.” The Wright brothers spent years building gliders, crashing, adjusting, and starting again before they stayed in the air long enough for anyone to care.

Even the PS5 only exists because someone was willing to ship PS1 through PS4, cop the complaints, and keep iterating. Version five is never the first swing. It's the fifth swing.

We celebrate these now as obvious wins.

At the time, they were just expensive, exhausting experiments.

Creators are no different.

The turning point from passion to purpose rarely looks glamorous in real time. It looks like:

- your first attempt at raising prices and hearing “we don’t have budget”
- your first product launch selling three in the first week (one to your mum, one to a supportive mate, and one you’re still not sure wasn’t pity)
- your first “proper” brand deal negotiation ending with you undercharging... but slightly less than last time

That’s the real shape of progress.

Messy. Human. Slightly humiliating. Still progress.

I’ve seen creators with totally normal-sized audiences make one brave decision and change their trajectory.

A beauty creator who stopped saying yes to every brand and picked three that actually matched her mission. Her income got more stable. Her audience trusted her more. She lost a few cheques... and gained a position.

A fitness coach who finally wrote a simple mission statement: “I help busy parents build strength without burning out.” Then he aligned his content and offers with that. Engagement dipped for a bit. Then the right people started finding him. Now he has a waitlist and doesn’t have to yell to be heard.

I’ve also seen people step up and fall completely flat on the first attempt.

Courses that barely sold.

Podcasts that never got past episode seven.

Collaborations that looked promising and quietly went nowhere.

The difference isn't that the "successful" ones never fail.

It's that they treat those first failures like WD-40, Dyson prototypes, and old PlayStations:

Version one.

Version three.

Version thirty-nine.

Not a verdict on who they are.

When MANWASH started paying creators, I got it wrong at first too. Underpaid. Undervalued. Let the platform rules do the thinking for me. The turning point wasn't a perfect campaign where everything lined up.

It was the guilty feeling I couldn't shake afterwards.

That discomfort forced me to rethink the whole relationship between creators and the value they generate.

Your first "professional" move might wobble.

It might sting your pride. It might look, from the outside, like a failed launch or an awkward negotiation.

That's fine.

The point isn't to nail version one.

The point is that you stop sleepwalking through your own career and start treating every attempt as another prototype on the way to something real.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Pick one "version one" you've been avoiding and make it deliberately small:

- raise your rate on one offer by 15%
- pitch one brand that actually fits (even if they say no)
- write one simple offer page (one page, not a novel)
- ship one product/service to five people and ask for honest feedback

Call it what it is: **a prototype.**

Not your final form. Just your next attempt.

WTF is a chrysalis? And why you should be one

The Pause Where You Grow on Purpose

Change is already happening to you.

With or without your vision board.

With or without your “year of focus.”

With or without this book.

That’s just growth. It shows up whether you RSVP or not.

Sometimes it’s loud and obvious: new followers, new numbers, new toys.

Other times it’s quiet: you just notice you don’t react the way you used to, or tolerate the same nonsense.

The difference isn’t whether you’re growing.

It’s whether you let it happen on autopilot... or you choose to pause and grow on purpose.

This section is about that pause.

About choosing, deliberately, to grow up in how you see yourself and your work. Not in a “no more fun” way. In a “I’m going to take myself seriously enough to change” way.

And just to be clear: this has nothing to do with age.

You can be twenty and still need to grow up in your business.

You can be fifty and still need to grow up in your boundaries.

The moment you choose to do it intentionally is the moment the game shifts.

The part of the butterfly story nobody posts about

We all love the butterfly part.

Wings out. Colours on. Floating around like it woke up one day and simply chose excellence.

We also get the caterpillar part. Eat. Grow. Hustle. Grind. The “I’m doing things” phase. That one feels productive, so we’re comfortable with it.

But the bit we skip is the middle.

The pupa. The chrysalis. That weird, motionless stage where, from the outside, it looks like absolutely nothing is happening.

If you saw it on the ground, you’d step over it and think, “Well... that thing is done.”

But that stage is where everything important happens.

The caterpillar basically dissolves itself. It breaks down who it was so it can

become something it's never been before. No audience. No applause. No progress photos. Just a full reset inside a tiny sleeping bag.

From the outside, it looks like stuck.

On the inside, it's transformation.

Humans hate the middle

We love being busy caterpillars, and we want to skip straight to confident butterfly.

We don't like the season where it looks like we've slowed down, disappeared, or gone quiet.

The time you post less because you're rebuilding the business behind the scenes.

The months you feel like you're not growing, but really you're unlearning old patterns.

The quiet evenings where you're staring at a blank page, trying to rewrite who you are in this next chapter.

It can feel useless.

It can feel like you're falling behind.

It can feel like everyone else is flying while you're stuck in a shell.

But the pupa stage isn't a glitch.

It's part of the design.

It's the pause where your old identity and your new one negotiate.

It's the space where you stop being "someone who posts"... and start becoming "someone who owns a brand and a business."

It's where the emotional shift actually happens.

So if you're in that season right now, where nothing seems to be moving on the outside, don't panic.

You're not broken. You're in the middle.

And the middle is where you quietly become the person who can handle the life you say you want — not just dream about it.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

If you're in a chrysalis season, give yourself one small proof that the change is real:

- Pick one thing you're no longer available for. (One boundary. Not ten.)
- Pick one thing you're building behind the scenes. (One asset. One offer. One system.)
- Tell one person you trust what you're becoming. Not for validation. For accountability.

The outside doesn't need to look busy for the inside to be working.

Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is go quiet long enough to transform.

Making the Commitment to Change

This Is the Pause

This is the part where we pause.

You can keep treating this like a nice little self-help intermission. Nod along. Highlight a few bits. Tell yourself you'll "come back to this when life is less hectic."

Or you can decide this is a line in the sand.

And no, that decision doesn't have to look like a 5 a.m. alarm, cold plunges, monk mode, or forcing yourself to do random "uncomfortable things" for content.

In the context of this book, change is much simpler. And much more grown-up.

It's agreeing to focus on less, more intensely.

Less random opportunities, more aligned ones.

Less saying yes to everything, more saying yes like an owner.

Less spraying your energy everywhere, more building a few things properly.

You don't need to quit your job tomorrow.

You don't need to announce "a new era" on Instagram with a dramatic caption.

You just need to decide, quietly and honestly, that you're done treating your work like a side act in your own story.

If you want something concrete to mark that decision, here are three small moves you can make today

1) Write your mission in one sentence

Not for public consumption. For you.

"I help X do Y in a way that Z."

Put it somewhere you'll see it before you post, pitch, or agree to anything.

Not because it's cute.

Because it stops you drifting.

2) Choose one way you'll professionalise this month

Just one.

- a simple rate card
- a one-page "this is what I offer" doc
- a basic content plan linked to revenue, not just trends

One move that says, to you first: **I take this seriously.**

3) Tell one person you trust

Not to get a gold star.

Just so someone else knows.

“I’m done winging it. I’m treating this like a real business from here on.”

That’s it.

No rituals. No personality transplant. Just a decision, plus a few small actions to prove you mean it.

This chapter is your turning point if you let it be.

From here, we’re going to get very practical:

Identity.

Audience intelligence.

Partnerships.

Monetisation.

Operations.

All the “businessy” things that quietly turn talented creators into solid operators with actual leverage.

You don’t need to do it all at once.

Read a section.

Do one thing from it.

Go live your life.

Come back.

Repeat.

But none of it really lands if you skip this first part — the part where you admit to yourself:

You’re not here to be free labour for platforms, agencies, and pitch decks.

You’re here to build something that looks after you.

So take a breath.

Make the call.

And meet me in the next chapter, where we turn all of this from “nice idea” into habits, structures, and decisions your future self will quietly thank you for.

Coffee Is For Closers

A Modern Example: What Changing Focus Looks Like

Let me give you a modern, very public example of a focus shift done properly.

Emma Chamberlain.

She started the way a lot of creators start: a teenager with a camera, editing her own chaotic, funny, deeply relatable vlogs in her bedroom. No strategy deck. No MBA. Just a style that felt like you were on FaceTime with a friend.

And it didn't just "work." It changed the culture of the platform. Even the New York Times has been credited (in coverage about her) with pointing out how much she shifted the way YouTube authenticity looks and sounds.

Then she hit the point a lot of big creators hit eventually:

Burnout. Anxiety. The sense that a weekly upload schedule stops being a creative challenge and starts being a trap. She's spoken publicly about stepping back from YouTube and feeling better mentally once she took that pressure off.

From the outside, that looks risky.

From the inside, it's a grown-up decision:

Less “I must feed the algorithm every week.”

More “I’m going to protect my brain and put my energy where it actually matters.”

That’s focus shift number one.

The bigger shift: from “I am the content” to “I build assets”

Emma took something that was already part of her world (coffee) and turned it into a company: Chamberlain Coffee. Not a one-off collab. A brand. It launched in 2019 and started direct-to-consumer.

And then it did the unsexy part: operations, retail, range expansion, all the stuff that turns “creator brand” into “real business.” Coverage has described it expanding into major retailers like Target, Walmart, and Whole Foods, and growing to thousands of retail doors.

The third shift most creators never make

Inside the business, there was another focus change: away from “growth at all costs” and toward the boring, powerful stuff.

Supply chain. Margins. Profitability.

Reporting around a leaked pitch deck and internal-doc coverage described supply chain disruptions, and a deliberate shift toward profitability — with profitability reportedly returning in early 2025.

So if we strip away the headlines and the Met Gala fits, here’s what actually happened:

- . **From always-on → to intentional output**
- . **From “I am the product” → to “I own products”**
- . **From impressive growth → to a business that works**

You don't need her scale to use her moves.

You can:

- Pull back from doing everything, everywhere, all the time (and keep your creative energy for what matters)
- Build one or two assets outside the daily grind: products, services, memberships, IP
- Start caring whether the thing is sustainable (profit, time, and sanity), not just impressive in screenshots

Not to become Emma. Not to copy coffee.

Just to remember you're allowed to move from **“I make content”** to **“I build things that take care of me.”** And sometimes the most powerful move isn't posting more.

It's deciding what all of this is actually for.

Finding Your True North: Validating Identity and Position

What Makes You Irreplaceable?

Irreplaceable: Becoming Your Own Algorithm

Think about the people we treat as untouchable in film and entertainment.

De Niro.

Spielberg.

Brando.

Meryl Streep.

You don't confuse them with anyone else.

You can see three seconds of De Niro's face move and know it's him.

You can watch thirty seconds of a Spielberg scene on mute and still feel it.

You can tell it's Brando even when he's whispering and doing... basically nothing.

And with Meryl, it's wild in the opposite way: she can disappear into a role so completely you forget it's her... and yet somehow, you still feel the precision. The intention. The taste level.

They're not "good at content."

They're **specific**.

You might not love every project they've touched, but you know when it's theirs. There's a flavour you can taste. A posture you can sense. Even if you couldn't explain the recipe if someone offered you a million dollars and a microphone.

That's what irreplaceable looks like in the wild.

The uncomfortable bit

You already have that uniqueness in you.

Everyone does.

Then the internet gets hold of you.

You start with a natural style. A way you talk. A way you see the world. A way you move on camera or write on a screen. It's messy and unrefined, but it's yours.

Then you start "learning."

You study trends.

You copy hooks.

You mimic edits.

You absorb other people's opinions.

And bit by bit, you trade specificity for safety.

You start asking, “What works for the algorithm?” instead of, “What works for my people, from me?”

That’s the pivot point.

Because you can spend your career trying to hack an algorithm...

...or you can become one.

You become the pattern people recognise and want more of.

Not because you put “authentic” in your bio. But because you’ve done the work to figure out what only you can bring, and you’re willing to double down on it even when the trend report says otherwise.

Irreplaceable doesn’t mean “best”

It means **non-interchangeable**.

In business terms, if you look and sound like every other creator in your niche, then from a brand’s perspective you’re a commodity. They can swap you out for someone cheaper with more reach and the campaign still looks roughly the same.

But if you show up with a clear identity, a specific lens, and a body of work that only makes sense coming from you... replacing you costs them something.

They lose your voice.

They lose your relationship with your audience.

They lose the trust you've built.

They lose the way you frame their product in a way only you can.

That's leverage.

Irreplaceable can look like:

People quoting you without tagging you, because the line is so clearly "you" it carries your fingerprint anyway.

Brands coming to you for your brain and perspective, not just your engagement rate.

An audience noticing when you're missing, because you're not just noise, you're part of their mental furniture.

This isn't about being weird for sport

It's about stopping the slow erosion of your individuality in the name of "what performs."

Every time you flatten an opinion to be safer, you dilute your edge.

Every time you copy someone else's style because "it works," you train your audience to see you as the cheaper version.

Every time you chase a trend that doesn't fit you, you tell the platform and your people: I'm willing to be anyone for attention.

Being irreplaceable is more grown up than that.

It sounds like:

“This is how I talk.”

“This is what I care about.”

“This is who I’m willing to lose, so I can serve the people who get it.”

Patterns, not trends

Irreplaceable isn’t one viral moment. It’s patterns.

Patterns in the stories you tell.

Patterns in the problems you go after.

Patterns in the way people feel after consuming your work.

If you pay attention to those patterns, you can build around them on purpose.

That’s what becoming your own algorithm actually means.

You stop asking, “What does the platform want today?” and start asking:

“What do my people come to me for... and how do I deliver that deeper, sharper, and more consistently?”

The twist: it’ll feel risky

Becoming irreplaceable will sometimes mean:

- saying no to easy views
- being slightly out of sync with what's trending this week
- letting people not “get” you straight away

But remember the names we started with.

None of them became who they are by rounding off their edges to fit in.

Brando didn't act like everyone else.

De Niro didn't pick soft roles to be more “relatable.”

Spielberg didn't make beige films to appeal to everyone.

And Meryl didn't become Meryl by chasing what was popular — she became undeniable by committing to craft and range so hard that the industry had to make room for her.

They leaned so far into their lane that there was no one else there.

You don't need to be a global celebrity. That's not the point.

In your niche, in your corner of the internet, in the lives of the people you serve, you have a choice:

A replaceable piece of content in an endless scroll...

...or a recognised presence they would actually miss if you were gone.

Irreplaceable isn't a personality type.

It's a decision.

A decision to stop shapeshifting for every platform mood swing, and start building a body of work that could only have come from you.

In the next section, we'll get very specific about who that "you" is actually for.

Because being irreplaceable in your identity is powerful.

Being irreplaceable in the eyes of the right people is where it becomes a business.

Clarifying Who You Serve and Why

Your Audience Isn't Just an Audience. It's Data.

Here's where the conversation matures a bit.

You don't just have an "audience."

You have data. A lot of it.

Views. Likes. Shares. Saves. Watch time. Clicks. Follows.

That's the quantitative stuff. The scoreboard. Useful... but shallow on its own. It tells you what happened, not why.

If you want to become irreplaceable, you've got to get curious about what's underneath the numbers.

That's the qualitative side.

The actual words people use in the comments.

The DMs they send at 11:47pm when they're being honest.

The same questions showing up again and again.

The topics that trigger stories, not just emojis.

Most creators treat analytics like a mood board. Quick glance. "Nice."
Screenshot. Back to posting.

You're going to treat it more like an X-ray.

Because behind every spike and dip is a real person making a decision:

Stay. Scroll. Save. Click. Buy. Ignore.

The shift that matters: quantity to meaning

This is exactly why I got involved with the Zaaz Collective

Quick disclosure: I didn't build it. I'm a founding member, and I'm behind its mission because I'm done watching creators do all the heavy lifting while everyone else gets the leverage.

Zaaz exists for one simple reason:

Most analytics tell you what happened. Creators need help

understanding what it means.

At a practical level, Zaaz connects to your existing social accounts and helps translate the chaos of likes, comments, and clicks into clearer signals about your audience.

Not “reach is up 12%.”

More like:

- what people stayed for
- what made them talk
- what made them click
- which topics attract tourists, and which ones pull in the people who stick (and spend)

Think of it as an **intelligence layer** — not a replacement for your platforms, and not an agency. Just a way to “read the room” properly without losing your mind in screenshots and spreadsheets.

And to be clear: you don’t need any tool to do this. Tools just make it easier at scale.

The real shift is mindset:

You stop saying, “My audience is growing.”

And you start saying, “My people are revealing themselves.”

That’s where audience becomes community. And where content starts behaving like a business.

Quantitative vs Qualitative

Think of it like this:

- **Quantitative data = the “how many”**
- **Qualitative data = the “so what”**

“How many” tells you if something landed at all.

“So what” tells you who it landed with, why, and what happened next.

Example:

- **Post A:** 500,000 views, 20 comments, no clicks
- **Post B:** 30,000 views, 200 comments, 400 profile visits, 80 clicks

The platform will clap for Post A.

Your bank account will quietly prefer Post B.

When you start looking at your numbers this way, you stop chasing generic virality and start tracking the signals that actually move your life.

You start noticing:

- certain phrases light people up and start real conversations
- certain topics attract broke attention, others attract buyers
- certain stories build trust fast, even if they don't “perform” in the usual way

And then you can make decisions that feel less like gambling and more like building.

From Data to Humans

All of this only matters if it brings you closer to actual people.

The goal isn't to become an analytics robot. The goal is to use data to put clearer faces on who you serve.

When you look at comments and DMs with this lens, clusters start to appear:

- the burnt-out social media manager who always says, “I needed this.”
- the mid-sized founder who keeps asking about pricing and systems
- the creator who replies “I feel called out” every time you talk about money

These aren't random reactions.

They're your segments coming into focus.

Data starts to show you:

- this group sticks around for tough love and practical steps
- this group cares about ethics and brand alignment
- this group only engages when you talk behind-the-scenes reality

From there, your job gets simpler (not easier, just clearer):

Stop screaming at the room.

Start talking directly to the people who keep raising their hands, in their words.

Not guessing.

Not assuming all followers are equal.

Not chasing whatever got the most views last week.

Just paying attention to what's already been right in front of you:

The handful of groups for whom you're already becoming irreplaceable.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Pick your last 10 posts and do a 20-minute scan:

. Circle the **top 5 repeated phrases** people use in comments/DMs

. Write down the **top 3 questions** you keep getting asked

. Identify **one post** that drove action (clicks, replies, saves) even if the views were "meh"

Then ask:

"What kind of person is this attracting... and do I want more of them?"

Uncovering Your Hidden Value

The Real Money Is Usually Hiding

Most creators can see the obvious value.

Views. Follower count. Clicks. A good month of brand deals. The visible stuff. The stuff you can screenshot.

But the real money rarely sits there.

The real money sits in **value you're creating** that nobody taught you to measure yet.

When I looked back at the MANWASH creator who got \$250 while our ads did hundreds of thousands in revenue, that was the first proper slap in the face.

On paper, the deal looked normal.

In reality, the gap between what we paid and what we gained was massive.

Same thing happened to me with a speaking offer.

I'd been giving talks "for free" inside companies for years. The day someone put a serious number on it, I realised I'd been treating a premium asset like a throwaway extra.

There's a good chance you're doing the same thing somewhere in your world.

Not because you're naive.

Because creators get trained to price the obvious... and ignore everything else they're really supplying.

What Brands Actually Get When They Work With You

Let's pull it apart.

A brand deal is never just:

“One post and one story in exchange for X.”

They're also getting:

Your relationship with your audience (built over years of showing up).

Your taste and filter (they're borrowing your “this fits / this doesn't” credibility).

Your language (the way you say things so your audience doesn't roll their eyes).

Content they can reuse long after the invoice is paid.

Sales or sales opportunities they didn't have yesterday.

Proof they can take internally to justify spend and look smart in the boardroom.

That's on top of reach and impressions.

When you list it like that, “one post equals X dollars” starts to look... a bit silly.

You’re not a shelf product.

You’re an ecosystem. Most deals are priced like a tin of beans.

Where Value Likes to Hide

Here are a few places it hides in plain sight.

Your back catalogue

You see old posts.

Brands see cheap R&D.

If you’ve got hundreds of posts, you’ve already tested what hooks work, what angles convert, what topics your people will actually sit through.

That’s a living research library.

Your patterns

Maybe you’re the one who names the uncomfortable truth.

Maybe you’re the calm explainer in a chaotic niche.

Maybe you’re the “I’ll try it so you don’t have to” person.

Those patterns are value. People trust you because of them.

Brands can't fake that. Agencies definitely try.

Your timing

You know when your audience is listening.

You know when to talk story, when to talk money, when to talk product.

That sense of timing is worth more than a media plan built by someone who's never opened the app you live on.

Your feedback loop

Comments. DMs. Emails. Lives.

People are constantly telling you what they like, hate, fear, want, and can't quite say out loud.

Most brands would kill for that kind of real-time insight. You already have it. You might just not be labeling it as an asset yet.

Optional note: tools like **Zaaz** can help surface these patterns faster across platforms, but it's not required. You can do the same work manually — it just takes a bit more intention.

From “Nice to Have” to “Revenue Driver”

A big part of uncovering hidden value is changing the story you tell about what you do.

If you describe yourself like:

“I make fun content, my audience likes me, I’ll put your product in a video...”

You sound like a nice extra.

But if you can say:

“When I talk about products in this specific way, my audience clicks, saves, and buys. Here’s the behaviour I see, and here’s how we can design the offer around it...”

You sound like a revenue driver.

Same person. Same platform. Same audience.

Different framing.

Data is what gives you the confidence to say it without feeling like you’re bluffing.

A Quick Hidden Value Audit

Set a timer for 30 minutes.

Look at:

. Your last 10 pieces of content that led to business outcomes: Sales, sign-ups, inbound DMs, enquiries, serious conversations — anything concrete.

. The comments and DMs on those posts.

Not the emojis. The sentences. The “this is me” messages.

. The brands or people who keep coming back.

Repeat business is a signal. Don't ignore it.

Then ask:

- What was I really doing here? (Educating? Validating? Challenging? Simplifying?)
- What topic hit a nerve?
- What exact phrases did people repeat back to me?
- What actions happened in the next 24–72 hours? (Clicks, saves, DMs, purchases)

Write down what you notice, even if it feels “too obvious.”

Because you'll start seeing your value isn't “one video that did well.”

It's:

“I'm the person who helps this type of person do this specific thing in a way that makes them move.”

That's hidden value.

Once you can see it, you can:

charge for it properly

design offers around it

say no to work that ignores it

And you walk into every conversation — with brands or with your audience — with a little more spine.

Because now you're not just the person making things.

You're the person who understands why it works.

Authenticity with Intentionality

“Be authentic” is one of those phrases that's been repeated so often it's basically meaningless.

Online, “authentic” sometimes seems to mean filming every meltdown, narrating every argument, and live-streaming your nervous system.

That's not authenticity.

That's unpaid reality TV.

Being authentic doesn't mean radical transparency all the time. You don't owe the internet your deepest trauma, your bank balance, or a livestream from your therapist's waiting room.

Authenticity, in this book, is simpler and way more useful:

Show up in a way that's true to where you are, and meet your audience where they are.

Anything more becomes performance.

Anything less becomes distance.

What Authentic Actually Looks Like

Authenticity looks like:

- “I don't have this fully figured out yet, but here's what I'm learning.”(Instead of pretending you woke up enlightened.)
- “This brand pays me, and here's why I'm still comfortable recommending them.”(Instead of acting like everything is a coincidence.)
- “I tried this. It didn't work. Here's what I'd do differently.”(Especially if you were the one who recommended it last month.)

It's less about revealing everything, and more about **not faking what you're not.**

And yes, you can be intentional and still be real.

You can plan your content, edit your videos, and choose your words carefully without becoming a fraud.

In fact, your people usually feel safer when they can tell you've thought about how your message lands on their side.

Boundaries Are Not Inauthentic

There's a weird pressure online to "share more" as proof you're genuine.

You don't need to show your kids, your bedroom, your partner, or your medical history to be taken seriously.

You're allowed to have parts of your life that don't go on camera.

You're allowed to say, "I'm not ready to talk about that."

You're allowed to process things privately and bring the lesson later, when it's actually useful.

Some of the most authentic people I know are selective about what they share.

They just never lie about the parts they do put out.

A simple rule that saves a lot of pain:

Everything you put online should be true.

Not everything that's true needs to be online.

Intentionality: Serving Them and You

Authenticity without intention can turn into emotional dumping.

Intention without authenticity turns into corporate fluff.

You want the middle.

Before you hit publish, ask two questions:

1. **Is this honest for where I'm actually at?**
2. **Does this help or connect with where my audience is at?**

If it's yes to both, you're in the right zone.

Sometimes that means sharing a win and breaking down how you got there, without pretending it was effortless.

Sometimes it means sharing a failure — but framed in a way that helps them avoid the same hole, not just asking for sympathy.

And here's the giveaway: your audience tells you when you've hit that balance.

Not with likes. With real responses.

The “thank you for saying this” comments. The thoughtful DMs. The people telling you they changed something because of what you shared.

That's usually honesty plus usefulness.

Not “here's my pain in real time.”

More: **here's what hurt, here's what I learned, here's what might help**

you.

Dropping the Persona, Keeping the Standards

A lot of creators accidentally build a persona they get trapped in.

The always-on funny one.

The unshakeable boss one.

The perfectly put-together one.

Then real life happens, and the gap between who they are and who they pretend to be gets wider — and heavier.

Authenticity with intentionality means you stop feeding that gap.

You let yourself be a human who's good at what you do... not a character who can never have a bad day.

You can still have standards:

- you can edit out the bits that are boring, mean, or unhelpful
- you can decide certain things belong in your journal, not your stories
- you can keep your private life private and still be trusted

You just stop lying about the state of things.

“I’m tired, but I’m committed.”

“I’m doing well here, struggling over there.”

“I believe in what I’m selling, and yes, I want to get paid for it.”

That’s what people can actually build trust on.

Why This Matters for Your Position

From a business perspective, intentional authenticity does a few powerful things:

It makes you **consistent** (people know what version of you they’ll get).

It builds **durable trust** (the kind that doesn’t collapse the first time you admit a mistake).

It makes you **easier to work with** (brands know your lines, and your audience believes you when you say “this is worth your time”).

Over time, this becomes part of what makes you irreplaceable.

Anyone can copy your format.

Very few people will do the slower work of being honest, with boundaries, on purpose — for years.

In the next section, we’ll connect this to the competitive landscape.

Because once you’re clear on who you are, who you’re for, and how you

show up, it becomes a lot easier to see where you sit in a world full of people still just shouting into the feed.

Competitive Landscape Analysis

Competitive Landscape: Without the 60-Page PDF Nobody Reads

On the surface, “competitive landscape analysis” sounds like something a consulting firm would charge twenty grand for... and then deliver in a 60-page PDF that becomes a coaster.

And you might be thinking:

I’m a creator, not Coca-Cola. Do I really need this?

Not in the corporate way, no.

But if you ignore it completely, you’re playing the game with one eye closed.

Because even if you don’t have a formal “market,” you absolutely have a competitive environment.

Your audience’s time is finite.

Their attention is finite.

Their money is definitely finite.

And every time they see you, you’re competing with:

- other creators in your niche
- big brands with big budgets
- agencies churning out glossy campaigns
- platforms pushing whatever they're trying to promote this month
- plus Netflix, group chats, kids, work, and yes... the fact they're probably on the toilet

You're not just competing with "people like you."

You're competing with everything asking for their brain space.

The good news: you can borrow the useful parts of how big brands think, without becoming a beige corporate robot.

What Big Brands Do That You Can Borrow

Big brands and agencies love a few simple questions:

- Who are we really up against?
- What are they saying?
- Where are they showing up?
- What box does the customer put us in?

They map the category, spot the players, then try to own a corner of the map.

For a soda brand, that corner might be:

"We're the fun one" vs "we're the healthy one" vs "we're the cheap one."

For you, it might be:

“I’m the blunt, practical voice for creators who want grown-up money”

versus

“I’m the calm, aesthetic, aspirational version of this topic.”

Here’s the twist.

Most creators don’t do this on purpose.

They watch others to copy what “works,” instead of using the landscape to figure out where they could be different.

Who You’re Really Competing With

Your competitive set isn’t “everyone in my niche.”

It’s more like:

- the **three creators** your audience would watch instead of you if they only had 10 minutes
- the **one or two big brands** they already trust in your space
- the **default option** they’d choose if you didn’t exist at all

Example:

If you help early-stage founders, you’re competing with:

- one or two big-name startup voices

- their favourite podcast
- their own habit of doom-scrolling instead of doing the work

If you're a beauty creator, you're competing with:

- other creators they see as “their person”
- brand-owned content from the big retailers
- the TikTok makeup wizard doing wild transformations for pure entertainment

You don't need a formal report to see this.

You just need to pay attention:

- look at comments when your stuff hits
- look at who else your followers follow
- look at what content sits next to you in the feed

That's your real neighbourhood.

How to Study “The Big Guys” Without Spiralling

Don't study others to compare yourself and feel rubbish.

Study them with this question:

What can I steal the logic of, without stealing the aesthetics?

A few things worth stealing:

1) Consistency of point of view

Big creators have a stance. You know what they believe.

You can do that too - without copying their opinions.

2) Repetition of key ideas

Big brands repeat the same message a hundred ways.

You can do that with your core ideas instead of chasing new topics every week.

3) Customer language

Good brands obsess over how people talk.

You can do your own version by reading comments and DMs and using that exact language back in your content and offers.

4) Gaps

Look for what they avoid.

The angles they don't touch.

The people they speak over.

The problems they won't name.

That's often where your opportunity sits.

Optional: a tool like **Zaaz** can help surface patterns in audience language and behaviour faster across platforms — but it's not necessary. The manual

version works. It just requires you to slow down and actually read what people are telling you.

A Simple Creator Competitive Scan

This will tell you more than hours of vague “market research.”

Pick:

- **3 creators** your audience definitely knows in your space
- **2 brands** your audience already buys from
- **1 bigger company or agency** in the same general topic

For each one, answer in 1–2 sentences:

- What are they obviously known for?
- What do they do better than almost anyone?
- What do they ignore or avoid?
- If your ideal follower described them in one line, what would they say?

Then do the same for yourself.

No fluff. No self-hate. Just honest.

“If I’m blunt, right now I’m known for...”

“The gap I could own is...”

You’ll start to see:

- where you’re blending in

- where your natural difference already exists
- where you could position yourself alongside bigger players instead of orbiting under them

Running With the Big Guys

The point of this isn't to make you feel small next to a company with a 50-person marketing team.

It's to realise you already have advantages they'd pay for:

- faster feedback
- closer audience connection
- more freedom to experiment
- the ability to change direction without a 12-week sign-off process

When you add basic competitive awareness on top of that, you stop moving like a random freelancer and start moving like a small, sharp brand.

You're no longer "some creator the brand found."

You become:

- the one who owns this angle in the space
- the one whose audience trusts them on this specific topic
- the one they need in the mix if they want to be taken seriously here

That's what competitive landscape analysis looks like for you.

Not a deck.

Not a buzzword.

Just a clearer sense of where you stand, who you stand next to, and how you stand out without pretending to be someone you're not.

Next, we'll bridge from this internal clarity into how it actually lands with your audience.

Because it's one thing to know your True North.

It's another thing to make sure they can feel it.

I fell in the gap

Imposter syndrome did not hit me like a truck.

It arrived like a slow leak.

From “Authentic” to “Aligned”: Why Imposter Syndrome Shows Up

In the last sections we talked about authenticity with intentionality.

Not oversharing. Not playing a character. Just telling the truth with boundaries, on purpose.

Here’s the link most people miss:

When you drift away from that... **imposter syndrome doesn’t always arrive as drama.**

Sometimes it arrives as a slow leak.

It did for me.

Imposter syndrome didn’t hit me like a truck.

It arrived like a slow leak.

At first, it was tiny.

A little voice before a talk saying, “Are you sure you’re the right person for

this?”

An extra hour tweaking slides so nobody could see the bits I was unsure about.

A quiet dread when someone introduced me as an expert, because I knew all the things I didn't know.

Nothing dramatic. Just a low-level hum in the background.

But as the rooms got bigger, the gap got bigger too.

There was the real me — the one who likes nuance, who can say “I don't know,” who'd rather tell a story that makes me look human, not heroic.

Then there was stage me.

The version I thought the audience wanted.

More polished.

More certain.

More answers, fewer questions.

At first, I told myself I was just “professionalising.”

In reality, I was sanding off anything that felt risky... and replacing it with what I thought would land.

The problem is, audiences aren't stupid.

They might not be able to explain it, but they can feel when something is off.

And so can you.

Every time I stepped on stage with a talk that had been over-edited to fit some imaginary ideal, I felt that gap.

I was saying the right things.

The slides looked good.

The feedback was fine.

But inside, there was this quiet, sick feeling:

“I don’t quite believe myself right now.”

I ignored it. For a while.

Then one day my body decided it had had enough.

I was mid-talk. On stage. Lights in my face. A couple of hundred people out there. Familiar territory.

Except this time, halfway through a point I’d made a dozen times before...

My mind went completely blank.

Not “I forgot the next slide.”

Fully blank. Static.

Heart rate through the roof.

Hands cold.

I could hear myself speaking, but it felt like I was watching from outside my own body.

Classic panic attack.

Terrible timing.

Later, once the adrenaline wore off, the truth was simple:

I no longer believed what I was saying... at least not in the way I was saying it.

The talk wasn't a lie, exactly.

It was a version of the truth that had been stretched to fit what I thought that room wanted from me.

The gap between who I was and who I was performing as had finally gotten too wide.

My nervous system did what any sensible system does when asked to stand in front of people and present something it doesn't trust.

It pulled the plug.

After that, I stepped back for a bit.

I told myself I was just “focusing on other things,” but really I was licking my wounds and trying to work out what had happened.

Was I not cut out for speaking?

Was I out of my depth?

Was this all a fluke and now I’d been found out?

It took time to see the pattern.

The times I felt most like an imposter were the times I was furthest from myself. The times I was trying to match an image. Tick a box. Be the version of me I thought the room wanted.

Fast forward, and I took an evangelist role with a new tech company.

On paper, it looked like the same setup: be “on,” talk to customers, be on the road, represent the brand.

So I arrived braced, ready for round two of trying to live up to some imagined standard.

Instead, I met my director.

A wonderful human. Calm. Smart. Zero interest in turning me into a brand-safe robot.

The only real expectation they had was this:

“Are you enjoying it?”

Not “Are you sticking to this script?”

Not “Can you be more like that other speaker?”

Not “Here’s the persona we want you to adopt.”

Just: “Are you enjoying it?”

It was disarming.

At first, I didn’t fully believe them. Years of corporate conditioning had trained me to wait for the catch.

But it never came.

So I started doing the job the way I actually wanted to.

I told the truth about what the product could and couldn’t do.

I shared my own stories, not the neat case studies.

I admitted when I didn’t know — and went and found out — instead of bluffing.

And here’s the funny thing:

The more I did that, the less imposter syndrome I felt.

Not because I suddenly became perfect.

Because there was no longer a gap.

The person on stage was the same person off stage.

The words coming out of my mouth matched what I actually believed.

The expectations around me were based on me being me... not me playing a character.

That's when I realised something important:

Imposter syndrome isn't always a sign you're not good enough.

Sometimes it's a signal you've drifted too far from yourself.

Yes, build skills. Raise your standards. Learn the craft.

But if you're constantly feeling like a fraud, it's worth asking:

Have I built a version of myself for the audience that I don't recognise anymore?

If the answer is even a little bit yes, the cure isn't more pretending.

It's less.

It's finding spaces — and people — who let you be good at what you're good at, in your way, without asking you to put on a costume first.

Like that director who only cared if I was enjoying it.

Enjoyment is underrated as a metric.

Because when you enjoy how you show up, when you're not fighting yourself every time you open your mouth, the need to hold everything together with performance drops.

You feel less like an imposter because there's no one else you're trying to impersonate.

After that season — a rebuilding, if you like — I chose, on my own terms, to call my corporate career into an early retirement.

Not because I'd had a gut full.

Because I finally understood the value I bring when it comes from a place of real alignment.

It really is just you.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

If imposter syndrome is humming in the background, don't ask "How do I get more confident?"

Ask:

- **Where am I performing instead of communicating?**
- **What part of my message do I keep sanding down to feel safer?**
- **What would I say if I was allowed to be me, and still be professional?**

Then make one small move back toward yourself:

- swap one “perfect” line for one honest line
- admit one “I don’t know yet” (and follow it with “but here’s what I’m testing”)
- stop trying to sound like the room... and start sounding like you

From Self-Reflection to Audience Resonance

Up to this point, most of what we’ve done has been internal.

Who you are.

What makes you irreplaceable.

Who you serve.

What value you’re actually creating.

Where you sit in the bigger picture.

It can feel a bit like you’ve been rearranging furniture in your own head.

Important work. Necessary work.

But here’s the hard truth:

None of it really counts until it lands on their side.

It doesn't matter how clear your True North is if your audience still experiences you as "that person who posts random stuff."

It doesn't matter how good your positioning sounds in a notebook if, out in the wild, your content still looks and feels like everyone else in your niche.

So this is the shift we're making now.

From:

"I understand myself better."

To:

"My people understand me better — and they know exactly why I'm for them."

Because self-reflection is what stops you building a brand you secretly hate.

But audience resonance is what turns that brand into momentum, impact... and yes, money.

Resonance leaves receipts

The good news is you don't have to guess whether it's working.

Your audience is already telling you, every day, in a hundred tiny ways:

- what they save

- what they share
- what they comment on with actual words (not just emojis)
- what they quietly click two days after you post
- when they say, “This is exactly how I feel,” or “I thought I was the only one”

That’s resonance.

Not hype. Not virality. Not “numbers go brrr.”

Resonance is when your work makes someone feel seen and moved.

In the next chapter, we’re going to take everything you’ve clarified internally and test it in the real world:

- Does your content actually reflect the identity you say you have?
- Do your offers make sense for the people you claim to serve?
- Does your tone, pacing, and style match where your audience is at?
- Do the numbers and the comments back up the story you’re telling yourself about your brand?

Because the real power move isn’t just knowing who you are.

It’s becoming so clear, so consistent, and so useful that when your people see you in the feed, they don’t just recognise you.

They feel:

This one is for me.

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Pick one recent post that “performed” and one that “connected.”

Then ask:

- Which one sounds more like me?
- Which one sounds more like the internet?
- Which one did my people respond to with real words?

That’s your direction.

Understanding Your Audience: Beyond Vanity Metrics

Breaking Free from Like-Chasing

Data Runs More of Your Life Than You Think

Before we get into vanity metrics, we need to admit something.

Data, whether we like it or not, drives a lot of decisions.

Even the “gut feelings” you have? On some level they’re the result of data too — patterns, reactions, and behaviours your brain has been storing for years. That’s basically what people mean when they talk about cognitive bias: your mind running old pattern-matching software in the background and calling it intuition.

So when we talk about metrics, we’re not replacing instinct.

We’re just making the signals clearer.

Now let me say this clearly.

I’m not anti likes, views, or followers.

I’m extremely pro metric.

A like is still someone reacting.

A view is still time spent.

A follow is still a tiny vote that says, “More of this, please.”

They’re not meaningless. They’re just not the whole story.

Vanity metrics get a bad name because people use them as the only scoreboard. That’s where things go sideways.

If your entire sense of progress lives or dies on how many hearts you got today, you’ve basically hired the algorithm as your emotional manager.

But if you treat those numbers as useful signals, they become tools instead of triggers.

A bunch of likes can tell you:

- the topic landed
- the format was easy to consume
- the hook did its job and stopped the scroll

A spike in views can tell you:

- the platform is testing you with new people
- you hit something with wider appeal than usual

That stuff matters. It’s often the first sign you’re onto something.

It becomes a trap when the number is the only thing you care about.

You know the drill:

You post.

You refresh.

You compare it to last time.

You decide if you're "up" or "down" as a person based on a bar chart.

I've done it too. Even with MANWASH, where we had real revenue to worry about, I still caught myself getting more excited about which ad had the prettiest graph... instead of which ad was actually selling product.

So here's the balanced take:

Vanity metrics are helpful. They're just incomplete.

They show you attention happened. They don't automatically tell you if it translated into anything deeper.

That's the upgrade we're making.

Metrics as Behaviour, Not Popularity

When you treat metrics as behaviour, even the "vanity" ones start working harder for you.

A like is: "This hit enough for me to tap."

A comment is: "This made me think in words."

A save is: "This matters enough to come back to."

A share is: “This says something about me to other people.”

A click is: “I’m willing to leave this app for this.”

A purchase is: “I’m willing to pay for what you’re doing.”

Those are different levels of commitment.

Likes and views are often the front door.

There’s nothing wrong with celebrating a post that pops off. Enjoy it. Screenshot it. Send it to your friends. You worked for that.

Just add one question under the celebration:

What did this actually lead to?

Sometimes the honest answer will be “nothing, it was just a fun banger.” That’s fine.

Not every piece of content has to carry a P&L. Some things exist to entertain, to keep you familiar, to remind people you’re human.

But when you’re thinking like a business owner, you start looking for patterns, not peaks.

From Like-Chasing to Pattern-Spotting

Like-chasing is: “How do I get this number higher?”

Pattern-spotting is: “What does this number keep teaching me?”

For example:

“Every time I tell a real story about creators getting underpaid, likes are normal, but saves and DMs spike... and clicks jump a day later.”

“Quick funny clips get the most views, but deeper breakdowns bring serious enquirers.”

“Whenever I talk honestly about the business side, reach drops a bit... but the people who stay are exactly who I want.”

Now your metrics aren't ego fuel.

They're clues.

Optional note: a tool like **Zaaz** can make it easier to connect these dots across platforms without living in spreadsheets, but it's not necessary. You can do the manual version and still get the insight.

The principle stays the same:

- likes and views tell you what pulls people in
- comments, saves, clicks, and buys tell you what moves them

You need both. Top-of-funnel and depth.

Breaking Free Is About the Role Metrics Play

Breaking free from metrics isn't about ignoring them.

It's about changing the job they do in your head.

If metrics are a source of validation, they'll end up ruling you.

Good day: you feel worthy.

Slow day: you feel like a fraud.

And you start bending yourself toward whatever bumps the graph, even if it has nothing to do with who you are.

But if metrics become a source of information, they start serving you.

You look at a post and ask:

- What is this teaching me about my audience?
- What can I try next based on this?
- How does this map back to my intent for the brand and business?

That's being data-led.

Not data-controlled.

You set the intention.

You decide who you want to be and who you're for.

Then you use the numbers to refine how you express that — instead of letting the numbers rewrite who you are.

A Healthier Relationship With the Dashboard

Next time you check analytics, try this:

. Look at your top posts for the month **by the metric that matches your current stage**

- early stage: reach and follows
- growing stage: saves, replies, clicks
- business stage: enquiries, conversions, sales

. For the “vanity wins,” ask:

What hook, topic, or emotion made people tap so fast?

. For the “quieter posts” that drove action, ask:

**What did I do differently that made fewer people watch...
but the right people move?**

Write the answers down.

That becomes your playbook.

Because the goal isn't to become too cool to care about numbers.

The goal is to care about them in a way that supports your growth... instead of letting them decide who you are and how you feel.

Vanity metrics are fine.

We're just making sure you use them as data... not as a mirror.

Audience Intelligence: The Data that Matters

A Quick Walk Through Business School (Then Back to Your Feed)

Let's take a short walk through business school before we come back to your feed.

Long before TikTok, before "creator economy" was a phrase, big brands were already obsessed with understanding audiences.

Agencies like Ogilvy built entire empires on a simple idea:

If we really know who we're talking to, we can move them.

To do that, they used a few basic building blocks:

Demographics

Age, gender, income, location, job title.

Who is this person on paper?

Behaviours

What they actually do.

What they watch, when they buy, how often they visit, what they click, how they pay.

Patterns

What keeps repeating.

The times they engage, the topics they lean toward, the offers they respond to.

Cohorts

Groups of people who share something in common.

New customers vs repeat. High spenders vs window shoppers. People who came from one campaign vs another.

None of this is new. Agencies have used these lenses for decades to decide where to put TV ads, which magazines to buy space in, and which slogans will hit.

The difference now is simple:

You are the brand.

You are the media channel.

You have the data.

You don't need a research department. Your socials, your email list, your

store, your DMs... they're already coughing up all of this every day.

The Business School Basics, Creator Edition

Here's how those classic concepts translate into your world.

Demographics

Not "my audience is everyone."

Try:

"Mostly women 25–34 in cities... plus a surprising pocket of 40+ who comment the most."

"Founders and operators, mainly on LinkedIn, often in SaaS or ecom."

Demographics tell you who's in the room when you talk.

Behaviours

This is where it gets useful.

- Which posts they watch all the way through
- Which topics make them comment stories (not just emojis)
- Which links they actually click
- How often they come back
- When they buy, and what pushes them over the line

Behaviours show you what they do, not just what they claim they like.

Patterns

Patterns are where you earn your strategist badge.

You start noticing things like:

- every time you talk money, overall views drop... but high-quality DMs go up
- honest “here’s what this really costs me” posts get saved and shared
- Tuesday mornings suit serious breakdowns better than Friday nights

Patterns are what turn data from noise into direction.

Cohorts

Cohorts are just groups of people who behave differently.

For example:

- people who found you from one viral post vs people who found you through a friend
- customers who bought once on a discount vs customers who buy full price
- creators who follow you for mindset vs founders who follow you for strategy

Once you can see cohorts, you stop treating your audience like a blob and start seeing segments you can serve differently.

Audience Intelligence: What Actually Matters

“Audience intelligence” is just a fancy way of saying:

I understand who is really here, what they care about, and how they behave over time.

Demographics, behaviours, patterns, cohorts — those are the inputs.

What matters is what you do with them.

You're looking for the overlap between:

- who they are
- what they do around you
- where your work genuinely helps

So audience intelligence sounds like:

“I know a lot of my people are mid-level creators, mostly women 25–40, who are sick of being underpaid. When I speak bluntly about the brand–creator power imbalance, they save and share it. When I give them language to push back on bad offers, they click... and some end up in my programs.”

Now you're not guessing what to talk about or what to build.

You're following proof.

Tools vs Manual: Same Goal, Different Speed

A traditional agency would pull data from multiple platforms, segment it, build a deck, present it, and charge accordingly.

You don't need the ceremony.

You need the outcome.

Tools like **Zaaz** can help turn what's already in your socials into usable audience intelligence without needing an analytics team. It can make patterns easier to spot across platforms, especially in comments and behaviour.

But it's optional.

You can do a manual version with the same mindset:

- read comments like they're research
- track saves/shares/clicks like they're votes
- notice repeated phrases like they're customer language
- group people by behaviour, not by ego metrics

The point is the same either way:

Not all data is equal.

The data that matters is the data that helps you decide:

- what to make next
- who to make it for
- what to say no to

From “I Have Analytics” to “I Understand My People”

Almost every creator has access to analytics.

Very few use them like a strategist.

The shift happens when you start asking better questions:

Not just: “What performed best this week?”

But: “What did my best people respond to — and what does that tell me about them?”

Not just: “Which post got the most reach?”

But: “Which topic consistently leads to saves, shares, and real conversations?”

Not just: “Who follows me?”

But: “Which cohorts actually buy, refer, or stick around the longest?”

Audience intelligence isn't about drowning in charts.

It's about having just enough of the right information to make your next move with intention.

Because once you understand your audience at that level, you stop creating in the dark.

You're no longer guessing what might land.

You're speaking directly to people you actually know — in a language they've already shown you they understand.

Who Are Your Real Fans?

Not Everyone Who Follows You Is a Fan

Let's clear something up straight away.

Not everyone who follows you is a fan.

A follower is someone who tapped a button once.

A fan is someone who shows up again and again, in ways that matter.

Followers are the crowd.

Fans are the people in the front row who would notice if you disappeared.

Follower vs Fan

Here's the difference in real terms.

A follower might:

- like the occasional post
- watch you if you happen to show up in their feed
- forget you for months, then go "oh yeah... that person"

A real fan:

- looks for your name in their feed
- watches even when the topic isn't obviously "viral"

- comments in actual sentences (not just 🔥🔥🔥)
- saves, shares, and sends your content to friends with “THIS is what I meant”
- buys when they can
- sticks around when you pivot because they’re there for you, not just one format
- defends you when someone misses the point in the comments

Fans participate.

Followers observe.

Fans move from passive consumption to active involvement.

How the Previous Chapter Helps You Spot Them

In the last chapter we talked about:

- behaviour, not just reach
- patterns and cohorts
- audience intelligence, not just impressions

This is where that pays off.

Your real fans show up as a pattern in your data.

They’re the ones who:

- keep appearing in your comments across multiple posts
- open your emails regularly (not just the spicy ones)
- click through even when there’s nothing “free” on the other side
- buy, come back, and bring others with them

When you start looking through that lens, you'll usually see layers inside your audience.

Something like:

- 50,000 followers
- 5,000 regular engagers
- 500 people who act like real fans
- 50 who are your core customers or advocates

Those inner layers are where your business actually lives.

What Real Fans Look Like in the Wild

Real fans are often:

- the first to comment when you drop something new
- the ones who say “this is exactly what I needed today”
- the ones who tell their own story in response to yours
- the ones whose names you start recognising without trying

They're also usually the ones who:

- fill out your survey when you ask for input
- show up to your live sessions
- reply to your emails like they're talking to a person, not a brand

Real fans aren't perfect people with unlimited money.

Some won't ever buy because they can't right now.

They can still be fans if they consistently engage, share your work, and bring new people into your world.

Participation is the marker — not just spend.

Finding Your Real Fans On Purpose

You don't need a full-blown community strategy to start.

You just need to start recognising who's already acting like a fan.

And yes, this is where tools can help if you want them.

Zaaz can make it easier to surface your most engaged people across platforms — the ones who keep commenting, clicking, returning, and buying — without you manually scrolling through weeks of posts.

But it's optional.

The manual version works too. It just takes a bit more attention.

1) Check for repeat names in comments and DMs

These are the people invested enough to talk back.

Make a simple list if you have to. You'll start seeing patterns fast.

2) Look at your top engagers and buyers

Most platforms will show you who interacts the most.

If you've got a store or email list, look for repeat buyers and repeat openers.

That's your inner circle cohort.

3) Ask something that requires effort

Post a question that needs more than yes/no.

Send an email that invites a real reply.

The ones who respond aren't casual scrollers. They're participants.

4) Notice who stays through your honest posts

When you share something real or challenging and overall engagement dips...

See who's still there.

Those are your people.

Design for Fans, Not the Whole Internet

Once you know who your real fans are, decision-making gets cleaner.

You start asking:

- Will this help my real fans, or is it bait for strangers?
- Would my fans be proud to share this, or is it cheap attention?

- Is this offer built with my fans in mind, or am I trying to impress people who barely know me?

This doesn't mean you ignore everyone else.

It means you build your world around the people who've already proven they care...

...and let everyone else orbit as they like.

Because followers come and go with trends.

Real fans are the ones who turn your work from a noisy side project into something that can actually support you.

Listening, Surveying, Interviewing

Alright, this is the part where I briefly plug Zaaz (again).

Not because I want to turn this into a SaaS brochure, but because if you do this entire section manually, there's a very real chance you'll slowly lose the will to live.

Listening. Surveying. Interviewing.

Unsexy work.

Also the stuff that quietly turns you into a weapon.

Quick disclosure again, so we stay honest

I didn't build Zaaz. I'm a founding member and I back the mission because it's aimed at fixing a very real problem: creators generate **insane value**, and most of them are still guessing their way through what actually works and why.

Zaaz can automate some of the heavy lifting inside your socials. It helps surface patterns in comments, cluster common themes, and show you what your audience reacts to — without you screenshotting chaos into spreadsheets at midnight.

But — and this matters — doing some of this manually will make you a better creator and a better listener.

So I'm going to give you both:

- the “tool option” (Zaaz or anything similar), and
- the “no tools, just you” manual version.

And yes, we're calling them **audience** from here on out. Not “followers.” Not “users.” Actual humans who feel things.

Listening: The Free Masterclass You Keep Skipping

Most creators are great at talking and terrible at listening.

Listening looks like:

- reading comments properly, not just checking the count
- noticing the exact words people repeat back to you
- seeing which part of a story they latch onto
- watching where the conversation goes after your post, not just under it

Tool option: Zaaz can help cluster comments and surface recurring themes — like noticing that every time you mention “underpaid” or “burnout,” one segment of your audience lights up.

Manual version: scroll your own comments like a detective.

Because when you read them yourself, you hear tone. You feel the frustration, the relief, the “finally someone said it.”

That feeling is what you’re designing for.

Surveying: Asking Better Questions Than “What Do You Want to See More Of?”

Surveys are where a lot of creators get lazy.

“Hey guys, what do you want to see more of?”

Terrible question. Nobody knows. They’ll either say “more of this” or they’ll disappear.

Good surveying is about asking specific, answerable questions that give you something you can use.

Try questions like:

- “What are you stuck on right now that you wish someone would just explain clearly?”
- “What have you tried in the last year that didn’t work for you?”
- “When you think about money and your work, what worries you the most?”

You can ask these in:

- Stories with question boxes
- email with one or two direct questions
- a simple Google Form
- a pinned post
- a broadcast channel prompt

Tool option: Zaaz can help connect survey responses back to behaviour (who saves what, who clicks what, who comes back). That's where the insight gets sharper.

Manual version: tag responses into 3–5 buckets. Literally copy/paste into a doc:

- money
- confidence
- consistency
- brand deals
- burnout

You'll start seeing patterns faster than you think.

Interviewing: Talking to People Like a Grown-Up

This is the part everyone tries to skip because it feels awkward.

Don't skip it.

Get on calls with your audience.

Short ones. 15 minutes. Low drama.

You don't need to pretend it's a formal "user research interview." Just say:

"Hey — I'm building things for people like you and I don't want to guess. Can I ask you a few questions about what's actually helpful?"

On those calls, listen for:

- how they describe their situation in their own words
- what they think your work does for them
- where they see you fitting in their life or business
- what nearly made them unfollow you
- what nearly made them buy... but didn't

Record them if you can (with permission). Rewatch. Take notes.

It's tedious work.

It's also where your sharpest insights live.

No tool can replace the feeling of hearing someone say:

"I thought I was broken until you said X."

Or:

"I follow a lot of people, but you're the one I actually listen to when you talk about Y."

Tool option: Zaaz can help you choose who to talk to by surfacing the people who already behave like fans or buyers — so you're not picking random names from the crowd.

Manual version: find your repeat commenters, repeat repliers, repeat clickers. Start with the people who are already raising their hand.

Why This “Boring Stuff” Matters

Here’s why I’m pushing this.

If you only live in the numbers, your audience becomes abstract.

Percentages. Charts. Lines going up or down.

Listening, surveying, and interviewing puts flesh back on the bones.

You start to:

- hear the real fears behind the polite comments
- understand the stakes behind a simple “this helped”
- see the gap between what you think you’re doing... and what they’re actually receiving

And once you see that, you can’t unsee it.

You make different content.

You build different offers.

You negotiate differently with brands.

Because you’re no longer guessing what your audience cares about.

You've heard it — in their own words.

Bringing It All Together: Turning Insight Into a Plan

Before you panic and open a spreadsheet, take a breath.

You don't need to do every single step in this chapter every single month like some kind of analytics monk. This isn't a new religion. It's a new habit.

The simple shift I want for you is this:

Less “Did this post do well, yes or no?”

More “What is this telling me about my audience — and what does that mean for what I do next?”

If you only pick a few of these exercises and repeat them regularly, you'll already be ahead of most people in your space.

Because analysis isn't just about understanding the past.

It quietly changes how you think about the future.

Instead of guessing, you have clues.

Instead of vibes, you have patterns.

Instead of waking up thinking “what on earth do I post today,” you've got a rough plan rooted in real behaviour from real people who actually care.

You don't need perfection. You need the habit.

A little time each cycle spent analysing — not just checking — turns you into a different kind of creator and operator. One who moves with more certainty because you're not flying blind anymore.

You've done the reflective bit.

You've stared at the numbers.

You've thought about fans, not just followers.

You've even tolerated my Zaaz plug.

Now you need a simple way to turn all of that into something you can actually use:

- what to make next
- how to show up
- what to double down on
- what to quietly retire

Think of this as your **Audience Intel** → **Action** template.

And yes: Zaaz can help you pull pieces of this faster if you want it to. But it's optional. Everything below can be done with native analytics and a notebook.

Step 1: Set Your Focus for This Cycle

Pick a time frame. A month is good. Six weeks max.

Write:

Business goal for this cycle

- “Grow email list by 500”
- “Sell 30 spots in my program”
- “Test if people will buy a more premium offer”

Audience focus

- “Mid-level creators who are underpaid but already in motion”
- “Founders who follow me for blunt truth about brand and sales”

This stops your brain chasing everything at once.

Step 2: Pull the Only Data You Actually Need

You don't need everything. You need the right things.

For the last 30 days, grab:

- top 5 posts by reach
- top 5 posts by saves
- top 5 posts by comments
- top 5 posts by link clicks or sales (if you can see that)

Tool option: Zaaz can pull and cluster this faster across platforms.

Manual version: native analytics + a note doc (or a simple spreadsheet if you must).

Create a table like this:

Post / Asset | Topic/angle | Format | Hook | Main metric | Notes

Fill it in, then look for patterns.

Step 3: Add the Human Layer (Qualitative Notes)

Now stop acting like a robot and add context.

For each top post, ask:

- What was I really doing here?

Calling something out, telling a story, teaching, BTS, vulnerable moment, pure entertainment

- What did my audience actually say?

Pull a few real comments or DMs. Look at language, not just emojis.

- Who did it resonate with?

Creators, founders, beginners, advanced, certain age bracket, certain platform

Add a “Qualitative Notes” column.

You’re looking for themes like:

- “Whenever I talk underpayment with a blunt tone, saves and long comments spike.”
- “Whenever I share real numbers, fewer people watch, but serious people click.”

Step 4: Spot Real Fan Behaviour

Now bring in what you learned about fans.

- Which posts did your repeat names comment on?
- Which content did existing buyers engage with?
- Which topics got replies from your “front row” people, not just strangers?

Create a quick snapshot:

Fan cohort | What they engage with | What they struggle with | What they do next (click/buy/share)

Keep it simple. Three to five cohorts is enough.

Examples:

- underpaid mid-level creators
- bootstrapped founders (30s/40s)
- lurkers who only speak up when you talk burnout

Step 5: Turn Insights Into Content Pillars

Now we turn the mess into direction.

Looking at your table and cohorts, answer:

. What 3–5 topics clearly matter most to my real fans?

(Not what went most viral — what leads to saves, DMs, clicks, sales.)

. What 2–3 emotions/truths keep showing up?

Underpaid. Unseen. Confused. Ambitious. Exhausted-but-not-done.

. What formats seem best for each?

Short reels, longer breakdowns, carousels, emails, lives.

Now define your pillars:

Pillar | Who it's for | Purpose | Best formats

This becomes your spine.

Step 6: Map the Next Content Cycle (Loose Plan, Not a Prison)

Turn pillars into a simple weekly grid:

Day | Pillar | Topic/angle | Format | CTA / next step

You're not trying to predict the entire month perfectly.

You're giving your future self a runway that is:

- based on real behaviour
- built for real fans
- connected to business goals

Step 7: One-Page "Audience Intel Plan"

This is the thing you revisit monthly.

Goal for this cycle

- Business:
- Audience:

My real fans

- who they are

- what they struggle with
- what they keep telling me

Key patterns

- topics that drive depth (saves, DMs, clicks)
- formats that work best
- phrases/ideas they repeat back to me

Content pillars this cycle

- . pillar + who it's for + purpose
- . pillar + who it's for + purpose
- . pillar + who it's for + purpose

Next 10 content ideas

List them out, tied to pillars, with a rough format and a CTA.

Tool option: Zaaz can speed up the “find patterns” part.

Manual version: platform insights + your brain + a notebook works fine.

Either way, this is the point:

You're no longer creating in the dark.

You're building from:

- who you are

- who your audience actually is
- what your data keeps quietly telling you

That's how you go from “posting a lot” to operating like someone who understands their audience — and is building a real business around them.

Turning Insight into Business Strategy

Up to now, we've been collecting puzzle pieces.

Not in a "sit in a room and overthink your life" way.

In a practical way.

We've looked at data, not to worship it, but to understand what it's been trying to tell you. We've talked about audience intelligence, competitive awareness, authenticity with boundaries, and the difference between followers and fans.

None of that is new information to you.

It's mostly things you already felt.

You already know which posts bring out the real people.

You already know the topics that hit a nerve.

You already know the difference between a follower who taps a heart and a fan who sends your post to a friend with "THIS."

What we're doing is taking those gut instincts and turning them into something you can use on purpose.

Because the gap between "I have good instincts" and "I have a strategy" is just this:

You can explain it.

You can repeat it.

You can build on it.

That's what strategy is.

Not a 40-page plan.

A clear way of deciding what to do next, and why.

Insight is what you notice. Strategy is what you do about it.

Here's the simplest version:

- **Data shows you behaviour.**
- **Behaviour reveals patterns.**
- **Patterns tell you what your people actually value.**
- **Strategy is choosing how you're going to deliver more of that... on purpose.**

So when you see that:

- "Underpayment posts don't go viral, but they get saved and lead to serious DMs"
- "Funny clips get reach, but breakdowns get clicks"
- "My audience uses the same three phrases again and again when they're stressed"

You're not just collecting trivia.

You're discovering:

- what your people care about
- what they trust you for
- what makes them move
- what they're willing to spend time, attention, and money on

That's the raw material for a strategy that feels natural, because it's basically your lived experience, just organised.

The Strategy Stack: From Feed to Foundation

Think of it like a stack.

1) Identity (who you are)

This is your voice, your stance, your lane.

The part we covered when we talked about authenticity with intentionality and not sanding yourself down into a safe persona.

If you're not aligned here, strategy becomes cosplay.

2) Audience intelligence (who they are)

Not "everyone." Your actual people.

The cohorts. The patterns. The repeat names. The phrases they keep using.

This is where your content stops being "creative output" and starts

becoming a conversation you can build on.

3) Positioning (where you sit)

This is the competitive landscape piece.

Not obsessing over everyone else, just knowing what you're different for.

So you're not just "another creator in the niche."

You're the one who owns a specific angle.

4) Offers (what you sell)

This is where value turns into something structured.

Fans don't just want more content. They want outcomes.

They want:

- clarity
- relief
- momentum
- language they can use
- a system that makes life easier

That becomes offers.

Not because you're trying to extract money.

Because you're trying to package value in a way that's actually usable.

5) Feedback loop (how you refine)

This is the habit piece.

Not spreadsheet monk energy.

Just a regular cycle of:

- make
- notice
- adjust
- repeat

That's how you stop guessing.

And that's how you get predictable.

The Big Shift: From Popularity to Value

When creators stay stuck, it's usually because they're measuring the wrong thing.

They measure:

- views
- likes
- follower count

Which are fine, but they're top-of-funnel signals.

Strategy starts when you measure value signals:

- saves
- shares
- thoughtful comments
- replies
- clicks
- enquiries
- purchases
- repeat purchases
- referrals

Those are the behaviours that tell you you're not just being watched.

You're being trusted.

And trust is the asset.

“This Isn't New. I've Known This.” Yes. That's the point.

If you've been reading these sections thinking, “I already kind of knew this...”

Good.

That means you're not starting from zero.

You're just moving from accidental to intentional.

Most creators already have a strategy.

It's just hidden inside:

- their habits
- their gut feelings
- their best posts
- their best fans
- their most repeated questions

All we've done is pull it into the light, so you can use it on purpose.

Where Financials Fit (Without Making It Weird)

Now we get to the bit that makes strategy real.

Money.

Not because money is the only goal.

But because money is feedback.

Revenue is the cleanest signal that your work is creating value someone is willing to pay for.

And here's the upgrade that's coming:

When you connect insight to strategy, you can also connect strategy to economics.

Meaning:

- you stop pricing based on vibes
- you stop saying yes to deals that look shiny but don't serve your goals
- you start building offers with margins, sustainability, and capacity in mind
- you start helping brands and clients get better outcomes because you know what actually moves your people

This is where your audience intelligence becomes leverage.

Not manipulation.

Leverage.

Because you can walk into a brand or client conversation and say:

“Here's what my audience responds to, here's what they ignore, and here's how we can design this so it performs and feels right.”

That makes you more valuable.

It makes the brand's spend more efficient.

And it makes your work more sustainable.

Everybody wins. No cringe required.

Strategy Needs a Scoreboard

So here's where we go next.

We're going to take everything you've built—identity, audience, positioning, offers, feedback loops—and connect it to the financial pieces.

Not in a “become an accountant” way.

In a “build something that actually takes care of you” way.

Because the moment you can link:

- content → behaviour
- behaviour → trust
- trust → action
- action → revenue

...you stop being a creator who hopes it works.

You become an operator who can make it work... repeatedly.

And once you can do that, you and your clients can get more value out of every post, every partnership, every offer.

Not by doing more.

By doing what matters, on purpose.

Real-World Value: Building Business and Financial Intelligence

Owning It Verses Renting It

Renting Your Life vs Owning a Piece of It

Let's talk about the difference between renting your life from platforms... and actually owning a piece of what you're building.

Because social platforms are incredible for discovery.

They're also terrible landlords.

They change the rules, move the goalposts, and occasionally lock the door because someone in a product meeting wanted to "test a new feature." If your whole income depends on their mood, your revenue will feel like weather.

Sunny one week. Storm warning the next. No notice. Good luck.

What "owning it" looks like in real life

There are creators who've made this shift in a very human, non-hype way.

Take someone like **Katie Sturino**.

She didn't start with a grand business plan. She started by being unapologetically herself online. Honest. Messy. Talking about bodies and products in ways that would've made a traditional brand team sweat.

For a while she was “just” a creator.

Then she paid attention to what her audience kept asking for, and turned that into **Megababe** — a product brand that solves real, unglamorous problems.

The platforms are still part of the story, sure.

But the real asset is now a business that belongs to her, not to an algorithm.

On the other end of the scale you’ve got someone like **Rajiv Surendra**.

Slow, crafted, almost old-fashioned in his pace. He built an audience by inviting people into this gentle world of art, craft, soap making, and daily rituals.

Eventually, his people didn’t just want to watch.

They wanted to support. To own a piece of that world.

So he opened a small shop with limited pieces. No rush to scale. No constant hype. Just a simple, owned way for the audience to buy what he makes.

Different creators. Different styles.

Same principle:

Content is the front door.

The business lives somewhere you control.

Why this matters more than ever

If all you have is platform income, your income is fragile.

Not because you're doing it wrong, but because the platform can change things faster than you can adapt.

That's why more creators are building at least one "owned" layer behind the feed:

- a store
- a membership
- a paid newsletter
- a small but serious product line
- a service that exists outside the scroll

The specific format matters less than the outcome:

You want at least one part of your world where you set the rules, set the pricing, and nobody can turn the lights off overnight.

Owning doesn't have to mean scaling

I'm not saying you need to launch the next global brand or start shipping pallets like you're Amazon's little cousin.

Owning it can be small and still powerful:

- one flagship product that sells out because it's so clearly you
- one focused offer that solves one problem really well

- a tiny store that stays intentionally limited
- a newsletter that turns attention into predictable income

You've got a few ways to play this, and there are trade-offs.

Big scale can mean big upside... and big complexity.

Small and owned can mean less hype... and more stability.

Neither is morally better. One is just usually easier to build without losing your mind.

The point of this chapter

As you think about revenue streams in this chapter, don't treat them like a list of trends you "should" chase.

Think of them as **pipes** you can connect to something that belongs to you.

Because the real asset isn't the store, the membership, or the course.

The real asset is **you**:

Your voice. Your taste. Your way of seeing the world.

All we're doing here is giving that asset a home you actually own — so when money flows through your work, it has somewhere solid to land.

And the best part?

When you own even one layer of your world, you and your clients get more

value out of everything you do on-platform.

Same content. Same effort.

Better foundation.

Separating Personal and Business Finances

Real World Value: Building Business and Financial Intelligence

Most creators I know want **financial freedom** and also want to never open a spreadsheet again for the rest of their natural lives.

Same.

You didn't fall in love with making things because you had a secret kink for receipts and tax (I acknowledge that some of you may actually be right into that, I see you.).

But here's the part nobody puts on the motivational posters:

If you don't build some financial intelligence, even the basic kind, you stay easy to underpay.

Not because you're not talented.

Because the system loves talented people who don't track anything. They're the cheapest to work with and the easiest to delay.

If that feels a bit blunt, it's only because I've been there too.

This chapter isn't here to turn you into a CFO.

It's here to help your work start looking after you.

Before we go further: tiny disclaimer, big relief

I'm not your accountant. I'm not your lawyer. This isn't tax advice.

Think of this as the “before you book a meeting” chat — so when you do speak to someone qualified in your country, you don't sit there nodding while your brain quietly exits the building.

The messy phase (aka: how most creators start)

When I started consulting, I did what a lot of us do.

Everything went into the same pot.

Money in. Money out. One card. Another card. Some vague mental notes. A heroic belief that Future Me would “sort it out later.”

Tax time arrived and it felt like trying to solve a murder mystery where the main suspect is... me.

It works when you're tiny.

Then one day it doesn't.

And the annoying part is you don't get a polite notification saying, “Congrats, your chaos has scaled.”

You just wake up feeling stressed, behind, and slightly unsure if the business is doing well or if you're just... busy.

Sound familiar?

The boring move that gives you your life back

Separating personal and business finances is one of those unsexy steps that makes everything calmer.

You're basically saying:

“There's me, the human... and there's this thing I'm building. We're connected, but we're not the same.”

Even if you're early, it's worth doing.

At a basic level, it's this:

- one business bank account for income
- one business card for expenses
- a habit of paying yourself from the business instead of treating it like a magic wallet

That's it. No monastery. No spreadsheets. Just edges.

Why it matters (without the finance lecture)

Clarity

You can actually see what the business earns and what it spends. Not vibes.

Not guesses. Reality.

Less emotional whiplash

When everything is mixed, a slow month feels personal. When the business has its own account, a slow month is still annoying — but it's a business problem, not an identity crisis.

Better decisions

You stop accidentally spending tax money on a new camera because it “felt like a good month.”

(We've all been there. Some of us have the receipts. Literally.)

If you do nothing else this week, do this

Open a business account that makes sense for your country and setup.

Route all work income there.

Then choose a simple way to pay yourself:

- weekly
- fortnightly
- monthly

Regular beats perfect.

The goal isn't to optimise. It's to stop guessing.

The accountant chat (what to ask so you don't waste the hour)

When you speak to someone local, these questions are gold:

- “What’s the simplest setup for someone like me right now?”
- “How should I pay myself under this structure?”
- “What’s the one mistake you see creators make that causes the most pain later?”

That last one will save you more stress than any YouTube video titled “Tax Hacks For Creators (Gone Wrong)”.

Where we're heading next

Once you separate money properly, something shifts.

You start seeing your work like an operator, not a hopeful artist living on vibes.

Next, we'll build on this and talk about the financial basics that actually matter:

What you keep.

What you owe.

What you reinvest.

And how to make your income feel less like weather.

Not to become “good at money.”

Just to make sure your talent finally has a structure that can hold it.

How You Talk About Money

Understanding the Money Words (Without a Finance Degree)

Let’s clear something up: if you don’t know what “EBITDA” stands for, you’re not failing. You’re just... normal.

Most creators never got taught this stuff. But brands, agencies, and platforms all use the same handful of money words when they talk about budgets, value, and “what’s possible.”

Learning the language doesn’t make you corporate. It just stops you getting left out of important conversations.

And one quick note before we get into it:

If any of this feels a bit “simple,” good. That’s intentional. This isn’t a finance exam. It’s a pocket glossary so you can understand your own game — and sound credible when money comes up, without pretending you’re an accountant.

You’ve got a few ways to play this. You can skim it now and come back later. Or you can read it once, then keep it as a reference. Either works.

Revenue: The Money In

Revenue is all the money that comes in **before** anything gets taken out.

For a creator, that might be:

- brand deals and sponsorships
- affiliate payouts
- ad revenue (YouTube, TikTok, podcast ads)
- course or product sales
- memberships, Patreon, subscriptions

If someone pays you and it hits your business account, that's revenue.

Expenses: The Money Out

Expenses (sometimes called expenditure) are the costs of running your creator business.

For example:

- gear (camera, lights, mic, laptop)
- software (editing tools, schedulers, storage)
- contractors (editors, designers, VAs)
- platform fees and payment processing
- a portion of your internet, phone, workspace

If it helps you create, deliver, or sell... it's probably an expense.

Profit: What You Actually Keep

Profit is what's left after you subtract expenses from revenue.

Simple version:

$$\text{Revenue} - \text{Expenses} = \text{Profit}$$

Example:

If you made \$5,000 and spent \$2,000, your profit is \$3,000 (before tax).

Profit answers the grown-up question:

“Is this actually worth it... or am I just busy?”

Loss: When It Costs More Than It Makes

A loss is just the opposite: when expenses are bigger than revenue.

$$\text{Revenue} < \text{Expenses} = \text{Loss}$$

You might have a loss in a month where you:

- buy a new camera
- launch something new with upfront costs
- test paid ads
- hire help for the first time

A loss doesn't automatically mean "this is failing." It means, "This month cost more than it made."

The real question is:

Was that **on purpose** (investment)... or **by accident** (leak)?

Cash Flow: Timing, Not Totals

You can be profitable on paper and still feel broke. That's usually a cash flow problem.

Cash flow is about **when** money comes in and goes out.

Example:

- brand pays you 60 days after the campaign
- your editor wants to be paid weekly
- software bills hit monthly

If more money is going out now than coming in now, life feels tight — even if you're "doing well" overall.

This is why even a small buffer matters for creators. It gives you breathing room between "work done" and "cash received."

Margin: How Healthy the Business Is

Margin is usually "profit margin" — how much of your revenue you keep after expenses, as a percentage.

Example:

- Revenue: \$5,000
- Profit: \$2,000

Profit margin = $2,000 \div 5,000 = 0.4 \rightarrow$ **40% margin**

Higher margin means more room to:

- pay yourself
- invest back into the business
- survive a weird month without panic

You don't need to memorise this or start giving TED Talks on margins.

The goal is simpler:

When you see these words in an email, contract, or conversation... you know what they mean in your business.

Because once you understand the language of money, it stops being intimidating and starts being what it really is:

A tool. One you're allowed to learn.

How They Talk About Money

Speaking Brand Money (So You're Not Just a Line Item)

Most creators walk into brand deals thinking, "Is this fee fair for me?"

Meanwhile, the people on the other side of the table are thinking in spreadsheets, dashboards, and quarterly reports.

They're not just asking, "Do we like this creator?"

They're asking, "Can I defend this spend to my boss... and not get my budget cut next quarter?"

If you understand how brands and agencies actually make decisions, the whole vibe changes.

You stop showing up like a nervous freelancer hoping they say yes... and start showing up like a partner who can help them win internally.

You don't need an MBA. You just need a working grasp of a handful of money words they care about — and how your work connects to them.

Once you can do that, negotiations feel different.

Not "please approve me."

More "here's how we make this work for both of us."

The Money Words Brands and Agencies Actually Care About

When a brand works with you, they're not only thinking:

"Was this cool?"

They're thinking:

“Did this move something we can report?”

Here are the big ones, translated into creator-speak.

Budget: The Pot You’re Playing In

When someone says, “Our budget for this campaign is X,” they mean:

The total amount they can spend on creators, media, production, and sometimes agency fees too.

Why you care:

- it tells you what’s realistically possible
- it helps you price deliverables and usage without guessing
- it stops the “can you add five more things for free” creep

A totally normal question to ask:

“What budget range are you working with for creators on this?”

ROI: Return on Investment

ROI is the brand’s way of asking:

“Was this worth it?”

Very simplified:

$(\text{Money made} - \text{money spent}) \div \text{money spent}$

If they paid you \$5,000 and tracked \$25,000 in sales, that's a story they can take upstairs.

Why you care:

If you can frame your work as improving ROI — more sales, more sign-ups, better leads — you stop being “nice to have” and start being “please don't cut this line item.”

You don't need to calculate exact ROI to speak it.

You can say:

“When we ran this format last time, it drove higher clicks and sales than their usual ads.”

ROAS: Return on Ad Spend

ROAS is ROI's advertising cousin.

Revenue from ads ÷ ad spend

If the brand turns your content into paid ads, they'll watch ROAS closely.

Why you care:

If your content becomes their “hero ad” — the one with the best ROAS — you become very valuable, very quickly.

It's also a solid reason to charge for:

- whitelisting (they run ads through your handle)
- paid usage rights
- extended usage windows

More upside for them = more value for you.

Earned Media Value (EMV): The “Free” Attention You Generated

Earned Media Value is a fancy way of saying:

“If we had to pay for this level of attention through ads or media buys... what would it have cost us?”

This is what brands mean when they say things like:

“This got picked up.”

“This started a conversation.”

“This spread.”

It’s the value of the exposure you created that they didn’t directly pay a media platform for.

Why you care:

Because a lot of creators get underpaid when the brand treats your work like “one post.”

But if your post triggers shares, stitches, press mentions, reposts, and

organic reach that goes way beyond your audience, the brand is getting a lot more than deliverables.

EMV helps you tell that story in language the brand already respects.

One caution though:

EMV can be squishy. Different tools calculate it differently. Some brands love it. Some treat it like vibes in a blazer.

So don't hang your whole pricing model on EMV, use it as supporting evidence.

You can say:

“This content performed like earned media. It didn't just reach my followers, it triggered secondary sharing and organic pickup, which is value you'd normally pay media dollars for.”

CPM: Cost Per Thousand Impressions

CPM is the cost per 1,000 impressions.

Brands use it to compare channels.

Example:

- they pay you \$2,000
- you deliver 200,000 impressions
- CPM is about \$10

If their normal ads cost them \$25 CPM, you look good on a spreadsheet.

Why you care:

It helps you understand how they benchmark you — and how to frame your value when you consistently deliver reach at a fair cost.

You might say:

“On past campaigns my CPM tends to land around \$8–\$12, which is often lower than typical platform ads.”

CPC and CPA: Cost Per Click / Cost Per Action

CPC = cost per click

CPA = cost per action (purchase, sign-up, install, lead)

Why brands care:

Because it measures how efficiently attention turns into something measurable.

Why you care:

If you can drive strong clicks or actions at a good cost, you're not just a creator — you're a performance asset.

And here's the sneaky bit:

A campaign can “not go viral” and still be a huge win if CPA is strong.

You don't need exact numbers to speak this language.

You can say:

“My audience tends to click more when I lead with story first, then a clear CTA.”

Conversion Rate: Do People Actually Do the Thing?

Conversion rate is the percentage of people who take the action.

Example:

- 1,000 people click
- 50 buy
- conversion rate = 5%

Why you care:

Sometimes reach is average, but conversions are strong.

This helps you tell a better story than “views were down.”

You can say:

“Reach was normal, but conversions were strong, which tells me the message hit the right people.”

Payment Terms: When You Actually Get Paid

Brands talk in:

Net 30, Net 45, Net 60

Translation:

They pay your invoice 30/45/60 days after the invoice date.

Why you care:

This is cash flow. Not theory. Your actual life.

A big deal on Net 90 can hurt more than a smaller deal that pays upfront.

Normal questions:

“What are your payment terms?”

“Is there flexibility on terms for smaller creators?”

PO and Invoice: The Paper Trail

PO (purchase order) = their internal approval that says, “We’re allowed to pay this person.”

Invoice = your request to be paid.

Why you care:

No PO often means delays.

Clean invoices get paid faster and make you look like someone they can work with again.

Bare minimum on an invoice:

- your name or business name
- tax ID / ABN (or local equivalent and if relevant)
- their business details
- description of work and dates
- amount, currency, tax
- payment terms and bank details

The Real Point of All This

You don't need to become an agency strategist.

You just want to understand enough that when someone says:

“We need to hit ROAS targets, CPM has been creeping up, budgets are tight this quarter — but if CPA looks good we can scale...”

You don't glaze over.

You hear:

“Money is tight, but if I help them get cheaper, better results, they’ll come back... and they’ll probably pay more next time.”

That’s creator-level financial intelligence.

Not being obsessed with money.

Just knowing enough of their language to position yourself as a partner — not a line item.

Learning to Love the Money Stuff

“Love” might be a stretch. Let’s aim for “not dread.”

I used to treat financial reports the way most people treat a warranty booklet.

Shove it in a drawer. Hope nothing breaks. Only open it when there’s smoke.

That was survivable when I was one salesperson inside a big company. It’s... less survivable when the business is under your name.

Here’s the reframe that helped me:

Money isn't the enemy. Money is feedback.

Not moral feedback. Not “you're a good person / bad person” feedback.

Just signal. Data. A scoreboard that tells you whether:

- your offers make sense
- your pricing is aligned with reality
- your content and marketing are actually moving people to act

You don't need to become a spreadsheet person.

You just need to be willing to look at a few simple numbers, on purpose, more than once a year.

The handful of numbers that actually matter

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

pick one day a month and check these five.

Revenue

What actually came in this month. Not what you're owed. Not what “should” land. What hit the account.

Expenses

What went out. Tools, subscriptions, contractors, ad spend, software, travel, fees. The real number, not the one you keep in your head.

Profit

Revenue minus expenses. This is what the business made before tax.
(Not glamorous. Extremely clarifying.)

Cash on hand

How much is sitting in your business account right now.

Runway

If no new money came in, how many months could you cover your usual expenses with what you have?

That's it. No finance degree. No 47-tab spreadsheet. Just the basics.

And when you look at these regularly — even once a month — something shifts.

You stop saying, “I hope this is working,” and start saying, “I can see what's working... and what's quietly bleeding.”

The emotional bit (because it's real)

If money has always carried shame, anxiety, or old family weirdness, be kind to yourself here.

You're not suddenly going to feel calm looking at a profit-and-loss statement. That's normal.

This is also why having a decent accountant or bookkeeper helps — not someone who makes you feel like you're in trouble, but someone who feels like a human on your team.

When you talk to them, you can say something like:

“Numbers aren't my natural home. I want a simple way to see what matters each month without getting overwhelmed. What would you recommend we track, and how can we keep it simple?”

Most good professionals will respect that. And the ones who don't? You've got a few ways to play that too — including finding someone else.

Because the goal here isn't to become “good with money.”

It's to stop flying blind.

To use money the way it's meant to be used in a business:

As feedback you can act on.

Taxes and the Self-Employed Creator

This is the part where everyone's eyes glaze over... then widen in panic at the end of the financial year.

So let me be clear up front:

I'm not qualified to give you tax advice. I'm not going to tell you what you

can deduct. Tax law changes, and it's different everywhere. Please find a registered tax professional where you live.

My job here is simpler.

To help you not get ambushed.

Because if you're self-employed — creator, freelancer, “independent”, whatever label you prefer — there's no employer quietly taking tax out before the money hits your account.

Which means:

If you don't plan for tax, you're basically booking yourself a very stressful surprise later.

And look, you don't need to turn tax into your personality. You just need a few calm systems.

Three tax principles that save a lot of pain

1) Treat a percentage as “not yours”

When money comes in, a chunk of it isn't yours. It belongs to your tax office. They're just letting you hold it for a while. (How generous.)

So the move is:

- decide on a percentage
- move that percentage into a separate “tax” account every time you get paid

- don't touch it

The exact percentage depends on your country, your income level, and your setup.

That's a perfect accountant question:

“Given my situation, what percentage should I set aside from each payment for tax?”

You don't need the answer from TikTok. You need it from someone local who'll be liable for the advice.

2) Track real business expenses (without relying on your memory)

If you spend money to run your business, you want a record of it. Not because you love admin... because end-of-year guesswork is a form of self-harm.

Typical creator expenses can include things like:

- tools and software
- equipment
- contractors (editors, designers, VAs)
- platform fees
- and sometimes a portion of phone/internet/workspace (depending on local rules)

A good accountant will tell you what counts in your region.

Your job is the simple part:

- use your business card for business costs
- keep receipts (or let an app store them)
- don't leave it all until the end of the year

If this feels messy, that's normal. You're building a system you were never taught.

3) Don't wing it alone for too long

You can sometimes get away with doing your own tax when income is tiny and the whole thing is simple.

Once things ramp up even a little, paying a local professional is usually worth it — not because you're "fancy," but because:

- self-employment rules are different
- online income gets weird fast
- and the cost of a mistake is often higher than the cost of help

You don't have to become a tax expert.

You just have to respect that **tax is part of the game**, not a surprise boss at the end of the level.

Get an accountant (and an app). It's not overkill.

One last thing: getting an accountant is not a waste of money.

It's one of the few business expenses that often pays for itself in ways you don't see immediately:

- fewer mistakes
- better structuring

- smarter decisions
- way less mental load

And yes, an accounting app helps too.

Xero and QuickBooks are common for a reason. You don't need to use every feature under the sun. At minimum, you want to be able to:

- generate and send clean invoices
- track expenses without chaos
- see what's coming in vs what's going out

The app keeps the day-to-day tidy.

The accountant helps you stay compliant and make better calls.

You don't get extra points for doing all the financial heavy lifting alone.

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Open (or set up) a separate tax bucket and start moving a percentage into it every time you get paid.

Future you will be annoying about how grateful they are.

Choosing the Right Business Structure (LLC, S-corp, etc.)

Imagine trying to play a sport without knowing what game you signed up for.

Are you allowed to use your hands or not?

Are you meant to tackle people or avoid them?

Do you win by goals, tries, or just surviving?

Business structure is basically that. It's the rules of the game you're playing.

And if you've never thought about it, you're not behind. Most creators don't. They just start earning money and hope the admin gods sort it out.

The good news

You don't need to become a legal expert.

You just need enough awareness that you can ask the right questions — and not get talked into something you don't understand because someone used confident words and a pie chart.

Different countries use different labels, but most setups fall into a few familiar flavours:

- **“It's just me”** (sole trader / self-employed / individual)
- **A company structure** (the business is a separate legal entity)
- **Partnerships / trusts** (usually when there are multiple people or more complex goals)

I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on all of these. I'm not. This is accountant and lawyer territory, and it changes by country.

What you need is the shape of it, so you know what you're choosing.

The two most common creator setups (in plain English)

1) Operating as “just you”

This is usually:

- easier to set up
- cheaper to run
- less admin
- money flows straight to you

The trade-off:

If something goes wrong, there’s often less separation between **you** and **the business**. That can mean more personal risk depending on what you’re doing and where you live.

2) Operating through a company structure

This is usually:

- more paperwork
- more rules
- more admin

But you often gain:

- more separation between you and the business (important if you’re taking on bigger risks)
- sometimes better options for tax planning once income hits a certain level
- a more “grown-up” structure for contracts, staff, and bigger deals

The trade-off:

It can feel heavier. You're signing up to be a bit more organised. (Annoying. Powerful.)

When should you even think about changing structure?

You don't change structure because "someone on YouTube said you should."

You change structure because your business has changed.

Common triggers:

- your income has grown and stays higher, consistently
- you're signing bigger contracts with brands/clients
- you're hiring people (even contractors) regularly
- you're taking on more risk (events, physical products, bigger ad spend, anything that could blow up financially)
- you're building something you want to sell one day, or share ownership in

None of those mean "you must change." They just mean, "hey, maybe review this."

The one conversation that's worth the fee

Go to an accountant or small business advisor in your region and say:

"Here's roughly what I earn, how I earn it, and what I'm trying to build over the next few years. Am I in the right structure, or should I be thinking about changing it?"

Then ask them to walk you through three things:

- **Legal risk:** what's exposed if something goes wrong?
- **Tax implications:** what changes in how you're taxed?
- **Admin burden:** what extra work am I signing up for?

You don't need to understand every detail.

You just want to leave with:

- a structure that fits your stage
- a simple explanation of why it fits
- a sense of when you should review it again

The soft part (but it matters)

If the language intimidates you, say so.

A good advisor will slow down and translate.

You're not stupid. You're learning a new domain. That's allowed.

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Write down how you currently earn money (all sources), and what you're building toward next.

Take that into the meeting. It makes the advice ten times better.

Basic Financial Systems for Predictable Income

Let's talk about one of the most exhausting parts of this life.

Feast and famine.

Three huge months where everything lands at once. You feel invincible. You celebrate. You upgrade things.

Then six weeks of tumbleweeds.

Same you. Same talent. Just no invoices landing, no brands approving, no one hitting checkout.

If this feels messy, that's normal. The work is real. The timing is the problem.

Financial systems don't make you "more corporate."

They just soften the rollercoaster so you can think like a grown-up when the numbers get weird.

You don't need enterprise-grade software.

You need a few calm habits.

1) Set up buckets, not soup

Right now, if everything lands in one account, it becomes soup.

You look at the balance and your brain goes:

“We’re rich!”

Then tax shows up later like an unpaid bouncer.

So inside your business banking, set up a few buckets (sub-accounts):

- operating expenses
- tax
- owner pay
- buffer / reserves

Every time money comes in, move it into the buckets based on rough percentages.

For example:

- 50% owner pay
- 20% tax
- 20% expenses
- 10% buffer

Don’t obsess over the perfect split. Start somewhere reasonable. Adjust later once you’ve got real numbers and an accountant who knows your local rules.

The point is: when you log in, you instantly know:

- what’s already spoken for
- what you can actually touch

That alone lowers stress.

2) Pay yourself like it's a job

Even if income is uneven, try to pay yourself a consistent amount on a consistent rhythm.

Weekly. Fortnightly. Monthly. Whatever fits.

On strong months, surplus stays in the buffer.

On weaker months, the buffer keeps your pay steady.

This does two underrated things:

- calms your nervous system
- separates “my business had a slow week” from “I can't pay rent”

If you're not sure what a sane baseline is, bring your last few months of numbers to someone local and ask:

“What's a realistic amount I can pay myself regularly while still covering tax and expenses?”

You're not asking for permission. You're asking for a plan.

3) Build a buffer slowly, on purpose

Aim for **one month of operating expenses** in your buffer bucket.

Over time, push towards **three**.

This will feel boring.

It will also feel like the best decision you ever made on the day:

- a big client delays payment
- a launch underperforms
- you get sick
- a platform change kneecaps your reach

Buffer isn't just financial. It's emotional.

It gives you the space to make smart decisions instead of desperate ones.

4) Blend spikes with steadier income

If all your income comes in spikes, every month feels like a bet.

Over time, look for ways to add one steadier layer:

- retainers with brands or clients
- consulting/advisory
- memberships/subscriptions
- longer-term partnerships with staged payments
- products that sell regularly (even in small volume)

You don't have to build all of this at once.

Start with one question:

“What's one thing I already do that I could package into a more consistent income stream?”

That's the whole game: keep the creativity, reduce the panic.

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Create a “tax” bucket and a “buffer” bucket, and start moving money into them the day you get paid.

Future you will sleep better. And they'll stop doing that thing where they open their banking app like it's a horror movie.

Monetising Your Genius: Consistent, Diverse Revenue Streams

Consistent, Diverse Revenue Streams (Without Turning Into a Content Robot)

First, a quick reminder before we start playing shop.

You are not your revenue model.

Ad revenue, brand deals, products, memberships, courses... these are just pipes. Options. Doors. Ways money can reach you.

Your real worth is you.

Your taste. Your point of view. Your ability to take messy human stuff and turn it into something other people can actually use.

This chapter is a menu, not a prescription. You don't need to do all of it. In fact, please don't. That's how you end up with seven half-built income streams and one nervous system held together with caffeine and hope.

From Content to Cash Flow

Let's say the quiet part out loud:

Posting is not a business model.

Posting can be:

- attention
- trust
- proof
- practice
- discovery

All useful. None of them pay your tax bill on their own.

If you want consistent money, you need **at least one clear “next step”** where attention turns into revenue.

That can be:

- a brand deal
- an affiliate link
- a physical product
- a digital product
- a service
- a membership
- consulting
- speaking

You don't have to choose forever. You just have to choose for now.

The shift is:

From **“I hope something comes from this”**

To **“I know exactly what the next step is for someone who likes this.”**

A few good questions to keep you honest:

- If someone loves my content and wants more, where do I point them?
- If a brand loves my influence, what's the offer I put in front of them?
- If someone wants deeper support, what exists beyond my free stuff?

If your answer is, “They can keep watching,” you’ve built a content machine with no cash flow system attached.

This chapter is about attaching a few pipes.

Door 1: Platform and Brand Money

Ads, Affiliates, Partnerships

This is the most visible lane. Also the easiest one to get stuck in.

Ad revenue

Platform pays you based on views/watch time/whatever metric they're changing this quarter.

Upside

- can earn from old content over time
- feels “passive” once it's running

Trade-off

- you don't control the rules
- rates can change overnight
- can be meaningful... or laughable, depending on niche + geography

Treat it like bonus money, not a retirement plan.

Affiliate marketing

You recommend a product/service and earn a percentage of sales.

Upside

- simple to start
- aligns well if you already use and trust the thing
- can stack nicely over time

Trade-off

- you're still building someone else's asset
- tracking can be messy
- commissions can get cut the second it starts working

Used well: nice supporting stream.

Used lazily: link spam that quietly erodes trust.

Brand partnerships

This is where it gets real — if you treat it like a deal, not a favour.

A partnership doesn't have to be “one post and a story.”

It can be:

- a campaign over a few months
- being part of a launch
- shaping creative, not just starring in it
- bringing your audience insight into their strategy

Upside

- bigger cheques
- longer relationships
- more room to do good work

Trade-off

- more stakeholders
- more approvals
- more contracts
- more need for boundaries (and a spine)

The more financially literate you are, the less you get trapped in “I’m just happy to be here” energy.

Door 2: Owned Money

Products, Memberships, Courses

This is where you stop renting everything.

No platform approval. No brand brief. Just you turning value into

something people can buy.

Owned products

Physical, digital, or somewhere in between:

- physical products
- templates
- Notion systems
- toolkits and resources
- workshops
- playbooks

The only rule: **solve a specific problem for a specific person.**

Owned products give you:

- control
- better margins (often)
- the ability to improve over time
- a way for fans to support you without third parties

Memberships

Memberships are ongoing relationship.

Examples:

- private community
- monthly live sessions
- resource library that grows
- office hours
- group coaching

Beautiful when done well. Exhausting when done badly.

The trade-offs are real:

- clear boundaries matter
- consistency matters
- you are not running 24/7 emotional support, no matter how sweet they are

Courses

Courses are structured teaching. You take someone from A to B, with a process.

They can be:

- live
- evergreen
- cohort-based
- hybrid

Courses work best when:

- you've actually done the thing
- you can explain the process simply
- you care more about results than a fancy portal

And again: you don't need to do all of this. Pick what matches your energy.

Some people love a membership and hate recording courses.

Some people love a product and hate ongoing community commitments.

Some people want deep workshops a few times a year and nothing in between.

All valid.

The Mistake: Trying to Build Everything at Once

I see this constantly:

Ads. Affiliates. Brand deals. Course. Membership. Consulting. Speaking. Product line. All launched by next Tuesday.

You're not a venture-backed media company.

You're a person.

What you want is sequencing, not chaos.

A calmer monetisation sequence

Stage 1: Proof of value

Money usually comes from:

- brand deals
- freelance work
- 1:1 services

Goal: prove your work causes results.

Stage 2: One simple owned offer

Introduce one thing you control:

- workshop
- starter product
- simple consulting package
- mini course

Goal: attach a pipe you own.

Stage 3: Stabilise baseline income

Ask: “How do I make this less volatile?”

- retainers
- repeatable workshops
- membership for your front-row people

Goal: reduce feast/famine.

Stage 4: Diversify (carefully)

Only once one or two streams work:

- add a second owned offer
- add one scalable stream
- deepen partnerships

Goal: resilience without burnout.

Don't Build Your House on Rented Land

You already know this in your bones.

Algorithms change. Features get retired. Accounts get flagged. Reach gets kneecapped because someone in a product meeting felt spicy.

You don't need to be everywhere. You just want at least one home base:

- an email list
- a site/home page
- a way to contact people that isn't controlled by an app

Then ask yourself:

- If this platform vanished tomorrow, could I still reach my real fans?
- If brand deals dried up, what would still be left?
- How much of my income comes from things I own vs things I rent?

This isn't fear. It's adulting.

From Random Windfalls to Reliable Streams

If your income has felt like lotto wins and dry spells, you're not broken.

You've been operating in a system that rewards bursts of attention and ignores stability.

Monetising your genius isn't chasing whatever the internet says is hot this week.

It's:

- remembering your value is you, not the trend
- choosing a few doors that fit your season
- sequencing them so you stay sane
- slowly shifting from one-off wins to baseline + upside

You don't need seven revenue streams.

You need:

- one clear way for attention to become income
- one way to make income steadier
- one optional upside stream when you're ready

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Write down one sentence: **“When someone loves my content, the next step is ____.”**

Then build that next step properly — even if it's small.

Because in the next chapter, we're going to talk about the part that actually protects all of this:

pricing, positioning, and negotiation.

It's one thing to know you're valuable.

It's another thing to sit across from a brand, agency, or client and hold that value in the room.

From Cash Chaos to Confident Planning

If money has felt chaotic up until now, you're not behind.

Most of us got thrown into this.

One day you're "just making content" or "just freelancing a bit."

Next minute you realise you're running a full-blown business... with the financial literacy of a house plant. (No shame. Plants are thriving. They're just not great with invoicing.)

You don't need to fix everything this week.

You don't need to become a numbers person.

You just need to take a few small steps toward being the kind of person who:

- knows what's actually going on financially
- has a basic setup that makes sense in your region
- asks for professional help without feeling like you've failed

That can look like:

- separating business and personal money
- checking a few key numbers regularly (revenue, expenses, cash on hand, runway)
- respecting tax enough to plan for it

- reviewing your structure with a local accountant when things start getting real
- setting up buckets so income feels less like weather and more like something you can work with

None of this is about “being better.”

It’s about being **less exposed**.

And once you start doing it — even in small ways — your relationship with money changes.

You feel:

- less at the mercy of “what lands this month”
- more grounded when you talk to brands and clients
- more confident saying yes or no, because you’re not guessing your position

This chapter isn’t here to turn you into a finance professional.

It’s here to give your creative and strategic work something solid to stand on... so the value you create actually has a chance to turn into a life that supports you.

And once you’ve got even this basic level of business and financial intelligence, the next part gets interesting:

How you price, package, and negotiate your value.

Because when you know what you need, what you bring, and how your money works...

...you stop walking into deals like you're asking for permission.

You start walking in like you belong there.

Up All Night Getting My Money Right

When you scroll past headlines about creators and money, it's easy to think, "Yeah... but they're different."

They're not different species. They're the same animal, just further down the track.

Same problems, upgraded stakes:

Irregular income

Tax sneaking up like a jump scare

Platforms changing the rules mid-season

Trying to figure out when to reinvest... and when to actually pay yourself

The shift isn't "they're smarter." The shift is: they stopped treating money as a thing to avoid, and started treating it as part of the craft.

So instead of giving you a motivational speech about spreadsheets (no thank you), here are six real-world patterns you can steal without needing their audience size.

1. Treat yourself like a business, not a side quest

Vivian Tu (Your Rich BFF) didn't "become corporate." She took her finance background and built a creator business around making money make sense to normal humans. Content is the front door. The business is what lives behind it: podcast, book, partnerships, products.

The move here is simple:

Your content = marketing

Your offers/IP = the business

Not a vibe. A structure.

2. Get your structure right so tax doesn't quietly bite you

Creator-focused finance companies exist now because creator income is weird. Karat is one example: they're literally built around creators and their income patterns, and they've partnered with major players like Visa.

You don't need to cosplay as a CFO. You need enough structure that:

You can see what you earn

You can plan for tax

You can prove income when it matters (rent, loans, bigger deals)

3. Cash flow is why “six figures” can still feel broke

There’s a classic creator trap: revenue looks impressive, but the money has no job, no buckets, no timing plan... so you still feel like you’re one late payment away from doom. CreatorBread has written about versions of this exact story.

The flex isn’t “I had a big month.”

The flex is “I can survive a quiet month without making desperate choices.”

4. Tools and systems: boring things that make you richer

The creators who stay sane don’t have magical discipline.

They reduce friction.

One account for business income.

One card for business expenses.

One tool that keeps receipts and makes reporting less painful.

Use whatever you’ll actually stick with (Xero, QuickBooks, a spreadsheet, a shoebox of receipts if you’re chaotic-good). The goal is consistency, not aesthetics.

5. Creators are now treated like investable businesses

This is where it gets spicy.

There are funds and operators who invest in creators the way they invest in small businesses. **Creative Juice** (linked to MrBeast) has talked publicly about investing in creators with check sizes in the tens to hundreds of thousands, in exchange for a share of future revenue.

And the reason MrBeast gets discussed like a company, not “a guy with a camera,” is because the business is real. Big revenue, heavy reinvestment, big-company decisions.

Even if you never take investment, this is useful because it forces one question:

“Could someone understand my business without me explaining it emotionally?”

That’s what clean numbers give you.

6. Everyday money discipline beats hype

The most useful “finfluencer” content isn’t the hacks. It’s the behaviour:

They know what’s coming in

They know what’s going out

They build rules that survive bad weeks

That’s why they can say no to dodgy deals. Stability gives you standards.

(And yes, banks and big brands have noticed — “finfluencer” marketing is a thing now, for better or worse.)

Pulling it together

Across all these examples, the pattern is boring... which is why it works:

Separate your money

Track what matters

Use tools to reduce friction

Get a real accountant when it's time

Learn enough “money language” to negotiate like a peer

Because once you can see the numbers clearly, you stop being “the talent.”

You start moving like the owner.

Leverage Brand Partnerships: Negotiating on Your Own Terms

Lovely jubbly

Let me show you what “negotiating on your own terms” looks like in the wild.

Before there were YouTube chefs and TikTok recipe hacks, there was a young guy in a London kitchen called **Jamie Oliver**.

Jamie grew up in his parents' pub in Essex. Proper graft. Real customers. Then real restaurants. He ended up at **The River Café**, which was already a serious food place. He wasn't a TV host. He was just a fast-talking, slightly chaotic chef who clearly loved what he was doing.

Then a BBC crew came in to film a Christmas special.

Jamie was background noise.

Not cast. Not mic'd up. Just cooking.

But the camera kept finding him.

The way he handled ingredients.

The way he spoke about food like it was a mate, not a textbook.

The way he laughed and joked while still doing real work on the stove.

When the producers reviewed the footage, they kept coming back to this one young chef who made pasta look like a night out and olive oil look like something you actually wanted to use, not just photograph.

That moment is basically the "brand discovers creator" scene.

The camera focuses on someone real, in their lane, and the people holding the budget go:

“Hang on... there’s something here.”

From there, The Naked Chef happened.

And it wasn’t just a cooking show. It was a whole new tone.

Messy kitchen. Scooter in the streets. Music. Friends dropping in. Jamie talking to you like a mate in a share house, not a headmaster in a tall hat.

He wasn’t just delivering recipes. He was bringing in a new audience:

Younger. Looser. People who didn’t usually sit through formal cookery programs.

That new audience is what made him valuable to the BBC and to advertisers. Ratings moved. Ad dollars followed. Products that showed up in his world started selling.

Sound familiar?

That’s partnership 101.

A creator with a real relationship to a specific crowd makes an old category interesting again. The network (or brand) gets growth, the audience gets something they actually enjoy, and the creator sits in the middle holding all the wires together.

Here’s the bit I want you to notice for this chapter.

Jamie looked easygoing. He still does.

But **easygoing** doesn't mean naive.

He understood, very quickly:

- his style was the reason people watched
- his audience was different from the usual
- his presence on screen made money for other people

So he fought — quietly, firmly — for creative control.

He cooked in his own voice.

He refused to turn it into stiff “yes chef” theater.

He leaned into the things that made him Jamie, even when the old guard didn't love it.

And later, when he went after things like school dinners and food education, those weren't random stunts. They were aligned with what he cared about and what his audience trusted him for. That positioning gave him even more leverage with networks, publishers, advertisers — even government.

In partnership terms, Jamie wasn't just “inventory.”

He was:

- creative
- talent
- strategy
- social proof

All in one.

And he negotiated like that was true.

He didn't walk in grateful someone noticed him.

He walked in knowing that when he signed on, whole demographics moved.

That's the posture I want you to borrow.

You might not be fronting a BBC show, but the pattern is the same.

You're in your version of that kitchen right now.

You're publishing.

The camera is on you (whatever platform that takes).

Someone with a brief and a budget is noticing the way your people respond.

When that email lands, you've got a choice.

You can behave like background noise who got lucky.

Or you can behave a little more like Jamie when the producers came calling:

Friendly. Collaborative. But very clear that:

- your audience is an asset
- your tone isn't cosmetic, it's the engine

- your creative approach is why the partnership will work at all

And when you see yourself that way, it becomes much easier to:

- question the brief instead of just obeying it
- push back on awful scripts
- ask for proper usage and exclusivity terms
- suggest longer deals where you show up over a season, not a single post

That's negotiating on your own terms.

Not drama. Not ego.

Just calm awareness that your job in the room isn't to say thank you for the burger.

Your job is to help them learn how to cook with you — properly — over time.

That's a partnership.

How Brands Really See You

Leverage Brand Partnerships: Negotiating on Your Own Terms

This is where we take all that financial and business confidence and walk it into the rooms where brands and agencies live.

You already know what it feels like to be the “talent” who's just happy to be invited. No judgment, most of us started there. This chapter is about

becoming the partner who sits at the table and talks in their language... without turning yourself into a brand-safe cardboard cut-out.

We'll cover:

- how brands actually see you (and why that matters)
- how to communicate your value in a way that makes sense to them
- what to look for in contracts (without needing a law degree)
- how to shift from random one-offs to longer relationships
- how to set boundaries so your creativity doesn't get turned into committee soup

And we'll keep it practical: real phrases, real examples, and ways to translate your world into theirs.

How Brands Really See You

Here's the slightly uncomfortable truth:

Most brands and agencies don't wake up thinking, "How do we make this creator's dreams come true today?"

They wake up thinking:

"How do we hit our targets for awareness, traffic, and revenue this quarter?"

You're not the main character in their story. You're a lever.

That's not cynicism. That's clarity. And clarity is useful, because it means you can stop taking things personally and start playing the game properly.

Inside a brand or agency, people are thinking in terms like:

- reach and frequency
- CPM and CPC
- ROAS and CAC
- brand lift and sentiment
- impressions, clicks, conversions

Your job isn't to become a marketing textbook. Your job is to understand this:

When they look at you, they're asking:

“If we spend this much with this person, what do we get back?”

And they'll usually slot you into one of a few mental boxes.

The common boxes:

A line item in a campaign

One of many names in a spreadsheet. A row in a media plan. A “we need five creators in this niche” situation.

A creative asset

Someone who can make content cheaper and faster than a production company. (Sometimes with better results, which is why this one can actually work in your favour.)

A trust signal

Your face, voice, and credibility transferring belief to their product. This is where your reputation becomes the product.

Access to a community

A bridge into a group they can't reach cleanly any other way. Niche, culture, tone, inside jokes — the stuff brands can't buy with a bigger ad budget.

None of those are bad.

The problem is when you only ever see yourself as “lucky to be chosen,” and you don't see how much value you bring to their internal story.

Because if you don't define your value... they will.

And they'll usually define it in the easiest way for them to justify: deliverables and reach.

The deck test

Next time a brand approaches you, picture the internal slide where your name appears.

Not your Instagram bio. Their slide.

Ask yourself:

“How are they explaining me to their boss?”

Are you:

- “a mid-tier creator who over-indexes on saves and thoughtful comments in X niche”
- “a founder-creator who can speak business and brand fluently”
- “the one whose audience is sick of traditional ads and will actually listen when they talk”

Once you understand how they see you, you can start shaping that perception on purpose.

You can feed them the story you want them repeating internally... instead of hoping they figure it out.

And that’s where negotiating on your own terms actually begins.

Because the negotiation doesn’t start at the rate.

It starts at the positioning.

Next, we’ll get into how to communicate your value in a way that makes their spreadsheet people relax... and makes your bank account less offended.

Calculating and Communicating Your Value

You know what it feels like to send a rate card that is basically **vibes and comparison**.

You ask a few friends what they charge. You stalk some random thread. You

pick a number that feels slightly scary and hope you don't get laughed out of the room.

We're going to level that up.

There are **four** layers to your value:

1) Hard numbers

The obvious stuff.

- average views, reach, saves, click-through
- website traffic or email list size (if you've got it)
- prior campaign results (even rough ones)

2) Audience quality

This is where "follower count" starts losing its power.

- how defined your niche is
- how engaged they are in real conversations (not just hearts)
- how aligned they are with the brand's actual customer

3) Business impact

This is what makes budget holders relax.

- sales, sign-ups, wait-lists, trials
- code usage, link clicks that convert
- tangible outcomes you've driven for brands or your own stuff

4) Earned Media Value

This is the one creators forget to name, and brands benefit from every time you stay quiet.

Earned media value is the extra exposure and credibility the brand gets **without paying for media placement**, because your content travels.

It can look like:

- shares into group chats and Stories
- reposts by other pages
- comments that turn into mini-testimonials
- PR pickup, blog mentions, “saw you on...” moments
- UGC ripple effects (your post inspires others to post about it)

Even when it’s not perfectly measurable, it’s real. It’s the reason a single piece of creator content can outlive a campaign and keep working in the background while the paid ads get turned off.

Brands and agencies usually live at **Level 1 and Level 3**.

Numbers and outcomes.

Your job is to connect the dots, and include the earned ripple, because that’s often where the real leverage hides.

Instead of saying:

“I get good engagement.”

You can say:

“On average, my partner reels deliver **X–Y views**, with **save rates around Z%** and **link clicks around A–B%**. In my last three collaborations in your category, that translated into **C–D sales** in week one through tracked links and codes. We also saw strong earned lift — shares, reposts, and comment threads that kept the content circulating beyond the initial push.”

That’s a sentence someone can repeat in a boardroom without needing to translate it.

Even if you don’t have everything perfectly tracked, you can still be more specific than “trust me bro”:

“Over the last six months, whenever I talk about **[problem]**, I see a consistent spike in **saves, DMs, and link clicks**. For my own product, posts in this format contribute to a meaningful chunk of monthly sales. I’d like to bring that same format and intent to your campaign — and build it to travel, not just land.”

The key is you talk about:

- **behaviour**, not just vanity
- **patterns**, not one lucky post
- **links between content and action**
- **earned lift**, not just paid reach

If you’re not sure how to pull numbers like this, start simple:

- top posts by saves, clicks, replies, code usage
- traffic to specific landing pages
- email sign-ups from social
- screenshots of dashboards with a one-line explanation

Because what you're really doing is telling a story they understand:

“When I do **this** kind of thing, my audience does **this** kind of thing... which creates **this** kind of result — plus earned lift that keeps working after the campaign window.”

That's their language.

Rough Financial Models You Can Use

Before we get into the models, a quick permission slip.

You don't have to price this way.

Plenty of creators charge a flat rate, send the invoice, and move on with their lives. Totally valid.

But if you've ever felt that weird “I'm guessing” feeling when you send a quote... these frameworks help. They give you a few grown-up anchors so your number isn't just vibes, comparison, or whatever mood you're in that day.

Use them like handrails, not homework.

Even if you only borrow one idea from this section, it'll make pricing conversations feel calmer, clearer, and a lot harder for other people to bulldoze.

Rough financial models you can use

Here are a few simple ways to think about what to charge that are less vibe-based and more grounded.

1) Media value model

Brands already pay for reach. They buy ads.

Paid media often works on CPM (cost per thousand impressions).

Let's say in your niche and region, they're used to paying somewhere between **\$10 and \$40 CPM** for ads.

If your content reliably does **50,000 views** for this type of campaign:

- At \$10 CPM, that's **\$500** in pure media value.
- At \$40 CPM, that's **\$2,000**.

Now add two multipliers brands don't get from a standard ad buy:

Creator premium

- your content is more trusted than a cold ad
- it's native to the platform
- it often gets better engagement than brand-owned creative

Earned media value (the ripple)

This is the part where your post travels without them paying to push it.

- shares into Stories and group chats
- reposts by other pages
- comment threads that act like social proof
- secondary discovery days later (not just the first 24 hours)

So you might look at it and say:

“For this deliverable, my fee sits between **2x and 5x** the equivalent ad spend for the expected reach — because you’re not only getting impressions, you’re getting trust and earned distribution.”

In our example, that could put you between **\$1,000 and \$5,000** per piece, depending on category, complexity, and usage.

Then you sense-check it against your Layer 0 cost floor.

If your floor is \$1,600 and the media value model suggests \$1,000, you already know: you don’t belong at the low end.

2) Revenue influence model

If you have any data on conversion and average order value, you can go further.

Let’s say:

- when you promote a product like this, **1–3%** of viewers click
- of those, **2–5%** buy
- the average order value is **\$80**

On a 50,000-view reel, even at the low end:

- Clicks: 1% of 50,000 = **500**
- Sales: 2% of 500 = **10**
- Revenue: 10 × \$80 = **\$800**

At the higher end:

- Clicks: 3% of 50,000 = **1,500**
- Sales: 5% of 1,500 = **75**
- Revenue: 75 × \$80 = **\$6,000**

Now here's where earned media value matters again:

That model assumes **direct clicks right now**.

But earned media value creates:

- late clicks (24–72 hours later)
 - “saw this in a group chat” buyers
 - brand search lift (“I keep seeing this brand”)
 - higher conversion because the social proof sits in the comments
- So your real impact is often **more than what tracking captures**.

A basic value-based approach is to aim for somewhere between **10% and 30%** of expected revenue as your fee, with a minimum floor. And you can add:

“If you want the content licensed for ads, reposted across channels, or used as a core creative asset, that increases the value — and the fee.”

So you might say:

“For this type of collaboration, my fee is **\$2,000 per reel**, which is

consistent with the revenue I typically influence in this category. If you want paid usage, broader licensing, or a series, I can package it properly.”

You’re not promising exact numbers. You’re showing there’s logic behind your pricing.

(And yes, tools like Zaaz can help connect dots faster — but you can do a version of this with basic analytics and link tracking.)

3) Cost + value sanity check

The simplest model is often:

Final fee sits somewhere between:

your cost floor (what it costs you to make)

and a multiple of your estimated value to them.

If your cost floor is **\$1,600** and your value models suggest they could make **\$5,000+** from the work, then **\$2,500–\$3,500** isn’t outrageous.

And if you’re seeing patterns where your content consistently creates:

- strong comment/social proof (earned trust)
- shares (earned distribution)
- continued sales after the initial post window

...then you’re often undercharging if you price like it’s a one-time deliverable.

Because it isn't.

It's a piece of media **plus** a distribution event **plus** a trust transfer.

Negotiating Contract Terms (Usage, Exclusivity, Payment)

Tim Ferriss had this old-school "comfort challenge" he used to recommend.

One of them was beautifully simple and deeply uncomfortable.

Just walk into a busy public place... and lie down on the floor.

That's it. No explanation. No performance. Just you, flat on your back, while strangers look at you and wonder if you've finally given up on life.

The point was to practice doing something harmless but awkward, so your nervous system learns: "Oh... nothing actually explodes when people look at me funny."

Now, you're a creator.

You talk to a camera. You post things strangers can judge. You've already done your version of lying down in public more times than you can count.

So when it comes to negotiating, here's the reframe:

You're not entering a hostage situation.

You're not trying to "win" a standoff.

You're just doing another slightly uncomfortable, harmless thing:

Calmly explaining the value you bring, and asking for value in return.

Negotiating contract terms is exactly that. Practice. A skill. Not a moral test.

And once you take the drama out of it, the rest becomes much easier to see clearly.

Negotiating Contract Terms

Usage. Exclusivity. Payment.

This is the part most creators want to jump straight to, but it only really works if you've done the value work first.

Because contracts are where brands and agencies quietly lock in more value for themselves.

Your job isn't to make it adversarial.

Your job is to notice what's being asked, and respond like a calm, mildly underpaid lawyer in a hoodie.

Usage

Usage is simply:

Where they can use your content

How long they can use it

Which territories it covers

What formats it includes (organic post, paid ads, email, website, retail screens, etc.)

The default clause often looks like:

“In perpetuity, all media, worldwide.”

Which sounds flattering until you translate it:

“They can run your face in paid ads in a country you’ve never visited, three years from now, and none of that extra value comes back to you.”

A clean response:

“For the rate we’re discussing, I’m comfortable with three months paid usage on your owned social channels in [region]. If you’d like extended usage, broader media, or additional territories, we can price an additional licence.”

What you're doing there is simple:

You're separating creation from licensing.

And licensing is where the money lives.

If you want an even softer version:

“Happy to make this easy for your team. My standard is X months usage on X channels. If you need more than that, we can extend it with a small additional fee.”

You're not being difficult. You're being accurate.

Exclusivity

Exclusivity is the cost of your absence.

It usually means:

You won't work with competitors

For a set period

In a defined category

Brands love vague exclusivity because vague exclusivity is cheap for them and expensive for you.

So your two best friends here are:

Time window

Category definition

A good framing:

“I can do exclusivity, no problem. Just want to be clear on the category and the time period, because it limits other work. If we’re looking at [X months] in [category], I’ll price that into the fee. If you’d like to keep the fee leaner, we can tighten the category or shorten the window.”

Translation:

“If you want to own my yes, you’re also paying for my no.”

And that’s fair. Not because you’re precious. Because you’re running a business.

Payment

This is the one that gets creators in trouble because it feels “awkward to ask”...

...right up until you’re 47 days post-campaign, refreshing your bank app like it owes you money (because it does).

Key things to look at:

When you invoice

When they pay (Net 14/30/60/90)

Whether there's a deposit

What triggers final payment (delivery, approval, posting date)

Whether you're being asked to float costs (production, editors, props)

A clean baseline:

“My standard terms are 50% on signing and 50% on delivery, payable within 14 (or 30) days.”

If they push back with “we're net 60”:

You've got a few ways to play it.

Option A: accept it (if it's worth it)

Option B: keep net 60 but raise the rate (because you're funding their campaign)

Option C: negotiate a deposit + net terms on the balance

Option D: walk away (quietly, respectfully, like an adult)

A simple reply:

“I understand. If payment terms are net 60, I’ll need a deposit upfront to cover production and cash flow. Happy to work with your process, just need it structured in a way that’s workable on my side.”

That sentence has saved more creators and contractors than any motivational quote ever has.

The point

You don’t need to become a contracts expert.

You just need to recognise the patterns:

Usage gets widened “by default”

Exclusivity gets thrown in like it’s free

Payment terms quietly shift all the risk onto you

And then you respond calmly.

Every time you do, you’re running the same comfort challenge:

A harmless awkward thing.

A clear email.

A small boundary.

Nothing explodes.

And over time your nervous system learns:

Negotiation isn't confrontation.

It's clarity.

It's you stating your value in plain language, and inviting the other side to meet you like a peer... not a lucky extra.

Shifting from One-Offs to Long-Term Partnerships

One-offs have their place.

They're great for testing a new category, seeing how your audience reacts, and figuring out which brands you actually enjoy hearing from... not just invoicing.

But if you want stability and real influence, you eventually have to stop thinking in isolated posts and start thinking in campaigns.

Because brands already do.

Inside their world, almost everything is mapped around:

Quarters

Campaign periods

Monthly reporting cycles

They're not planning "a post next Thursday."

They're planning:

"This quarter's launch."

"This month's focus category."

"This year's brand pillar we need to keep reinforcing."

And here's the helpful distinction most creators miss:

A campaign is the container.

Posts are the pieces inside it.

If you start speaking in their containers, you stop sounding like "talent" and start sounding like a partner.

Instead of:

"I can do a reel and two stories for X."

You move toward:

"For your Q3 launch, we could build a four-week creator campaign where I show up weekly across reels, stories, and one live. It takes the audience from awareness → social proof → direct action. Here's what that looks like."

Same you. Same skills. Different frame.

Act Like a Long-Term Partner From Day One

You don't "earn" a longer deal by being passive and hoping they offer it.

You earn it by behaving like someone who thinks past the next deliverable.

A few practical moves:

Send a simple wrap-up after the campaign

Not a 12-slide deck. A short email.

- What ran
- What performed (reach, saves, clicks if you have them)
- What the audience said (real comments are gold)
- One sentence: "Here's what I'd do next if we kept going."

Then add:

"If you've got another push next quarter, we can build on this instead of starting from zero."

Ask about their calendar, not just their brief

On a call, try:

"What are your key moments over the next 6–12 months where creators could play a role?"

That question quietly tells them: I'm thinking like your team thinks.

Propose a series, not a single hit

Something like:

“Instead of one post, what if we map this as a three-part story across the month. It gives your brand a recurring presence and gives my audience time to move from noticing → trusting → acting.”

You're not upselling. You're explaining how humans work.

Offer Tiers That Match How They Buy

Brands love options because options make it easier to get approval.

You can talk in packages like:

One-month pilot

Three-month partnership

Six-month ambassador role

Language that helps:

“My best work with brands happens over several months, not a single post. Your side gets consistency and a clearer story to report. My side stays authentic because the relationship feels real to the audience.

Here are options for a one-month pilot, a three-month partnership, and a six-month ambassador style engagement.”

You’re not begging for a retainer.

You’re giving them a clean way to buy what they already want: consistency, predictability, and a story that looks good in the next reporting cycle.

Because that’s the truth:

A one-off post is a tick-box.

A partnership is a plan.

And you’re allowed to be part of the plan.

Setting Boundaries and Creative Freedom

Here’s the part people get backwards.

Most creators think boundaries are something you earn once you’re “big enough.”

In reality, boundaries are one of the things that makes you big enough... because they protect the very thing the brand is paying for.

Your voice. Your taste. Your relationship with your audience.

If that gets watered down, the campaign might still get delivered... but it won’t land. And then everyone’s confused, and you’re left thinking, “Cool, I just did five rounds of edits for a post I wouldn’t even like myself.”

So let's treat this like a grown-up partnership conversation, not a tantrum.

Boundaries are not you being precious.

Boundaries are you making the work effective.

The Trade-Off Brands Need to Understand

Brands want certainty.

Your audience wants truth.

Your job is to sit between those two without becoming committee soup.

A helpful way to frame it:

“If you want my audience to trust this, I need to keep it in my voice. If we try to make it sound like your internal brand guidelines wrote it, it will perform like an ad. And you can buy ads anywhere.”

That's not aggressive. That's just... accurate.

Your Non-Negotiables

You don't need a 10-page manifesto. You need a short list you can hold calmly.

Common creator non-negotiables:

- **Final say on tone** (because your audience can smell a script)
- **No false claims** (obvious, but say it)
- **No attacking competitors** (unless your whole brand is chaos, in which case... Godspeed)
- **No over-promising outcomes** (your credibility is not a disposable asset)
- **Clear disclosure** (paid partnership language that keeps trust intact)

You're basically saying: "I'll sell with you, but I'm not lying for you."

The Creative Freedom Agreement

This is the line that changes everything:

"I can absolutely hit your key messages. I just need the freedom to deliver them in the format and language my audience actually responds to."

You're not rejecting the brief. You're translating it.

A practical approach:

- Ask for **their objective** (awareness, traffic, conversion, retail push)
- Ask for **their must-says** (2–4 key points max)
- Ask for **their must-not-says** (legal, compliance, sensitive topics)
- Then you own: **script, pacing, structure, tone**

If you do nothing else, adopt this rule:

They own the claims. You own the delivery.

Approval Without Death by Committee

Nothing kills good work faster than seven stakeholders doing “tiny tweaks” until it reads like a fridge manual.

So you want to set an approval structure before you create.

A clean way to say it:

“To keep this efficient and protect performance, I include one round of revisions. Extra rounds are totally possible, but they’re billed and may impact timelines.”

Also, define what a “revision” is.

A revision should be:

- swapping a word for compliance
- correcting a product detail
- adjusting a CTA
- trimming for length

A revision should not be:

“Can we rewrite it to feel more premium but also more casual but also more youthful but also more corporate?”

That’s not a revision. That’s identity confusion. And they can workshop that internally.

The “Two-Version” Trick

When you’re dealing with a nervous brand, give them safety without giving away your voice.

Offer this:

“I can do two versions:

Version A is fully in my voice (usually performs best).

Version B is closer to your brand tone (safer for internal approval).

We can choose based on your risk appetite.”

Nine times out of ten, they’ll approve A once they see it’s not reckless, just human.

And if they insist on B? Fine. Charge accordingly. Because you’re basically doing extra creative development to help them feel calm.

Exclusivity and Category Boundaries

Creative freedom also gets hijacked through exclusivity.

If they want you exclusive, it’s not just about money. It’s about what it does to your content.

So your boundary here is clarity:

- What category are we talking about, exactly?
- How long?
- Does it block adjacent categories?
- Does it block organic mentions of products you already use?

If they ask for “all skincare” exclusivity for six months, you can reply:

“I can do exclusivity, but it needs to be specific. Broad exclusivity limits my ability to create naturally, and that’s part of what makes the content work.”

You’re protecting your channel from becoming a hostage situation.

A Boundary Script You Can Actually Use

If you want a simple phrase that covers 80% of situations, steal this:

“I want this to perform for you. For it to perform, it needs to stay in my voice and match how my audience consumes content. I’m happy to align on key messages and compliance, but I’ll handle the creative delivery.”

That’s calm. That’s professional. That’s hard to argue with.

The Real Point

Boundaries aren’t walls.

They’re rails.

They stop your work from derailing into awkward content that nobody

likes, including you.

And when you protect your creative freedom, you protect the thing brands are actually buying:

Not your camera.

Not your follower count.

Your ability to make people feel something, trust something, and do something.

From Being Managed to Owning Your Role

At some point, every creator hits this weird moment.

You realise you're not being partnered with... you're being managed.

Not in an evil way. Often it's polite. Even friendly.

But the energy is:

Here's the script.

Here's the timeline.

Here's the brand voice.

Here's the approvals.

Here's the usage.

Here's the rate.

Sign here, talent.

And if you've ever found yourself saying, "Yep yep yep" while your stomach quietly says, "Hmm...", that's the moment this section is for.

Because the shift isn't "become difficult."

The shift is: **stop acting like hired hands in your own work.**

Managed Energy vs Owner Energy

Managed energy looks like:

- waiting for the brief to tell you what you're allowed to do
- saying yes to timelines you can't actually deliver without melting down
- letting five stakeholders rewrite your voice into beige
- hoping they don't ask for "one more thing" (they will)
- feeling relieved when they approve, instead of proud of what you made

Owner energy looks like:

- clarifying the outcome before you agree to deliverables
- proposing a structure that protects performance and your sanity
- setting terms like a grown-up business (because you are one)
- being collaborative without being absorbable
- treating your audience trust like a real asset, not a free add-on

Same creator. Same personality.

Different posture.

Your Actual Job in a Brand Partnership

Here's the reframe that changes everything:

You are not there to "post."

You are there to **translate**.

You translate a brand's goal into something your audience will actually receive.

That means your role is closer to:

- creative strategist
- media channel
- trust carrier
- cultural interpreter
- conversion partner (sometimes)

When you see yourself like that, you stop accepting instructions like you're a subcontractor with a camera.

You start asking the questions a partner would ask.

The Three Questions That Put You Back in the Driver's Seat

Before you say yes to anything, ask:

What's the goal?

Awareness, traffic, sales, retail push, email capture, app installs?

What does success look like on your side?

Are they tracking ROAS, CPA, earned media value, brand lift, saves, clicks?

What's the constraint?

Budget, timeline, compliance, usage needs, retail dates, approvals?

These three questions instantly change the tone.

Because now you're not being "selected."

You're diagnosing.

Own the Plan, Not Just the Deliverables

This is the smallest sentence with the biggest impact:

"Here's how I'd approach this to hit your goal."

Instead of accepting:

"One reel + three stories + link in bio + usage forever."

You propose:

"For your goal (traffic + conversions), I'd run this as a two-phase story:

- Phase 1: trust + problem awareness (reel)
- Phase 2: proof + CTA (reel or stories) Then we retarget with whitelisting if performance is strong."

Now you're not negotiating line items.

You're offering a strategy.

And strategy is where the money lives.

Own Your Lane: You Don't Need Permission to Lead

A lot of creators do this thing where they assume the brand knows better.

They don't.

They know their product. They know their internal politics. They know what their boss wants.

You know your audience.

So a clean way to hold that line:

“I'm happy to work within your brand guidelines, but I'll need to adapt the delivery to match what my audience actually responds to. That's how we avoid it feeling like an ad.”

You're not rejecting them.

You're protecting the result.

“I'm Easy to Work With” Shouldn't Mean “I'm Easy to Use”

You can be chill and still have structure.

In fact, structure makes you easier to work with, not harder.

Owner-level signals:

- **one-page offer menu** (what you do, what you don't)
- **baseline rates + what changes them** (usage, exclusivity, timeline, complexity)
- **clear revision rounds** (one included, more billed)
- **clear payment terms** (deposit + balance, or net terms that don't kill you)
- **clear usage defaults** (timeboxed, channel-specific, priced for expansion)

That's not corporate.

That's self-respect with admin.

The Emotional Shift: You're Not "Lucky," You're Useful

This is the part nobody writes down, but it matters.

When you walk into negotiations feeling lucky, you'll trade away your best assets for comfort.

When you walk in knowing you're **useful**, you'll protect what makes the work work.

Useful doesn't mean arrogant.

It means accurate.

You're not a random Instagram post.

You're a trust-based channel with creative capability and a feedback loop brands would kill for.

If You Do Nothing Else This Week, Do This

Write a three-line “role statement” for yourself. Private. Just for you.

Something like:

- “My job is to translate brand goals into content my audience trusts.”
- “I protect my voice because it protects performance.”
- “I’m not here to be managed. I’m here to partner.”

Then the next time a brief lands, you respond like that person.

Because that’s the whole shift.

Not a new identity.

A return to your actual role.

Should I get an Agent?

Let's talk about agents.

Not the fantasy version where you sign with some glamorous powerhouse and suddenly your inbox is full of Netflix and Dior.

The real version.

An agent is a leverage tool. A translator. A door-opener. A boundary-holder. Sometimes, a pitbull in a nice jacket.

But only if they understand one thing:

you've glowed up.

You're not "talent" in the old sense anymore.

You're a business that happens to be powered by a human.

And if your agent still sees you as "someone we can book gigs for," you'll end up right back where you started... just with nicer stationery on the emails.

The Benchmark: CAA and Michael Ovitz

If you want a benchmark for what elite representation looks like, it's hard to go past CAA.

Michael Ovitz had a reputation for being cut-throat in negotiation, and fiercely loyal to his talent. But the real edge wasn't just aggression.

It was how early he understood the game:

To stay competitive, and to make fortunes for the people he represented, he had to stop treating them like performers... and start treating them like enterprises.

There's a moment from his world I love because it's basically the point of this whole book in one scene.

He's talking to Jacqueline Bisset, and he says something like:

"Take off the actress hat. Pretend you're a small corporation. You're now "JB, Inc." Your revenue is X million a year. What can you do to increase your bottom line, and control the direction of your future growth? Get involved in developing your projects."

And someone else pushes back:

"You can't look at her like she's a corporation—she's an actress."

And the reply is essentially:

"That's exactly the difference. That's how we win."

That's the energy you're looking for in an agent.

Not "we'll get you deals."

More:

“We’ll build You, Inc.”

Your Agent Should Understand Your Glow Up

Here’s the quiet problem.

A lot of agents are still wired for the old model:

- you’re the product
- brands are the buyers
- their job is to negotiate a fee and fill your calendar

That’s fine... if you’re just doing one-off gigs forever.

But if you’re building Work Unbound style assets—products, partnerships, IP, owned channels, long-term leverage—your agent needs to think like a business partner.

Because the game now isn’t:

“How do we get you booked?”

It’s:

“How do we increase the value of the entity you’re building, and protect it?”

Talent vs Business Owner of Yourself

A “talent” mindset says:

- “What’s the fee?”
- “What’s the deliverable?”
- “How quickly can we close this?”

A “business owner of yourself” mindset says:

- “What’s the long-term value of this relationship?”
- “What rights are we giving away?”
- “Does this build the brand, or drain it?”
- “Can this turn into a quarter, not a post?”
- “Does this strengthen owned revenue, not just rented?”

Your agent’s job is to hold that frame when you’re tired, when you’re busy, and when the money is shiny.

The Golden Ticket Test

Selecting an agent should feel like choosing a partner who holds a golden ticket.

Not because they’re famous.

Because they can do things you can’t easily do alone:

- get you into rooms you can’t cold email into
- create deal tension (without you being “the difficult one”)
- protect your creative freedom with contracts, not vibes

- see the second and third order effects of a deal (usage, exclusivity, category lock-in)
- turn one win into a pipeline

But here's the key:

a golden ticket is useless if they're taking you to the wrong factory.

The agent has to be aligned with what you're building now.

What "Partnership" Actually Looks Like

A good agent doesn't just negotiate harder.

They help you think bigger.

They will push you into questions like:

- "What category do we want you to own?"
- "What do we want your name to mean?"
- "What are the three deal types we're prioritising this year?"
- "What are we saying no to, even if it pays well?"
- "Where does this fit in the portfolio—brand, product, IP, audience, equity?"

They're not managing your calendar.

They're helping you manage your trajectory.

Questions That Tell You If They Get It

If you're talking to an agent, listen for whether they ask (or respond well to) questions like:

- “What are you building outside brand deals?”
- “What does ‘owned’ look like for you—product, membership, service, IP?”
- “What does your best audience do? Buy? Click? Book? Subscribe?”
- “What kind of partnerships do you want more of?”
- “What are your non-negotiables creatively?”
- “What’s your long-term play—media, product, equity, licensing?”

If they only talk about:

“rates, deliverables, and closing quickly”

...they may be a great booking agent.

But not necessarily the partner for your next chapter.

The Real Point

Getting an agent isn't a status move.

It's a strategy move.

You're not hiring someone to “handle brands.”

You're choosing someone who can help you build **You, Inc.** with you.

Because when representation is right, it doesn't just get you paid.

It changes what you get paid for.

And it stops you being treated like “content inventory” when you’re actually building a business with a face, a voice, and a future.

Next section, we’ll get practical again: what to have ready before you approach an agent (so you don’t pitch like a hopeful creator... and instead show up like a growing asset).

Confident

Here's the quiet truth.

Money feels awkward mostly because we treat it like it's rude. Like it's somehow "not creative" to talk about pricing, profit, tax, runway, margins.

But you're not talking about money to become cold.

You're talking about money to become clear.

And clarity is what lets you keep creating without the constant background hum of "hope this works out."

Now add one more layer.

The more you understand how their business works, the calmer you get in your body.

Brands don't run on vibes. They run on budgets, reporting cycles, risk, approval chains, and someone trying not to get roasted in a Monday meeting.

Corporate marketing has a language. Agencies have incentives. Agents have leverage and relationships. None of it is evil. It's just a system.

And when you understand the system, you stop walking into it like a guest... and start walking into it like a peer.

At first, using money and business language will feel like wearing someone

else's jacket.

You'll say things like "payment terms" or "usage rights" or "earned media value" and a part of you will cringe, like you're pretending to be a grown-up. That's normal. Every new skill feels like that in the beginning.

Then something shifts.

You ask about budget without apologising.

You hear "net 60" and don't panic, you negotiate.

You spot a sneaky usage clause and calmly price it.

You frame your work in outcomes they can report upstairs.

And the words stop feeling corporate.

They start feeling like... yours.

Because they're not "finance words." They're ownership words.

Knowing your financial do's and don'ts doesn't turn you into an accountant.

Understanding how brands, corporate marketing, agencies, and agents actually work doesn't turn you into a sellout.

It just turns you into someone harder to push around, harder to underpay, and much harder to knock over when the algorithm does its little weather tantrum.

Over time, this levels you up in ways you'll feel everywhere:

You negotiate calmer, because you know what you need and what they need.

You choose better, because you can see the trade-offs and incentives.

You build steadier, because you're not guessing — you're reading the room properly.

So if money has been messy for you, you're not behind. You're just early.

Keep it simple. Keep it kind.

Learn the basics. Learn how their world works. Build one habit. Add one layer. Repeat.

And before you know it, you won't be “trying to be a business.”

You'll just be one.

Empowering Your Business: Grown-Up Systems and Operations

Creator Operating Manual: Documenting What Matters

Empowering Your Business: Grown Up Systems and Operations

Here is the part nobody dreamed about when they first opened TikTok.

Systems. Operations. Processes.

If your eyes are already getting heavy, stay with me.

Mature systems are not about turning you into a robot. They are about making sure your business does not fall apart the next time you get sick, go on holiday, or have one big launch that actually works.

Think of this chapter as building your own “creator operating system.”

Nothing complicated. Just a simple way to:

- Know what you do
- Do it the same way consistently
- Get help without wanting to scream
- Protect yourself with basic agreements
- Keep score without losing your mind

We will keep this practical and human. Hoodie friendly, not MBA cosplay.

Creator Operating Manual: Documenting What Matters

If you got hit by a bus tomorrow, could someone keep your business running for a month

Dramatic question. Important one.

Most creators keep their entire business in their head, their camera roll, and a haunted Google Drive.

Your “operating manual” is not some 200 page binder. It is a simple, living doc that answers three questions:

- . What do you do regularly
- . How do you do it
- . Where does everything live

Start with a basic list of recurring activities:

- Content creation:
Ideas, scripting, filming, editing, posting, repurposing
- Brand work:
Enquiries, pitches, briefs, approvals, reporting
- Money:
Invoices, expenses, tax prep, checking numbers
- Audience:
Email sends, community touch points, replies

- Product or service delivery:
Orders, client work, course updates, membership calls

For each one, write a short “how I do this” in plain language.

For example:

Weekly content workflow

- Monday morning:
Review analytics for last week. Note top performing topics.
- Monday afternoon:
Plan three to five core ideas for the week. Drop bullets into a “Content Ideas” doc.
- Tuesday and Thursday:
Filming days. Batch record reels and long form where possible.
- Wednesday:
Edit and schedule. Load into socials, add captions and links.

Then note where things live:

- Ideas: Notion or Google Doc called “Content Backlog”
- Final edits: Folder in Drive or Dropbox
- Brand assets: Folder called “Brand Collabs” with subfolders per client
- Templates: Email templates, rate cards, media kit, standard proposal

You do not have to build this all at once.

Start with one or two areas that feel chaotic and write them down.

The goal is not perfection.

The goal is that if you hand this to a future assistant, editor, or very organised friend, they could say:

“Ah, I see how this works. I can help.”

That is your operating manual. Messy is fine. Honest is better.

The Power of Delegation: First Hires and Outsourcing

Delegation is not a luxury for giant teams.

It is a survival skill for solo operators who would like their spine and nervous system to last more than two years.

You are already doing at least three jobs.

Talent.

Producer.

Admin.

Probably more.

The move to a grown up business is not “I will suddenly be able to do everything with better time management.”

The move is “I will stop pretending I have to do everything myself.”

Start by asking two questions:

- . What am I doing that absolutely does not require me
- . What am I doing that actively drains me and slows everything down

Common candidates for first help:

- Editing
- Thumbnail and graphic design
- Basic admin and email
- Simple customer support
- Repurposing content across platforms

Your first “hire” does not need to be full time.

It might be:

- A freelance editor a few hours a week
- A virtual assistant ten hours a month
- A bookkeeper once a quarter
- A moderator for your community for key hours

Practical path:

- . Write a tiny job description :

“I need someone who can [do X] for [Y hours per week] using [tools] so that I can focus on [Z].”

. Start small:

Trial one person for a month with a very clear outcome. One thing. Not ten.

. Add them to your operating manual:

Note what they do, how you brief them, where assets and files live.

Delegation is a muscle. The first few reps will feel awkward.

You will want to take everything back and do it yourself. You will think “it is faster if I just do it.”

Sometimes that is true in week one.

It is never true over twelve months.

By the way, this is a good time to check in with your accountant too.

Ask them:

- How should I be paying contractors in my region
- Do I need any registrations or forms in place
- What records do I need to keep for tax

That way you are not building a team and accidentally breaking local rules at the same time.

Tools and Frameworks for Everyday Operations

Tools are like coffee makers.

You do not need every fancy machine on the market.

You need one that works, that you know how to use, and that does not explode when you need it most.

Pick a simple stack for:

- Planning
- Doing
- Storing
- Communicating

For example:

- Planning.
Notion, ClickUp, Asana, or even a shared Google Sheet for content, launches, and tasks.
- Doing.
Your filming setup, editing software, scheduling tools.
- Storing.
Google Drive, Dropbox, or something similar with clean folders.
- Communicating. Email, Slack, WhatsApp, whatever you actually use with your team or collaborators.

Use frameworks as rails, not cages.

A few that help creators behave like operators:

- Weekly review.
Once a week, you look at what you did, what worked, what did not, and what you are doing next. Ten to thirty minutes.

- Monthly “numbers and notes” session.

Once a month, you look at basic metrics. Revenue, expenses, top performing content, audience feedback. Write down three observations and three decisions.

- Launch or campaign checklist.

One simple checklist you use every time you promote something. Teasers, emails, posts, tracking links, landing page, follow ups.

And yes, this is where tools like Zaaz can slot in as part of your operating system. If you can see audience behaviour, content performance, and patterns all in one place, your weekly and monthly reviews stop being guesswork and start being data led. That is the boring, powerful side of “being a professional.”

Rule of thumb with tools:

Only introduce a new one if it clearly:

- Saves you real time
- Reduces real mistakes
- Or makes real decisions easier

Shiny does not equal useful.

Simple Contracts and Risk Management

Here is the grown up part a lot of people avoid until something goes wrong.

Risk management sounds like a negative mindset.

It is actually just “taking your future self seriously.”

You do not need a legal team.

You do need a few simple documents and habits.

At minimum:

- A basic agreement template for brand work.
Scope, deliverables, timelines, revisions, usage, exclusivity, payment terms.
- A simple terms and conditions for your products or services.
Refunds, access, behaviour, boundaries.
- A habit of reading contracts slowly.
Especially clauses on usage, exclusivity, indemnity, termination, and payment.

Ideally, at some point, you:

- Pay a local lawyer to review or create a simple template that fits your country and your typical deals.
- Ask them to highlight clauses you should always check and red flag.

Risk management also includes:

- Backups.
Your content and key documents live in at least two places.
- Access control.
Not everyone gets the password to everything.

- Simple insurance.

Depending on your region and type of work, consider liability or professional indemnity. Talk to a broker who understands small media or creative businesses where you live.

When in doubt, ask:

“What is the realistic worst case here, and what simple step would make that less painful”

You are not trying to eliminate risk completely.

You are trying to stop small problems from becoming business ending events.

Measuring What Matters: KPIs for Growth and Sanity

If you measure everything, you end up understanding nothing.

Key performance indicators, or KPIs if we want to sound fancy, are just:

“The few numbers I actually care about this quarter.”

Pick three to five that match your current season.

Think in categories:

- Money.

Revenue, profit, cash buffer growth.

- Audience.

Email list growth, saves, replies, real comments.

- Product or offer.

Conversion rate from interest to purchase, completion rate for courses, retention for memberships.

- Sanity.

Hours worked, days off taken, number of nights you find yourself doom scrolling your own analytics at 1 am.

A simple system:

. Decide your focus for the next quarter.

Example: “Grow my email list by 1,000 and stabilise 5,000 per month in revenue.”

. Choose your KPIs.

Monthly revenue
Email list size
Number of new leads per week
One sanity metric, like “two days off per week” or “no work past 9 pm”

. Check them at the same time each week.

Make a tiny dashboard in Notion, a spreadsheet, or even on paper.

Write:

- This week’s number
- Short note: “Why did this move or not move”

Tie this back into the tools you are already using.

If you are using something like Zaaz for audience and content analytics, and

simple accounting software for money, you are not guessing. You are glancing at two or three dashboards and pulling the numbers that align with your goals.

This is where “data led” stops being a buzzword and starts being:

“I can see what is working. I can see what is not. I am not driving blind anymore.”

From Chaos to Calm Control

If operations have felt like chaos up until now, welcome to the club.

Most creators do not get taught any of this.

You land in this space because you are good at making things and connecting with people, not because you love folders and finance.

The point of this chapter is not to turn you into a project manager.

It is to give you a simple system underneath what you already do, so that:

- You can hand pieces off without everything breaking
- You can go away for a few days without your business having a meltdown
- You can make decisions based on a few real numbers instead of panic
- You can protect yourself with basic agreements and backups

You do not need to implement everything in one weekend.

Pick one thing from this chapter:

- Start your operating manual
- Hire or trial your first helper
- Clean up your folders and tools
- Get a basic contract template reviewed
- Set three KPIs for the next quarter

Do that.

Then next month, add another.

Little by little, you move from a business that runs on adrenaline and memory to a business that has a spine.

And that is the real point of grown-up systems.

Not to cage your creativity.

To hold it, so you have the time, space and calm to actually do your best work, without your entire life collapsing every time something good or bad happens.

From chaos to calm control is not a personality swap.

It is just you, deciding that what you are building deserves a bit of structure, so it can keep carrying you for years, not just this season.

Building Ownership: Assets Beyond the Algorithm

A Quick Pause For Yourself

The Work That Looks Like Play

You're allowed to have an unreasonable amount of fun doing this.

Not "fun" as in constant dopamine and fake hype.

Real fun.

The kind where you lose track of time because you're making something that feels like you.

The kind where you're laughing at your own dumb idea while you're filming it.

The kind where you try something ridiculous, it flops, and you still feel weirdly proud because at least you made a thing.

That's not you being unprofessional.

That's you working.

Play is how humans learn.

It's how we find new angles.

It's how we stumble into formats that people copy for the next five years.

It's how you stay original when everyone else is building content like IKEA furniture, following the same instructions, missing one screw, blaming the algorithm.

Play is not the opposite of strategy.

It's the engine of it.

But here's the part we have to say out loud.

Play is not the same as self-abandonment.

This world will happily take everything you've got.

Your attention.

Your nervous system.

Your sleep.

Your identity.

Your quiet time.

Your ability to sit still without reaching for a screen.

And the most dangerous part is how normal it can start to feel.

A little more posting.

A little more “just one more edit.”

A little more “I’ll rest after the launch.”

A little more “I’m fine.”

Until one day you realise you haven’t been fine for a while, you’ve just been functioning.

We’ve lost creators.

Not in the “they deleted their account” way.

In the real way.

The heartbreaking way.

The creative mind is powerful, but it’s also vulnerable.

It can build worlds.

It can also turn inward and torture the person living inside it.

So yes, have fun.

Make art.

Make jokes.

Make chaos.

Make beautiful things that don't make sense yet.

But treat your mind like it's part of the business.

Because it is.

Your brain is not a limitless resource.

It's the factory, the studio, the editing suite, the boardroom, and the audience all at once.

If it burns down, none of the other stuff matters.

Here are a few "boring" moves that keep the fun alive.

Put decompression on the calendar like it's work

Not as punishment.

As maintenance.

A walk with no podcast.

A gym session where you don't film it.

An hour doing something with your hands that doesn't need to be monetised.

Cooking.

Skating.

Gardening.

Drawing badly for no reason.

Your nervous system needs evidence that you still belong to you.

Have at least one person you can tell the truth to

Not your audience.

Not your comment section.

A real human.

Someone you can message and say:

“I’m not okay this week.”

Or:

“I’m fine but I’m getting weird.”

Or:

“I’m having dark thoughts and I don’t want to be alone with them.”

These are different times.

We have more connection available than any generation before us.

And we also have more isolation disguised as connection.

Use the real kind.

Know where you go when it's heavy

You don't need to wait for crisis mode to figure this out.

If you've got a therapist, great.

If you don't, a GP is a strong starting point.

If you've got community, lean into it.

If you're in a country with hotlines and support services, save the numbers now, not later.

If you're the "I don't need help" type, fine, keep that identity if you want, but still build a plan for when your mind stops cooperating.

Strength isn't white-knuckling it alone.

Strength is knowing when to get support.

Protect the part of you that makes the work

Here's the truth people don't like to admit.

A lot of "discipline" online is just self-harm with better branding.

You don't need monk mode.

You need care.

You need sleep.

You need food that isn't just caffeine and regret.

You need moments where nobody is evaluating you.

Because your best work doesn't come from pressure.

It comes from safety.

Play needs safety.

And when you have that, you get the best of both worlds:

Work that feels alive.

And a life that can actually hold the work.

So make the thing.

Laugh while you're making it.

Do the stupid version first.

Let yourself experiment like you're twelve again and nobody is watching.

Then, and this is the part that makes it sustainable, **take care of yourself like you're the asset.**

Because you are.

And if you do nothing else this week, do this:

Text one real person and tell them, honestly, how you're doing.

Flowers, Rats and Shredded Canvas

Banksy is the cleanest modern example of “off-platform ownership” we’ve got.

Not because they’re a perfect person (none of us are), but because the structure of it is wild.

We still don’t know who Banksy is. We don’t know their gender. We don’t know their face, their voice, their real name, or what they look like when they’re buying milk at the servo.

And yet:

You can spot a Banksy in three seconds.

You can feel the worldview instantly.

You can describe the flavour even if you can’t describe the artist.

That’s the point.

Banksy built an asset, not a feed

Banksy didn’t “grow an audience” the normal way.

No daily posting schedule.

No algorithm hacks.

No “link in bio.”

No brand collabs with a discount code like BANKSY10 (thank god).

Instead, they built something platforms can’t really control:

A recognisable signature.

A consistent point of view.

A body of work that lives in the real world.

A mystique that creates demand without constant output.

That’s ownership.

The work exists even if the internet goes down.

The real lesson isn’t “be anonymous”

Let’s be honest: most of us can’t pull off anonymous street art that ends up in major news headlines. Also, some of us would like our mum to know what we do for a living.

The lesson isn’t “hide.”

The lesson is:

Build something that still matters when you’re not posting.

Banksy's relevance isn't rented from a platform.

It's carried by:

- **Identity:** a clear voice and stance
- **Scarcity:** not always available, not always accessible
- **Distribution beyond socials:** walls, books, exhibitions, conversation
- **Cultural proof:** people talk about the work even without a new "drop" every week

That's what "assets beyond the algorithm" looks like in the wild.

How this applies to you without turning you into a street artist

You don't need to be Banksy. You just need a version of Banksy logic:

- A **home base** you control (email list, website, community)
- A **body of work** people can reference (archives, guides, best-of page)
- An **offer** that exists whether your reach is up or down (product, service, membership, workshop)
- A **signature** people recognise (themes, framing, tone, standards)

Because when you have that, you can disappear for a week... and your world doesn't collapse.

You're not just "a person who posts."

You're someone building something that holds its shape even off-platform.

And that's the whole game.

What if you got cancelled?

Imagine this.

You wake up tomorrow and the platforms are... weird.

Not “you got cancelled” weird. Not “you posted the wrong thing” weird.

Just... the kind of weird they do sometimes.

Your reach drops. Your usual people don't see you. Your best stuff lands like a paper plane into the ocean. Or worse, your account gets flagged, hacked, or quietly throttled and you can't even get a real human to tell you why.

Now here's the kind part.

If that thought makes your stomach tighten, it doesn't mean you're dramatic. It means you're paying attention.

Because whether we like it or not, most of us have built parts of our identity, income, and confidence on rented land.

And rented land can be taken back.

So, let's do a gentle little exercise.

Take the platform away for a second.

No Instagram. No TikTok. No YouTube. No LinkedIn feed. No algorithm handing you strangers. No “suggested for you” magic.

Just you.

Your voice. Your ideas. Your taste. Your relationships. Your work.

Would you still be relevant?

Not famous. Not viral. Not “hot right now.”

Relevant in the way that matters:

Would a small group of people still want what you do?

Would they still look for you?

Would they still pay you, refer you, or support you?

Would you still have a way to reach them?

If your answer is “I’m not sure,” that’s not a failure. That’s the starting line.

Because this chapter isn’t here to scare you off platforms. Platforms are brilliant.

They’re just unreliable business partners.

They’re the best place to get discovered... and a terrible place to store your entire livelihood.

Ownership is what changes that.

Ownership is the stuff you can keep building even when the feed goes quiet:

An email list you can actually contact

A product you sell without begging for reach

A service, membership, or offer that lives off-platform

A brand people recognise even if your account disappears tomorrow

A home base that belongs to you

And before you roll your eyes and think “ugh, I’m not ready for a whole empire” — good.

We’re not building an empire.

We’re building one or two real assets beyond the algorithm, so your work has somewhere solid to land.

Because the goal isn’t to outsmart the platforms.

The goal is to stop needing them to feel real.

If you do nothing else in this chapter, do this:

Start building something you own... while the platforms are still working.

That’s not paranoia.

That's maturity.

The Harsh Truth of Platform Risk

Building Ownership: Assets Beyond the Algorithm

Here's the good news.

If you're reading this, you've already done the bit most people never do.

You make things.

You show up.

You hit publish even when that little voice in your head is doing a full courtroom closing argument about why today is the day you should stop embarrassing yourself on the internet.

That's not nothing. That's the work.

Rick Rubin talks about one of the real rewards of making art being the act of sharing it. Not "sharing it once it's perfect." Sharing it while it's still a bit rough around the edges. Because every time you finish something and release it, you teach your nervous system: I can survive being seen.

You've already been building that muscle.

So no, I'm not here to fix your creativity.

You don't need another stranger telling you to "be authentic" like it's a toggle switch.

You don't need "post more" advice from someone whose main asset is confidence and a ring light.

You're already in the arena.

What we're going to work on now is what sits around your creativity.

Where it lives.

Who owns the connection.

And how much control you have over what happens after you hit publish.

Because right now, a lot of creators are essentially renting their entire livelihood from platforms.

And platforms are brilliant... but they're also moody landlords.

They change the rules.

They move the goalposts.

They "test a new feature."

And suddenly your income feels like weather again.

This chapter is about building assets beyond the algorithm, so your work isn't at the mercy of someone else's product roadmap.

Your creativity is the engine.

We're just going to give it a better vehicle to live in.

Growing an Email List: Your Most Important Asset

If there's one "boring" thing that will quietly change your life as a creator, it's building an email list.

Not because email is sexy. It's not.

Because email is still:

Direct

Portable

Not owned by a social platform

If Instagram disappeared tomorrow and TikTok decided your niche was "problematic this week," but you had 10,000 people on a list who genuinely like you, you'd be annoyed... not unemployed.

An email list gives you:

A way to speak to your people without an algorithm translating you

A place to deepen trust beyond short clips

A channel for launches, asks, surveys, and proper storytelling

You can keep this simple. You've got options.

The minimum setup

You need three things:

1) A way to collect emails

A landing page, a simple form on your site, or a basic email tool with a hosted signup page.

2) A reason to join

This does not need to be a 27-module "masterclass." It can be:

A short guide or checklist

A "stuff I don't post" behind-the-scenes email

Early access to drops, discounts, events

A one-page template that saves them time (people love time)

3) A rhythm you can actually keep

Weekly. Fortnightly. Monthly. Pick the cadence that won't turn into

guilt.

Consistency beats intensity here. Always.

What do you even send?

Think of your emails in three buckets:

Stories

Behind the scenes. Lessons. Honest reflections. The stuff that makes people feel like they know you.

Value

Practical tips, breakdowns, frameworks, “here’s what worked / didn’t.”

Invitations

Reply to this. Click this. Join this. Buy this. Simple, clean next steps.

And yes, you’re allowed to sell in emails. That’s kind of the point of owning a channel.

The part nobody tells you

Your list doesn’t need to be huge to matter.

1,000 people who open and act is an asset.

10,000 is leverage.

100,000 is a media company.

But here's the real bonus:

Email trains you to think like an owner.

You start asking:

“What am I doing for my people this month... and what am I offering them next?”

That posture is miles away from:

“I hope the feed likes me today.”

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Put one simple signup link somewhere obvious... and give people one clear reason to join.

Websites, Newsletters, and Searchable Expertise

Think of your website as your home base.

Not a monument. Not a “coming soon” page you redesign every six weeks

like it's a personality test.

Just a simple, clear place where someone can land and instantly understand:

Who you are

What you do

Who you're for

How to go deeper with you

Because here's the truth: platforms are great at introducing you.

They're terrible at holding context.

Your site is where context lives.

The minimum viable “home base”

At minimum, your site should have:

1) A clear one-line statement

“I help [who] with [what] so they can [outcome].”

Not your life story. Not your whole philosophy. Just the hook that makes a stranger go, “Oh. This is for me.”

2) Your key offers (in plain English)

Brand partnerships. UGC. Speaking. Consulting. Products. Memberships. Whatever your world is.

If people have to DM you “what do you do?” your website is failing its only job.

3) Email signup, front and centre

Not hidden in the footer like it’s an apology.

If your email list is the asset, the website is the funnel entrance.

4) A place to binge your best work

A “Start here” page. A featured library. A blog. A few pinned links.

Make it easy for someone who’s interested to go from “I like this person” to “I trust this person.”

Searchable expertise

Short-form content makes people notice you.

Searchable content makes people find you when they need you.

That might look like:

Blog posts answering the exact questions your audience asks

Articles a brand can forward internally like, “This is the creator we should work with”

Written breakdowns of your best ideas (so your thinking travels without you having to be online)

This is how you stop relying on feed luck.

You become discoverable on purpose.

Where newsletters fit

Newsletters sit in the sweet spot:

Regular enough to build relationship

Structured enough to archive

Searchable enough that someone can skim back through and feel your stance, your style, your spine

Over time, this creates a body of work that’s:

Indexed by search engines

Shareable in group chats and Slack channels

Proof of your thinking, not just your ability to ride a trend

Platforms are good for the scroll.

Owned spaces are good for the search.

You want both.

Community Platforms: Bringing Your People Together

At some point, it might make sense to gather your people in one place.

Not “followers.” The real ones.

The people who:

Reply to emails

Show up in comments like clockwork

Buy, attend, support, and share

Would actually notice if you went quiet for a week

Community is just what happens when attention turns into relationship.

And relationship... is something you can build **outside** the feed.

What “community” can look like

It doesn't have to be some giant, noisy server with 900 channels and one guy screaming “GM” at 4:57am.

It can be:

A private Discord

Circle / Geneva / Mighty Networks

A Facebook Group

A paid membership area on your site

Even just a monthly Zoom and a shared email thread

The tool matters less than the intention.

You don't have to start here

For a lot of creators, an email list + a monthly live session is already a strong little ecosystem.

But if your work naturally creates conversation, collaboration, accountability, or peer support... community becomes a very real asset.

You're no longer just broadcasting.

You're hosting.

Three questions before you build anything

Why does this exist?

Learning? Support? Access? Accountability? Networking? Co-building?

If you can't answer this in one sentence, you're building a room with no purpose.

What happens here that doesn't happen on public platforms?

Deeper questions. Messier honesty. Early access. Direct feedback. Unfiltered breakdowns. Behind-the-scenes.

If it's just "the same posts but inside a paywall," people will feel it.

How will you show up without resenting it?

Weekly prompt? Monthly call? Office hours? A Q&A thread?

Pick something you can sustain when life gets loud. That's the real test.

Small, quiet, high trust is the flex

You're allowed to keep it:

Small

Calm

Moderated

Drama-free

Built for the people who are actually there, not for screenshots

And yes, you're allowed to charge.

Not because “monetise community” is trendy. But because ongoing value plus ongoing presence is work — and high-trust spaces tend to stay high-trust when everyone has a little skin in the game.

A paid community of fifty aligned people who show up is worth more than fifty thousand followers who vanish the moment the algorithm gets bored.

That's ownership.

That's stability.

That's a home your work can live in.

Lifecycle Value of Owned Audience

Customer lifetime value is one of those terms that sounds like it belongs in a beige boardroom... but it's basically the difference between **getting paid once** and **getting paid like you own something**.

In creator language, it's this:

What's the value of one real person staying with you over time?

Not one post. Not one spike. The whole relationship.

Platforms train you to think in moments

Views per post.

Likes per clip.

RPM per thousand.

“Did this one do well?”

That’s not wrong. It’s just **short-term maths**.

Owned channels let you zoom out and see the lifecycle.

The creator customer journey is a relationship, not a funnel

Someone might:

- discover you via a reel
- follow you
- join your email list
- buy a low-ticket thing
- join a membership
- attend a workshop
- hire you, or refer you to their company

That’s not seven different strangers.

That’s **one person** saying “yep” to you... again and again.

And the value of that is wildly different to “average CPM on a sponsored post.”

This is why owned assets compound

- your email list grows
- your content library keeps working while you sleep
- your community gets stronger as people stick around
- your products get better as you refine them

The longer someone stays, the more likely they are to:

- buy something else
- pay full price
- refer friends
- trust your recommendations
- defend you when the comments get spicy

That's lifetime value in the wild.

It changes how you deal with brands too

Instead of:

“I can get you X impressions this week”

You can start framing it like:

“I'm not renting you attention. I'm introducing you to a relationship I've earned. Some of these people have been with me for years across email, products, and community. If I put my name on you, it carries weight.”

That's not influence as a number.

That's influence as a network of trust.

And once you see it that way, you stop selling your future for a quick

cheque.

From Algorithm Anxiety to Ownership Confidence

If you feel anxious about algorithms, it's not because you're weak.

It's because you built something real on shaky ground.

You've poured years of effort, creativity, and emotional energy into places that can change the rules on you without warning. That tension you feel is your system quietly saying:

“I want more control than this.”

And honestly... fair.

The answer isn't to rage-quit platforms.

The answer is to use them for what they're great at:

Discovery.

While you quietly build what they're terrible at:

Stability.

Email lists.

A simple home base site.

Searchable work people can find a year from now.

A small community if it suits you.

Clear offers that exist even if your reach gets weird.

You don't need to fix this by next Tuesday.

You don't need a 12-step funnel and a 50-page plan written by someone who thinks humans are spreadsheets.

You just need to pick one owned asset to strengthen next.

If you have no email list, start there.

If you have a list but no real "home," tidy up a simple site.

If you've got both, consider a lightweight community space or a better way to package your best thinking into something people can actually buy.

Each move like this takes a little power away from the algorithm and gives it back to you.

Over time, you shift from:

"I hope the feed is kind to me this week."

To:

"I like it when the feed is kind to me... but I'm building something that survives either way."

That's ownership confidence.

Not arrogance.

Just the quiet relief of knowing your creativity has a home that isn't going anywhere, and you're building a business around it that can look after you long after this week's trend disappears.

Staying Ahead: Platforms, Algorithm Changes, and Creator Resilience

Create or Die

Tangent: Art, Play, And Telling The Algorithm To Get Stuffed

This chapter might annoy the growth bros.

Good.

There's a weird thing that happens when you start taking your work seriously.

You forget how to play.

Content becomes output.

Ideas become assets.

Every post starts feeling like a performance review.

You open your phone to make something and your brain instantly runs three checks:

Will the algorithm like this.

Will the brand like this.

Will people think I've lost it.

Somewhere in there, you disappear.

Rick Rubin has this simple, irritating truth:

"Creativity isn't a job title. It's awareness."

The artist is just the person who notices things... and is willing to make something from what they noticed. Not mystical. Not special. Just curiosity + craft, without strangling the idea with judgement in the first ten seconds.

And if you want to "beat" the algorithm, stop treating it like a god.

Treat it like a slightly dim intern.

Helpful sometimes. Wrong often. Not the boss.

Art came first. Algorithms are a recent side quest.

Michelangelo didn't paint the Sistine Chapel thinking about the first three seconds of retention. He was mostly trying not to fall off scaffolding, arguing with popes, and getting paint to stick to a ceiling before it dried.

Da Vinci didn't do thumbnail tests for The Last Supper. He obsessed over light, perspective, human expression... and filled notebooks with half-finished experiments that never saw daylight.

And Banksy — whoever Banksy is — doesn't do a 3am wall piece and then check "engagement rate." The whole point is surprise. Context. Space. That

little grin you get when a city wakes up and goes, “Wait... was that there yesterday?”

Different eras. Same behaviour:

Play seriously.

Curiosity first.

Judgement later.

Modern platforms try to reverse that sequence.

You open the app and your brain pulls out a calculator. Before you've even written the first line, the critic in your head is already in a meeting:

Will this perform.

Is this on trend.

Is this what my niche expects.

By the time you've interrogated the idea, it's died of boredom.

So let's borrow a page from artists across time.

The painter sketches first. Loose. Messy. No one sees it.

The musician plays riffs that go nowhere for an hour before the song shows up.

The writer fills pages with garbage lines before a good one arrives.

Rubin talks about separating the maker and the critic. You make with one mind. You edit with another. Mixing them too early is like inviting a heckler into the studio and then wondering why you're blocked.

You need that separation too.

For your sake.

And for the sake of the stuff you haven't made yet.

Casey Neistat: Curiosity With a Camera

Take Casey Neistat.

If you strip the myth away, his "breakthrough" wasn't gear. It was play, at scale.

He pointed a camera at his life — New York, bikes, airports, chaos — and kept asking:

How can this be a story?

He played with cuts.

Time lapses.

Cardboard titles.

Skateboards as tripods.

The city as a character.

There was no brief. No deck. No “vertical video optimisation strategy.”

It was one guy trying things because it amused him to see if he could make a commute feel like an action scene.

The format everyone copies now — fast vlog pacing, cinematic beats, handwritten labels, music swells — started as play.

Curiosity first.

Metrics later.

The algorithm adjusted to him, not the other way around.

That’s what gets lost in all the “best practice” noise.

The internet rewards the people who treat it like a playground, not a compliance exam.

Play Isn’t the Opposite of Professional

I can already hear your brain:

“Nice speech mate, but I have bills.”

Same.

This isn't "throw away the business brain."

It's "stop letting the business brain strangle the creative brain."

You've got two phases. Let each one do its job.

Phase one: play.

Short bursts where your only job is to follow curiosity.

What happens if I film this differently?

What if I say the quiet part out loud?

What if I explain this like I would to a friend at 11pm, not in "brand voice"?

You don't do this for every piece of content.

You do it often enough that your work stays alive.

Phase two: shape.

Now you put the operator hat on.

Does this fit what I stand for?

Where does this sit in my ecosystem?

How does this connect back to my offers, my people, my direction?

Artists have always done this split. We just gave it dashboards.

Michelangelo had studies everywhere that never became finished work — but they trained his eye.

Da Vinci filled notebooks with wild ideas that never shipped — but they kept him sharp.

Banksy (again: whoever they are) uses the whole environment as part of the joke. Half the power is that it appears where it “shouldn’t.”

You can do the same digitally.

Drafts full of experiments.

Private notes that never become posts.

Throwaway pieces where the only metric is: did this feel fun to make?

Fuck the Algorithm (politely)

I’m not anti-metrics. I like numbers. I’ve helped build things that literally live inside analytics.

But the healthiest creators I know use the algorithm.

They don't worship it.

They understand:

The algorithm optimises for platform time, not your long-term career.

A short-term spike isn't the same as durable trust.

Chasing whatever the machine wants this week is the fastest way to erase what makes you different.

So yes — study what works.

Yes — pay attention to patterns.

Yes — respect the data.

And then, once in a while, do something that makes no sense to the algorithm... but makes perfect sense to you.

Post the thing that's too honest.

Test the weird idea.

Make the slower, deeper piece when everyone says "shorter, faster, louder."

If it bombs, you learned.

If it lands, you just taught the algorithm a new trick.

Either way, you stayed an artist — not just an operator.

A Small Practice That Brings the Fun Back

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Set aside one tiny block as your **no-performance session**.

Thirty minutes. One hour if you can spare it.

Rules:

You create something nobody asked for.

You do not check metrics during or immediately after.

The only question you're allowed to ask is: **Did this feel alive to make?**

It might be a rough script.

A one-take video.

A rant you never post.

A weird idea that sits in drafts for six months until suddenly... it fits.

You're building three muscles:

Curiosity.

Experimentation.

Tolerance for not knowing how it will do.

That's the same muscle the greats used. They just did it with marble, paint, and city walls instead of phones.

Why This Matters for Your Business

Here's the twist.

This isn't separate from the "serious" business stuff. It feeds it.

Your positioning comes from what you're willing to say that others avoid.

Your offers come from problems you notice when you're paying attention — not when you're copying competitors.

Your most defensible niche is the mix of your curiosity, your story, and your craft. No update can clone that.

If someone copies your format, good.

That means you made something worth copying.

They can copy your hooks.

They can imitate your edits.

They can steal your camera angles.

They can't steal the connection between your curiosity and your people.

That's the art part.

So treat this chapter as permission.

Protect a corner of your work that's just for making interesting things.

Let the maker make. Let the critic edit later.

Use the tools. Ignore the gods.

Because before there was an algorithm, there was you, noticing something... and wanting to share it.

Getting Old School

Classic Practical Wisdom (A Small Detour Before We Get Nerdy)

I am not suggesting you go and read Meditations by Marcus Aurelius.

...although, it has genuinely changed my life.

And on the surface, you might not see what a Roman emperor journaling about death and self-control has to do with making content in 2025.

Same with the old-school business and sales books.

They look dusty. The covers are awful. Some of the examples are so dated they feel like fan fiction about fax machines.

But here is the thing:

A lot of the stuff you and I are trying to figure out on the fly – how to sell, how to tell stories, how to lead, how to build something that doesn't fall apart the second you look away – has been wrestled with, written about, and tested for decades.

Not all of it holds up. Some of it is cringe.

But the **classics** are still around for a reason.

I am not going to break them all down for you here. That is not the point of this book.

What I am going to do in the next two chapters is:

- Hand you a few simple, battle-tested techniques (like “Why You, Why You Now” or SPIN)
- Show you how they still work beautifully in a creator / short-form / internet context
- Invite you to see yourself not just as “new economy talent,” but as part of a much longer line of people who sell, tell stories, and build things

If you want a place to start outside this book, try **The E-Myth** by Michael Gerber.

It is basically a love letter to working on the business, not just in it – which is exactly the shift you are making as a creator.

Point is:

There is incredible content out there for the day-to-day – YouTube tutorials, TikToks, podcasts. Use them.

But there is also a whole **legacy of timeless advice** sitting in libraries and audiobook apps that contains real, unsexy wisdom.

You do not have to become a business-book nerd.

Just stay curious enough to occasionally ask:

“What did the people who came before me already figure out, so I don’t have to learn it all the hard way?”

These next chapters are my attempt to pass on a few of those gems, without the pinstripe suit and overhead projector.

Classic Techniques For Sales And Marketing

Old Moves for a New Game

I'm going to be honest... this chapter was slightly awkward to write.

Because I don't want to stand here like someone's dad explaining "how sales works" while you quietly close the tab and go watch a video of a dog driving a forklift, or my favourite, those skateboarding bulldogs.

But I also know there's a whole wave of creators and founders who never touched the old-school business and sales books. Which is fair. A lot of them are... aggressively average. Some are timeless.

So think of this chapter as me sliding a few dog-eared pages across the table.

Not commandments. Not "you must."

Just a handful of moves that have worked since the first market stall opened and someone yelled, "Fresh fruit! Two for one!"

Use what helps. Ignore what doesn't. No certificates. No quizzes. Just tools.

Why You, Why You Now

This is one of my favourite outreach frameworks of all time.

I learned it chasing software deals, but I still use it for basically everything: investors, executives, partners, agencies, brand leads. It still works because it answers the two questions every human has when a stranger appears in their inbox:

Why are you messaging me?

Why are you messaging me now?

That's it. That's the whole game.

Here's the shape of it:

. **Pick the right person.**

Someone you genuinely want to work with or learn from. Not “spray and pray.” More “this actually makes sense.”

. **Do five minutes of homework.**

A launch. A post. A new role. A funding round. A product update. Anything real.

. **Connect it to something relevant you've done.**

A result. A campaign. A pattern you've seen. A small proof that you're not guessing.

. **Ask for direction, not a meeting.**

This part is magic. You're not barging in. You're saying: “Am I in the right place?”

It sounds like:

Hi Sarah,

We haven't spoken before, but I saw your announcement about launching the new subscription tier at Acme.

We've just finished helping another B2C brand improve upgrade conversions from their existing audience, and I thought there might be a chance to apply some of that learning to what you're building.

Is this something you look after, or is there someone else on your team I should speak with?

Short. Respectful. Specific.

No twelve-paragraph origin story. No corporate jazz hands.

And yes, this works beautifully for creators:

- pitching a brand partnership
- reaching out to an agency
- offering yourself as a speaker
- opening a door with an investor
- even DM'ing a collaborator without sounding like a bot in a trench coat

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Write one "Why you, why now" message to someone you actually want in your world. Keep it to six lines. Send it.

SPIN

(selling without becoming "that guy")

SPIN is an old consultative selling framework. It sounds corporate. It's secretly perfect for modern content.

SPIN stands for:

- **Situation**
- **Problem**
- **Implication**
- **Need-payoff**

Here's the creator translation.

Situation

Describe their current world. Calmly. Accurately. No shame.

“You’re juggling five platforms, three half-baked ideas, and twelve drafts living in your Notes app.”

No pitch. Just “I see you.”

Problem

Name the friction. The annoying bit. The thing they keep tripping over.

“Most weeks you end up posting whatever you can finish fastest — not what actually moves your business.”

Implication

This is the bit most content skips. What does it cost if nothing changes?

“So you spend hours feeding the algorithm with posts that are basically lottery tickets. Some hit, most don’t, and you still don’t know why.”

Now they can feel it in their bones.

Need-payoff

Paint the better version. Then let your offer walk in like a normal person, not a carnival barker.

“Imagine if you had a simple system that showed you what to post, where, and why — based on what your audience has already responded to. That’s what I built this for.”

(And if you want to use something like Zaaz to help surface patterns faster, cool. If not, you can still do this with your native analytics, your comments, and a notebook. Same thinking either way.)

SPIN works because you’re not yelling features. You’re guiding someone through:

Where they are

What’s not working

What it’s costing

What changes when it’s solved

Movie Night

(storytelling, without the film school)

I’m not kidding: movies are a cheat code for learning structure.

If you've seen **Star Wars**, **Back to the Future**, and **The Goonies** (if you haven't, WTF, close this book now and go watch them, I'll wait), you already know the pattern:

Normal person

Gets thrown into something bigger than them

Meets a guide

Faces tests

Almost fails

Wins, but comes back changed

Luke has Obi-Wan and Yoda.

Marty has Doc.

The Goonies have... chaos and friendship and whatever is happening in that house.

In creator land, you rotate roles:

Sometimes you're the "normal person" sharing what you're learning in real time.

Sometimes you're the guide offering the shortcut you earned the hard way.

If you want people to care about what you teach or sell, wrap it in a scruffy little story:

“This was the situation.”

“Here was the problem.”

“Here’s what I tried (and how it nearly blew up).”

“Here’s what finally worked — and how you can shortcut it.”

That’s it. No dissertation. Just a human arc.

Use the Old Stuff to Build New Things

None of this is new.

Why You, Why You Now

SPIN

Simple story structure

They’ve survived longer than most platforms.

Your advantage is you get to steal them and use them in new places:

- emails

- DMs
- outreach
- short-form video
- pitches
- sales pages
- brand conversations

You don't need to worship the old playbooks.

Just take the parts that help you communicate clearly and respect people's time.

And if you want more of my experiments and notes on sales, positioning, and doing this without becoming a robot, I keep it here at **adamcorder.com**

Brand and Marketing: The Family Name You Build In Public

Brand Is a Word Everyone Understands and Nobody Can Define

If there was ever a word that's both perfectly clear and completely confusing, it's "brand".

We all know what it is.

We all explain it differently.

And annoyingly, that's kind of the point.

Ask ten people and you'll get ten versions:

Logo, colours, fonts.

Reputation.

How people feel about you.

The vibe. The trust. The "thing".

They're all right. They're also all incomplete.

Marty Neumeier says a brand isn't what you say it is — it's what they say it is.

I love that. And I want to add one more layer for our purposes:

Your brand is the sentence that lives in someone's head when your name comes up.

“Oh, they're the ones who...”

“Oh, she's the one who...”

“Oh, he's that guy who...”

That sentence is the brand.

Not what you claim.

What you consistently do, out in public, over time.

The Small Stuff Is the Brand

I'm not a “brand guru”. I don't sit around drawing archetypes on whiteboards and calling it “strategy”.

I am a complete snob about taste and experience.

And here's what building and running my own brands taught me the hard way:

The little things become the brand.

Not the mission statement.

Not the slick About page you wrote at 11:30pm.

It's things like:

- whether you reply to DMs like a human or a customer service kiosk
- whether the packaging feels like “afterthought” or “gift”
- whether your content sounds like you, or like a corporate LinkedIn post pretending to be you
- whether your product does what you promised on an average Tuesday, not just on launch week

You can have the best visual identity on earth, but if people lived experience is “late, messy, hard to deal with”... that's the brand.

You can have a logo you made in a mild panic, but if every touchpoint feels thoughtful, useful, and a little bit special... that's also the brand.

Brand is behaviour, remembered.

You Already Have a Brand

Here's the slightly uncomfortable part.

You already have a brand.

Even if you've never done a workshop.

Even if you don't have a proper logo.

Even if you're still using the username you made in 2016 when you thought you were “just mucking around online”.

If people have:

- watched you
- bought from you
- shared you
- recommended you

Then you exist in their mind as something.

It might be fuzzy, but it's there.

“He posts funny business videos, I think.”

“She's the one who talks creator money without making it gross.”

“They're that soap brand my partner likes because it doesn't look ugly in the shower.”

That's your current brand.

So, brand work isn't “creating something from scratch.”

It's tightening what's already happening so it works in your favour — on purpose — instead of by accident.

Brand and Marketing

People love to fight about “brand vs performance”.

Brand is the soul. Marketing is the loudhailer.

Brand is long-term. Marketing is short-term.

Brand is fluffy. Marketing is ROI.

Honestly, for creators and small founders, that split usually creates more confusion than clarity.

Here's a simpler version:

Brand is who you are and how people remember you.

Marketing is how you show up and get in front of them.

Same engine. Different job.

If you only think in marketing, you end up chasing hacks.

If you only think in brand, you end up with a moodboard and no money.

The move is letting them talk to each other:

- Brand decides what you will and won't do.
- Marketing decides how it gets delivered, and to who.
- Brand decides what offers feel true.
- Marketing helps those offers find the right people at the right time.

If your ads, content and funnels don't feel like you, that's a brand problem.

If the brand feels strong but nobody sees it, that's a marketing problem.

You need both. Just not at Fortune 500 complexity.

Think of Your Brand Like a Person

Here's a framing that makes this easier.

Think of your business as a person. Or better, a family.

How do they talk at a barbecue

What do they care about

Who do they invite over

What do people say about them when they leave the room

Some brands feel like that cousin with a new scheme every week and zero follow-through.

Some feel like the neighbour who always has time for a chat and a spare beer.

Some feel like the aunt who gives great advice and never makes you feel stupid for asking.

You get to decide who you're building.

With MANWASH, I didn't want "another men's body wash".

I wanted:

- something the guy actually likes using
- something the woman in his life is happy seeing in the shower
- a brand that feels like the funny mate who smells good and has his life mostly together

That wasn't just fonts and bottle shape.

It was:

- the language on the back of the bottle
- the jokes we allow ourselves to make
- the way we handle support emails
- the tone of ads
- what it feels like when the parcel arrives

That stuff compounds.

Eventually people start saying:

“Oh yeah, MANWASH. Simple. smells good. not try-hard. My partner got it once, I stuck with it.”

That sentence is worth more than any logo file.

How to Sharpen Your Brand Without Hiring an Agency

You don't need a rebrand. You don't need a workshop with sticky notes and a playlist.

You need a few clear, human answers.

Grab a notebook and answer these like you're describing a person, not a "strategic asset":

If your brand walked into a room, how would people describe them after you left?

Warm. sharp. intense. funny. calm. direct. chaotic-good.

What are three things you never want people to associate you with?

Cheap. spammy. confusing. overpromises. flaky.

What's the one line you'd love people to say when they recommend you?

"Her stuff just works."

"He makes this make sense."

"They actually care."

Where does your taste show up?

Your visuals. your music. your pace. your writing. what you refuse to do even if it "converts".

What do you stand against, genuinely?

Underpaying creators. complexity for the sake of it. products that look good but suck in real life.

You don't need perfect answers. You just need honest ones.

That becomes your brand spine.

Marketing That Matches the Brand

Once you have that picture, marketing becomes less “what do I post” and more:

“How do I let this person show up today?”

If your brand is the honest, slightly sarcastic older sibling, your content should sound like that.

If your brand is calm and premium, your ads shouldn't scream.

If your brand is playful and experimental, your feed shouldn't look like a tax portal.

Use all the tools if you want:

Funnels. email sequences. paid ads. collabs. UGC. SEO.

Just run them through one filter:

Does this feel like us

If yes, ship it.

If no, adjust it until it does, or don't do it.

Two Clocks

Brand moves at the speed of trust.

Marketing moves at the speed of attention.

If you only stare at the fast clock, you panic every time a post underperforms.

If you only stare at the slow clock, you drift and never test anything.

A cleaner way to think about it:

Every piece of marketing either deposits into the brand, or withdraws from it.

Clickbait that gets views but leaves people feeling tricked

That's a withdrawal.

A slower post that a smaller group saves, shares, and remembers

That's a deposit.

You can mix both. Just don't bankrupt the brand to buy short-term reach.

Clarity Beats “Best”

You're not competing with Apple or Nike.

You're competing with:

Confusion

Indifference

“I don't quite get what they do”

If your audience can answer three questions, you're already ahead of most:

Who are you in a sentence

What do you help me with

Why do I trust you over the other tabs I've got open

Bring It Back to You

You don't need to become a branding expert.

You just need to respect that, whether you like it or not, you are a brand.

Every email. Every story. Every product. Every collab.

They're all teaching people what to say about you when you're not in the room.

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Start acting like you're building a family name, not just a feed.

We can tweak logos later.

The real work is showing up consistently until the sentence people say about you sounds a lot like the one you would have chosen yourself.

Art & Composition: Stealing From the Masters (On Purpose)

Dead Geniuses, Living Results

If you're more visually wired, this is your chapter.

Words are great. Frameworks are cute. But sometimes the fastest way to level up your work isn't another hook formula.

It's going back a few hundred years and stealing from artists who had zero interest in your engagement rate.

(And yes, I mean that respectfully. They'd steal from us too.)

Go to the library, not just YouTube

If you can do this the old-fashioned way even once, it's worth it:

Go to a library.

Walk past the business shelves.

Find the big heavy art books — the Renaissance ones.

Michelangelo. Leonardo da Vinci. Raphael. Caravaggio.

Then don't look for "inspiration". Look for **construction**.

Ask:

- Where is the eye being pulled first
- What's bright, what's dark
- What's close, what's far
- What story is being told without a single word

These people didn't have algorithms.

They had patrons, candles, religious commissions, and the occasional vibe of "if this goes badly, my head might leave my body."

So they got insanely good at one thing:

Composing a frame so your eye can't help but go where they want it to go.

Which is... the whole job of thumbnails, product shots, carousels, reels, landing pages, and brand stories.

Same game. New tools.

The Golden Mean

You've probably seen the golden ratio spiral overlay somewhere and thought, "Cool. No."

Good. Keep that energy. You don't need the math.

Here's the practical version:

If you roughly divide the frame into thirds...

and you place the important thing **near those intersections** (instead of dead centre)...

everything suddenly feels more alive.

Painters did it with saints and swords and beams of light.

You can do it with:

- your face in frame
- a product on a bench
- text on a slide
- the subject of a photo
- the “one thing” on a landing page

The golden mean isn't magic.

It's just a very human-friendly way of arranging a scene so the story is clear.

Because composition is storytelling.

Where you put things on screen is you saying:

Look here first.

Feel this next.

Then notice this detail over here.

Good creators do this instinctively.

Great creators do it on purpose.

If you do nothing else this week, try this: **stop centering everything**. Put the “main thing” slightly off-centre and see how instantly it feels more intentional.

Ansel Adams and the Ten Shades of Truth

Now jump forward a few centuries.

Different tools. Same obsession.

Ansel Adams, black-and-white landscapes, huge mountains, bigger skies, and the kind of patience I do not personally possess.

Under the hood, he built a way of thinking about light and tone called the Zone System.

You don't need to learn it. You just need to steal how he thought:

He treated brightness like steps — from nearly black to nearly white — and paid ridiculous attention to the steps in between.

Let's call it **ten shades** for simplicity:

- Shade 1: almost pure black — detail gone, just mood / weight
- Shade 10: almost pure white — glow, punch, attention
- Shades 2–9: all the detail, texture, depth, nuance

His job wasn't "take a nice picture."

It was:

What do I want them to feel first

Where should their eye go

What stays in shadow (mystery, mood)

What gets light (clarity, focus, power)

He used contrast to tell the story.

You can do the same, right now:

- **Video:** what's the brightest thing in frame — is it where you want people looking?
- **Graphics:** is everything screaming at the same volume, or is there a clear "loudest" element?
- **Brand:** what do you keep subtle and implied, and what do you put under a spotlight?

Adams wasn't just photographing mountains.

He was building an emotional path using light and dark.

You're doing that too — with colour, cuts, pacing, layout — whether you

realise it or not.

These aren't rules. They're cheat codes.

Here's the bit I really want you to hear:

None of this is here to box you in.

It's here to give you leverage.

These are patterns humans have responded to for centuries. If you learn them, you get a head start.

You don't have to:

- overlay every frame with a golden spiral
- turn your feed into moody mountain photography
- cosplay as Michelangelo with a ring light

You can:

- use thirds instead of centering everything
- decide what gets contrast and what stays soft
- build foreground / midground / background (even in simple shots)
- ask, "Where does the eye go first — and is that what I want?"

That's it.

This chapter isn't an exam.

It's an invitation.

An invitation to:

- look at art that survived hundreds of years
- notice how much of it gets copied in ads, films, thumbnails
- steal what you like and remix it into your own work

You don't need anyone's permission to call yourself an artist.

But if you want to sharpen the craft, you could do a lot worse than spending an afternoon with Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Ansel Adams...

...then coming back to your camera or Canva file and asking:

”What if I composed this like it actually mattered?”

Because it does.

The Beholder

Here's how I want to close this chapter.

All of these principles — thirds, light, contrast, depth — they're not here to turn you into a “better content creator.”

They're here to help you **aim your taste**.

Because taste is the part no one can steal.

People can copy your edit style. They can borrow your camera angle. They can even mimic your captions like they're doing a cover song.

But they can't copy the combination of:

- what you notice
- what you refuse to say
- what you're brave enough to say
- and the way you see the world when you're not trying to be liked

So yes, learn the moves. Steal from the masters. Build the craft.

Then zoom back out and remember what actually makes this work land:

Your tone.

Your taste.

Your style.

Your truth.

If you centre on that, your work will shine in a way the algorithm can't manufacture.

And the right people will feel it.

Not "nice content." Not "good tips."

They'll feel:

This one's for me.

From Creator to Respected Founder: Your Next Chapter

Redefining Your Identity as a Business Owner

From Creator to Respected Founder: Your Next Chapter

Let's start with something simple and slightly uncomfortable.

You are not “just a creator.”

You are the person keeping a whole mini-economy alive. Brands, platforms, agencies, tools, freelancers, even the café where you sit and edit, they all get a slice of the value you generate.

Actually, read the above again, fuck yeah, you are making this all happen!

The question now is whether you're ready to see yourself the same way the market already does.

As an owner.

Not a passenger. Not “the talent.” Not the nice-to-have line item in a campaign deck.

The owner.

That shift isn't about ego. It's about responsibility.

Owners ask different questions:

Does this move the business, or is it just noise

What am I actually building over the next 3 to 5 years

How does this decision affect my future options, not just this week's views

And when you start seeing yourself that way, the same stuff you already do starts meaning something different.

A reel isn't just a reel. It's distribution for your next offer.

A collab isn't just a collab. It's a positioning move.

A platform isn't just a platform. It's rented land you're using while you build assets you actually own.

Here's the part I want you to take seriously:

You don't have to announce this shift. You don't have to rebrand. You don't need a "founder era" photoshoot where you stare moodily at a laptop.

You just quietly decide that from this point on, you're going to act like the person responsible for the whole machine, not just the output.

Because "respected founder" isn't a title.

It's a pattern.

It's the way you show up when nobody is clapping.

It's how you make decisions when the numbers are messy.

It's how you protect your name when a quick cheque is waving at you.

It's how you build something that still exists when the algorithm's mood swings.

And if you do nothing else this week, do this:

Stop asking, "What should I post?"

Start asking, "What am I building?"

Same hands. Same creativity. Same you.

Just a different seat at the table.

Your Founder Story: What Sets You Apart

Every respected founder has a story.

Not a polished origin myth written by an intern who's never met you. A real one. The path that got you here, with all the detours, dumb decisions, and "how did that not end worse" moments.

You've got one too.

And if you strip away the filters and clever edits, a founder story is basically three questions:

What did you struggle with that your work now helps fix?

What did you notice in your world that felt unfair, broken, or just stupid?

What did you decide to do about it?

That's it. No violins. No superhero arc. Just cause and effect.

For me, it was three threads that eventually tied together:

Years being the corporate dancing monkey, generating value I didn't really participate in

Seeing creators doing the same thing online, just with better lighting

Watching one MANWASH creator generate a ridiculous return for us and pocket a tiny fee in comparison

At some point those threads twist into a rope.

That rope is your story.

And here's the thing people miss:

your founder story isn't about proving you're special. It's about showing why you care enough to keep going when it's not working. Because anyone

can post when the numbers are up. The story is what explains why you're still here when they aren't.

It's the difference between:

“I make content about skincare.”

and

“When I was younger I had no idea what I was doing with my skin, and every brand talked to me like I was already an expert. I make skincare content so normal people don't have to feel stupid in the bathroom, and I build products that match that.”

Same niche. Different weight.

You also don't need to overshare.

This isn't an invitation to turn your pain into a content strategy. You're allowed to keep parts of your life private. What you do want is enough truth in the room that people can feel there's a human behind the brand, not just a content schedule and a Canva template.

If you do nothing else this week, do this:

Write your story in three messy lines (those three questions). Don't make it pretty. Just make it true.

That's the version people trust.

Building and Leaving a Legacy

Here's a confronting question.

If you stopped posting tomorrow... what would still exist that works for you?

Most creators don't love the answer. Because the answer is often:

“Uh... my drafts folder and a mild sense of dread.”

A respected founder plays a longer game. Not because they're magically more disciplined. But because they've learned the hard way that platforms are incredible for discovery and terrible for security.

And just to keep this grounded: legacy doesn't have to mean a statue, a scholarship, or a building with your name on it.

Legacy can be small and still real:

A product line that outlives a platform

A brand people trust even if you post less

A body of work that still helps someone three years from now

A company that pays people properly and doesn't treat “exposure” like currency

Think of it in layers:

Short term: posts, campaigns, launches

Medium term: offers, products, signature programs

Long term: brand, IP, equity, and the people you helped become better at what they do

Founders don't abandon the short term. They just don't confuse it for the whole game.

They can still care about today's post... while also asking:

“How does today stack toward something that looks after me later?”

That's legacy in this context.

Not a grand speech. Just compounding.

Celebrating Agency and True Value

Let me say this plainly.

You're allowed to be in control here.

You're allowed to make money.

You're allowed to say no.

You're allowed to negotiate.

You're allowed to walk away.

You are not a prop in someone else's growth story. You are the decision maker in yours.

Agency is just the moment you remember you have a choice.

You can choose which brands you work with.

You can choose how much of your time is free work versus paid work.

You can choose to stop doing deals that make your audience trust you less.

And yes, sometimes the "choice" still feels tight. Bills are real. Seasons are real. But even then, you're not powerless. You're steering.

Now, true value is what you bring when all the fluff gets stripped away.

Your taste.

Your judgement.

Your relationship with your audience.

The proof that when you point at something, people move.

That's what brands are really renting.

A respected founder learns to celebrate that instead of hiding it. You don't have to humble-brag yourself into the ground. You can say, calmly:

"My audience trusts me. When I recommend something, they listen. That has value, and I treat it like it does."

That's not arrogance.

That's stewardship.

Mapping Your Next Steps

Let's make this practical.

If you're moving from creator to founder, you don't need a 40-page strategy. You need a simple map for the next stretch of road. Something you can actually use when you're tired, busy, and one "quick collab" away from making your life harder.

Here's a clean way to frame it.

Identity

One sentence that captures what you do and who you're for.

Not your bio. Not your "brand values." A sentence you can test decisions against.

Write it. Put it somewhere you'll see it before you say yes to anything.

If an opportunity doesn't fit that sentence, it's either a "not now" or it needs to pay so well it's worth the distraction. Trade-offs, not guilt.

Offers

List what you actually sell. Not “I do content.” Real offers.

Brand deals.

UGC packages.

Consulting.

Products.

Memberships.

Speaking.

Whatever fits you.

If it's not on the list, it's not a focus right now. That's not you being small.
That's you being sane.

Audience

Write down who your real people are and what they care about.

Use your gut and the proof:

Comments with actual words

DMs that read like “thank you” not “nice post”

Saves, shares, clicks

Repeat names

Tools like Zaaz if you use them

The goal isn't to be a data robot. It's to stop guessing who you're building for.

Money

Rough targets. Not a perfect forecast. Just enough clarity to stop living on vibes.

Minimum you need to cover life

A stretch goal that feels exciting

What offers and prices get you there realistically

This is where confidence gets real, because you're no longer negotiating from “please pick me.” You're negotiating from “this is what I need, and this is what I deliver.”

Systems

Pick a few simple habits that keep the whole thing running.

A weekly review of content + results (patterns, not panic)

A monthly money check-in (what came in, what went out, what's next)

A regular block to improve **one** system (not everything at once)

That last one matters. Founders don't overhaul their whole life every Monday. They tweak one lever, then let it compound.

And that's it.

You've just moved from:

“I hope this works.”

to

“I have an actual plan I can iterate.”

That's founder mode. Not perfect. Just intentional.

Keeping the Passion Alive in Business

There's a fear a lot of creators have but rarely say out loud:

“If I turn this into a proper business, will it kill the fun?”

Fair question.

And yeah, it can... if you build the kind of business that treats you like a content vending machine. If everything becomes optimisation, extraction, and performance reviews disguised as “strategy.”

But that’s not what we’re doing here.

The whole point of stepping into founder mode isn’t to smother your creativity in spreadsheets. It’s to **protect your creativity with structure**.

Because when the money is chaotic, everything feels personal.

When the systems don’t exist, every wobble feels like a crisis.

When your boundaries are blurry, every opportunity feels like an obligation wearing a smile.

That’s not “being passionate.” That’s living on adrenaline.

Business, done properly, doesn’t remove the art. It gives the art a safer home.

It creates:

- a baseline, so you’re not creating from panic
- a buffer, so one slow month doesn’t wreck your confidence
- a process, so you’re not reinventing your whole life every week
- boundaries, so your best energy goes to the work that actually matters

So as we move into the practical parts, the money, the models, the deals, the systems, keep one promise to yourself:

You're building this so you can **love the work longer**, not less.

You're not choosing between passion and business.

You're learning how to let them coexist... without one quietly burning the other to the ground.

NEVER Stop Making Things!

A Small, Loud Reminder To Keep Making Things

Let me leave you with this.

You've already done the hard thing a hundred times.

Every post.

Every sketch.

Every half-finished draft.

Every "this is probably stupid but I'm going to hit publish anyway."

That was you, walking through fear.

Not in a dramatic "fight your demons on a mountain" way. In the most practical way possible:

You had an idea.

Fear started talking.

You moved anyway.

That's the muscle we've been building this whole time. Not hustle. Not productivity. Not "more output."

Just: I feel scared. I move anyway.

And no, this isn't a book about doing more.

You don't need another full-time job disguised as a "content plan."

This is about doing with intention what you were already going to do anyway.

Make things.

And maybe, for the first time in a while, spend a bit more time with you. The person behind the account. The one who's been carrying all this while pretending it's "just content."

Quietly asking:

Who am I becoming here?

What kind of me do I want to bump into tomorrow?

Because that's all tomorrow is, really.

You running into the consequences of today's decisions.

Not in a doom way. In a power way.

Today you decide your work is a business, not just a hobby.

Today you decide your rates have a floor.

Today you decide you're allowed to build things that look after you.

Tomorrow you meet the version of you who's lived with those choices for 24 hours. Then a week. Then a year.

Tiny, boring acts of courage that stack.

Email by email.

Post by post.

Boundary by boundary.

The Creator's Old Enemy

The creator has always struggled.

This didn't start with TikTok comments or YouTube analytics.

We've lost too many people to the internal wars that come with making things:

The voice that says you're not enough.

The pressure to be brilliant on command.

The whiplash of "genius" on Monday and "you've fallen off" by Friday.

That battle is old.

But here's what's different now.

You're not alone with it.

You've got community.

You've got other weirdos who understand what it feels like to put pieces of your brain on the internet and hope it doesn't eat you alive.

You've got resources. Real ones. People to talk to. Places to decompress. Tools that make the weight lighter.

And you've got agency.

You can choose your partners.

Your pace.

Your formats.

Your pricing.

Your boundaries.

Your ownership.

If I've done my job properly, you've also got something else.

Not "motivation."

A quieter thing.

A steady sense that you're allowed to build this in a way that doesn't destroy you.

And yeah, you've got me in your corner too.

Not as a guru. Not as someone who's figured it all out.

Just as someone who has:

Undercharged until it hurt.

Watched other people make fortunes off value I helped create.

Felt fear every time I asked for more.

And still chose—slowly, stubbornly—to do it differently.

If I can move that way, you can too.

Same raw materials.

Fear. Curiosity. And a stupid, persistent desire to make stuff.

Expression With Intent

So where do you go from here?

You keep expressing.

But now you do it with your eyes open.

You know that:

Every “small” piece of content is a tiny act of courage.

Every negotiation is a chance to back your value in public.

Every “no” to the wrong thing makes space for the right one.

Every time you share, you’re not just chasing metrics—you’re building proof:

”I’m someone who shows up.”

You’re not creating to feed a machine.

You’re creating to build a life.

That doesn’t mean you become precious and only post when Mercury is doing backflips and your aura feels “aligned.”

It just means you remember why.

Why this work matters to you.

Why your audience deserves to be served properly.

Why your future self deserves a business, not just a backlog of unpaid favours.

Make weird, honest, useful things.

Make them for humans.

Let the algorithm figure itself out.

Before You Close This

I don't need you to promise me anything.

No pledge. No oath. No "I swear I'll never undercharge again" ceremony.

Just take a second.

Right now.

Picture the version of you one year from now who:

Knows what they stand for.

Charges properly.

Has offers that make sense.

Owns something real beyond the feed.

Still laughs. Still plays. Still makes stuff that feels alive.

That person isn't a fantasy.

They're just you—plus a year of small, intentional moves.

You've already survived every bad day you've had so far.

You've already hit publish with shaking hands.

You already know how to move with fear.

Now you're just doing it with more clarity, more support, and more upside.

So keep going.

Keep experimenting.

Keep telling the truth in ways only you can.

And when it feels messy or pointless or slow, remember:

Roses grow in shit.

All my love,

Adam