

[Transcript] My First Million / #109 with Jonathon Barkl - The Founder of AirGarage Jams Out on Ideas

All right.

Quick break to tell you about another podcast that we're interested in right now, HubSpot just launched a Shark Tank rewatch podcast called Another Bite.

Every week, the hosts relive the latest and greatest pitches from Shark Tank, from Squatty Potty to the Mench on a Bench to Ring Doorbell, and they break down why these pitches were winners or losers.

And each company's go-to-market strategy, branding, pricing, valuation, everything.

Basically all the things you want to know about how to survive the tank and scale your company on your own.

If you want to give it a listen, you can find another bite on whatever podcast app you listen to, like Apple or Spotify or whatever you're using right now.

All right.

Back to the show.

So, we've got a guest with us today, Jonathan Barkle.

He's the founder and CEO of Air Garage, which is a company I heard of because I invested in my friend Ryan Hoover's fund called Weekend Fund, and Weekend Fund invested in you, and he sends out these amazing updates, like I don't know if you get the updates, but he sends out these amazing investor updates, and he talks about some of the companies he's excited about, and he was excited about you guys, and so that's what I first heard of you.

We've never met, but you sent me a list of ideas, and I said, okay, that's the ticket of entry to this podcast, is a lot of people reach out saying, hey, I'd love to come talk about my startup.

And I'm like, yeah, but I don't know if that's what people want to hear necessarily.

What you did was smarter, which was you said, hey, I got a bunch of ideas.

You know I can't resist that, and of course, we will also talk a little bit about Air Garage as well.

How was my intro?

Was that on point?

Yeah, that was awesome.

That was everything that I could have hoped for and more, and I'm glad that my list of ideas was a good enough ticket to get me on, because I mean, the reason I love and listen to this podcast all the time is because it's something that I do constantly, is think about startup ideas and just think about ways that things could be better in the world, and like you and Sam are obviously doing that constantly, and so this podcast is perfect because one of the unfortunate truths about being a startup founder is like, you always want to be thinking about new ideas, but then once you kind of have a semblance of product market fit, you just can't think about new ideas all the time.

You need to do one thing day in and day out and focus, and so then my release is listening to this podcast and thinking about new ideas on walks through San Francisco as I'm trying to unwind at the end of the day.

For sure.

That's exactly it.

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It's meant to be an escape.

You might learn something, but it's meant to just be shoot the shit and kind of get that part of your brain going and exercise it, and for some people like you who need to be super focused on your idea, it's like, cool, I worked that muscle out and it's like tired.

It doesn't have this like pent up, you know, idea juice that's just waiting there.

And on the other side, for people who don't have an idea, it's like, oh, it changes, hopefully it changes the way they see the world where they just see opportunity everywhere.

They see different pain points that could be solved or different business models that are interesting that they might be able to adapt, that sort of thing.

So I'm looking at your list right now because it's got a whole bunch of interesting things on it.

One that I just actually mentioned on a previous podcast I recorded is that stands out because it's a pain point I'm having, which is lemonade.com for general commercial liability insurance.

So are you having the same problem as me, which is that it's kind of a pain to get insurance for your business?

Yeah, it's a huge pain.

I mean, it's totally fragmented.

Like I just don't even want to deal with it half the time.

And like we're, we just signed a new lease on an office and the office like landlord wants to know, Hey, what's your commercial general liability insurance and what's your like workers comp insurance?

And I'm like, you know, these are things that we definitely have, but like the process of even getting you a certificate of insurance to prove that we have these things and adding you as an additional insured is this huge pain for me.

And like as a founder, those are the, those are the things that drain my energy, like just working on insurance paperwork, talking to like bureaucratic agent set insurance companies.

And I mean, when we moved into our house in San Francisco, this first time I had like a house off college campus or out of my parents house, right, and it was this beautiful experience of like, I thought that it was going to be this awful process to get renters insurance and I was dreading it for weeks.

And then I found lemonade went through their app in like five minutes.

They gave me a quote, I signed up and it's like, why is that same thing not being applied to the business space?

It totally, totally is a huge market.

Yeah.

I'm, I literally just go through that and had the same question of like, geez, why is this so hard?

I also think that there might be an opportunity because one of the things I struggled with was what insurance do I even really need?

Right?

Like I want to be protected, but then they're throwing all these different, they, hey, are you looking for this or this or this?

And I'm like, well, I don't actually know.

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I'm going to do a whole bunch of research.

And I recently had a cool experience where there's this guy, Moe, and he has his website called moepoints.com and moepoints.com basically just you, you book a call with this guy.

And in 30 minutes, he tells you exactly which credit card you need to be maximizing the rewards based on what rewards you want.

So for like, for me, it was, I want to take my family on vacations and have like, kind of like first class travel.

That would be amazing.

That would feel like a real reward.

And I spend a bunch of money on ads and all these other things on Facebook.

Cool.

So like, which cards maximize the rewards for that?

And he was like, boom, you need to be using MX gold for this reason.

And then in a year, you need to switch to this one.

And oh, by the way, because I was also like, you know, when I redeem my points through Chase Sapphire, I feel like I've been racking up points for years and then I go try to buy one plane ticket and it's like, doesn't work.

He's like, here's what you got to do.

First you need to transfer them to fucking like Lufthansa points and then that qualifies and you could, that'll let you book on United and then that's how you get like way more bang for your buck.

And I'm like, dude, how was I supposed to know this?

And so I think there's a lot of general information out there, but there's, there might be room for like these advisors to like insurance advisors, credit card advisors where it's literally like a 15 minute phone call, 20 minute phone call and be like, Hey, look, I have no horse in the, you know, no horse in the race here.

I'm just going to understand your problem and I'll tell you what you need is a bop.

You need a business owner policy and you need to also get this other thing.

You need cyber, you know, cyber insurance because you do X, Y and Z.

And I think that there's room for that as well because I think most small business owners are not insurance experts either.

No, definitely not.

And every time that I talk to a broker, I just am totally afraid that they're scamming me or leading me in the wrong direction just because I know that they're paid by, you know, the other people, the other party.

So it's like, I'm not the customer.

I am the product.

I'm being sold in this transaction.

And that's the status quo.

And it's like, I, I, I hate like what you said is, you know, they, they talk to you about, oh, hey, you asked for commercial general liability insurance.

Did you know you also need, you know, workers comp and you also need this, you know, earthquake insurance and you also need, oh, data and warehousing or, you know, director's insurance.

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And I'm just like, I, I've never heard of these things.
Like you're not doing a very good job of educating me.
And I just obviously know that you're getting paid to, to shill these things.
And so yeah, I would love to spend like 30 minutes on one call with someone that would just basically walk me through, okay, here's what you need.
Here's where you can go to sign up for it.
And I was just talking to some founders yesterday.
They, they run like this mailbox startup, basically it's per startup since this, you know, virtual mailbox, like instead of us every year, when we move offices to upgrade to a bigger office, having to reroute our mail to different locations.
We just have one address and we use that address forever.
And I'm super excited about that because I've thought someone should build this for forever.
I've been waiting for someone to build this.
I used to work at a UPS or what's that called?
That's a good idea.
Yeah.
It's called stable.
So they're, they're friends of mine now, and I've been giving them a ton of product feedback.
I think their website is, I think it's joins stable.com or use stable.com.
One of the two.
And it's basically, yeah, like stable mailbox one place.
But I was talking to them about how, you know, one of the things that they could do to improve their onboarding flow is they sent me like this long checklist that was super comprehensive of like, here's all the places that you should change your address based on what we know about your business.
Like, oh, you need to change it in Stripe.
You need to change it in your bank account.
You need to change in your credit card.
I was like, that was awesome.
I'm glad you did that.
You did all the thinking for me, but I'm still an awful lazy founder that hates op stuff.
And I still didn't do it because like it's neither important nor urgent.
So it doesn't ever fall on a, you know, my calendar when I want to do it.
And so basically I told them, like, yeah, you need to sit down on a call with me and basically say, during this call, we are going to onboard you, AKA, we're just going to watch you do this checklist so that we know that it got done.
So same, same kind of concept of like just having someone baby me through insurance broker stuff would be exactly what I want as like a first time founder that has no idea of what actually matters in the insurance world.
Yeah, exactly.
And I wonder, so those guys are doing it for business, the stable thing.
What do you think was the calculus of why do that for business versus for, you know,

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personal?

Yeah, I think it makes a lot of sense because, you know, businesses move more often than I think personal people do in like in the sense that basically like for startups, which is their initial market, we're constantly outgrowing our office space and it is a huge pain to constantly be forwarding mail.

I mean, there's still mail for our company that arrives at my parents house and my dad literally like scans it on their scanner and emails it to me and he's like, please change your address like wish we're tired of getting this mail.

And so, you know, it's a big perk for startups in that like we're constantly changing addresses. We don't want to constantly be updating our address where we're, you know, paying for our credit card, paying for everything and with the IRS, which is, you know, a huge pain.

So I think it makes a lot more sense for businesses to start off with, but I do think that there should be some sort of service just like this.

I'm a big fan of it basically coming up with ideas that will save the USPS if they're competent and execute on them.

So one of the things that actually is surprising to me, I was doing a bunch of research on the USPS six months ago.

The USPS brings in about a billion dollars in revenue every year from from PO boxes and PO boxes, they're all sold out.

Like if you try to get a PO box at the local post office in San Francisco, you can't do it.

They're all sold out for like, you know, months on months backward.

And so what I was thinking is, hey, they need to make more PO boxes because it's one of their only growing revenue categories.

There's obviously demand for personal mailbox that is better since the USPS is not good and they're doing a billion dollars in revenue per year and that doesn't account for like the UPS store, which also does personal mailboxes.

So what I think the USPS should do is basically offer a consumer service for like \$10 a year where you can say, okay, you know, Sean, your new mailing address is just like 123 virtual way.

And if anyone sends you mail at 123 virtual way, we're going to forward it to whatever address you currently have on file.

So you just forever have a forever mailing address that you can use everywhere.

And then the USPS maintains for \$10 a year.

This database where it's literally a basic database.

All they have to do is provide a front end that has your current virtual address.

And then on the other end, you can change what your physical address is.

And then they'll just forward your mail to you there.

And I mean, they could expand that and scan your mail and things like that.

But I think even just that basic thing, \$10 a year, probably could save the USPS and fix its deficit.

So I think there's definitely demand for personal mailboxes too.

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Dude, Jonathan, for president saving the USPS, I love it.

That's great.

So let's, let's jump through some of these other ones on here.

What ideas on here are you excited about?

Which one, which ones really pop out to you?

Okay.

So one of the ones that's kind of a little weirder, I guess, and in terms of like, you know, it would be an interesting idea because it's a problem that we face.

And I'm sure that you faced in the early days, if you have consumer, you know, demand on your platform.

So basically, I think that, you know, a lot of early stage companies want better customer service, but don't have the, you know, resources to hire a full customer service agent and they can't justify it.

And so then I think that there needs to be some sort of like, you know, marketplace where you can basically hire customer service on demand.

And I think that that, you know, is a good idea by itself.

And I'm sure that there are companies out there doing that.

But I think oftentimes what they're doing is like outsourcing to other countries and then you're worried about like, okay, are they going to have a language barrier?

How's quality going to be?

You don't really know.

So I think what the spin here should be is basically a customer service marketplace that depends on basically retired older people that are bored at home and love talking on the phone.

So basically just, you know, finding them, sourcing them, training them on, you know, the basics of like how to respond to emails, how to respond to phone calls and text messages, that kind of thing.

And like, it's great for them because, you know, A, they're making a little bit of money to supplement their fixed income, but B, they're, you know, basically keeping themselves entertained during their retirement.

And then for startups, it's more of a flexible, you know, you only need 10 hours a week of support or you need 20 hours a week of support.

That is a product that we would buy into like day one, if it existed, doesn't have to use the old people.

It's just a great spin on the product so that they would have, you know, a unique labor pool basically.

Yeah.

I've thought about this before and I've looked into a bunch of the kind of like customer service, like AWS for customer service type of thing where you just say, I need this and it like scales up as much or as little as you need.

And they're just like highly trained people so you don't have to go through the process of interviewing and just saying, do you have the basic customer service skills?

And it does seem like there's some out there, but I have a lot of friends who have e-commerce

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stores and I don't see a lot of them using this.

I know e-commerce has a ton of customer service that they need to do, but what I do really like in this idea is this framework of how do you empower, I've always said, whoever could figure out how to empower the stay at home mom workforce and give them part-time flexible ways to make money without requiring special skills is going to become a billionaire. And that was a lot of caveats, but if you do, you get to become a billionaire.

Same thing with sort of the retiree market, right?

So my parents are 62 and 65, they're both retired now essentially.

My mom was one of these kind of stay at home people.

She was doing user testing if you've ever used user testing.com.

So she started off just testing websites because it requires no skill.

What they want is you to be an average customer, an average, you know, 50 year old woman who's browsing a website and gets confused.

That's like the value there.

And then she actually got brought on by user testing to like rate the other user testers to help control the quality of the testers.

And so she does kind of like customer service, like, you know, very simple stuff.

She loves it.

She gets to work a set, you know, like a flexible hours from home.

It's not too hard.

She's not trying to progress in her career, but she gets money that she uses to like take us all out to dinner, like get a manicure or whatever she wants.

Right.

And I think that like a lot of people underestimate how valuable that is Rev.com is another example of that, which are transcribers that are like that, you know, English speaking transcribers of podcasts and other things.

Yeah.

So the challenge with these is a lot of them are vulnerable to like AI eating all the jobs.

But like, you know, you can kind of have human in the loop solutions where AI does a lot of the work, but you have a human just sense checking it to make sure it's good.

And so I like the idea of just working backwards from what are things that, you know, 65 year old people who are English speakers in the US can do.

And then could I aggregate a bunch of supply of that workforce and then create a service, you know, for that?

I think that's a really powerful way to Yeah.

And I think they're definitely this like under tapped underutilized like group of people in the United States.

I mean, my dad specifically right now, like he's, you know, kind of semi retired has been for several years.

And so he's like constantly basically works with my mom who has her own small business and then also works with me and air garage and like helps us out on random stuff on the ground and in like the Phoenix Metro where he lives.

And so it's like, you know, he's constantly just looking for things to keep him busy because

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he, you know, doesn't have a full time job and doesn't want to just sit at home in front of the TV all day.

And, you know, that's like valuable labor where, you know, he doesn't want a full time job.

He doesn't want to go look for one.

And so he's looking for things that will keep him busy, that will make him a little bit of money to supplement his income.

It's kind of the perfect, you know, match there.

And I think it's kind of like this mixture of like, how do we find work for those people that are kind of in those later stages of their lives and don't want full time employment? And like, how do we basically bring the gig economy like into the home in some ways where like a lot of the gig economy things that are happening are, you know, in person physical labor type things, but it doesn't necessarily have to be that way.

All right.

Today's episode is brought to you by tempo tempo.fit is the website.

I actually use this.

I've used this for a few months now and it's this machine that has a touchscreen in this 3D sensor.

And what it does is they give you weights like 115 pounds of weights and it's for strength training.

It measures your body and it sees how much weight you're lifting.

It sees how many reps you're doing and how much effort you're putting in, what your heart rate is.

It's pretty amazing.

And then you have a coach on screen walking you through what to lift, how many to lift, what workout to do, whether you want to do a 20 minute, 10 minute, 50 minute workout.

It's pretty amazing, but the best part is the leaderboard.

The other stuff, all the features that they have, that's cool, but I'm obsessed with the leaderboard because it measures how many reps you're doing and how much volume you're doing and you can compete with other people who have taken the same class.

So it's made me want to work harder, lift more weight or have more endurance.

It's just pretty freaking fun and the whole point of working hard is to have money so you can spend it on stuff that will make you live longer and this product Tempo, it checks that box for me.

So they're our sponsor today.

If you use the code Tempo Hustle, you'll get \$100 off.

So Tempo.fit is the URL and Tempo Hustle, one word, you'll get \$100 off.

So check it out.

I use it.

You'll see, I'm always filming videos where I'm talking to that company, saying I'm trying to crush their employees on the leaderboard because I actually love this thing and I use it all the time.

So check it out.

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Give me one more and then I want to talk about Aero Garage a little bit.

So give me one more idea off this list that you think is interesting we want to chat about.

Yeah.

I think one of the things that we think about a lot is like getting user feedback, of course, and so getting ratings through our web app and through our mobile app.

But one of the things that's challenging about that for us and for small businesses, I think is that those ratings are all in different places and everybody's looking at different sources.

So you may go to a Yelp page for a business and it has like five ratings.

You may go to a Google listing for the business and it has 500 ratings.

So it's not really very clear like, okay, what is the trustworthy source?

And so I think a service that one could build for small businesses would basically be some sort of service that uses the Yelp API, uses the Google Maps API.

And you send this like one rating kind of platform to your customers and the customer leaves one singular rating.

They say, oh, it's five stars.

Here's what I have to say.

And then that one rating service then turns around and posts it to each of those individual rating sites so that then as a business you have this kind of cohesive all over the place, you know, brand rather than having to say, oh, hey, you rated us on Google.

We really appreciate that.

But actually we needed it more on Yelp because our ratings over there are worse and we need to improve our ratings on Yelp so that people will come in.

And so this is one of the things that we deal with a lot because we actually, you know, on Google have listings for every single one of our individual parking lots and garages.

And so there's like hundreds of different locations.

So like this property manager that we're working with that works at a large regional property management company left us this stellar review the other day.

Super generous of her to do that, you know, really kind, had good things to say, but she left it on like the parking lot in Salt Lake City that she like, oh, so like nobody's ever going to see that.

Right.

And it's like, you know, it would have been great if she could have written that once and then it gets posted to a bunch of different places so that people actually see it in the places they're looking.

Right.

Right.

And so tell us about Eric.

How did you come up with this idea?

So explain what the idea is and how you came up with it.

Yeah, great question.

So I'll start with like kind of backstory a little bit.

But basically what we do now is different than what we did at the start.

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Of course, that's how startups go.

The way that we got into it, you know, I definitely never intended to go into the parking industry when I was a student.

I was studying physics and economics at Arizona State totally unrelated to what I do now. And basically we had the personal pain point of not being able to find parking or parking on campus was super expensive.

So there's a garage on campus at Arizona State that's like \$1,000 a year to park in.

And you know, we really just thought, okay, well, there's a garage right here.

And one of the interesting things about campus is across the street, there are some driveways sitting empty.

So we went and literally just knocked on people's doors and said, Hey, you know, can I rent a parking space from you?

Eventually we find this guy named Ari, who was like, Yeah, I have two spots in my driveway, got one car.

So, you know, pay me a hundred bucks, you can park here anytime for the year.

And so, you know, we did that, that was cool.

We bragged about it to all our friends said, Hey, I got this really cheap parking spot across the street from campus for a hundred bucks just parked in someone's driveway.

And you know, of course, everyone was like, Well, I want to do that too, but I don't want to, you know, go knock on random stranger's doors.

So long story short, we wound up building out this peer to peer marketplace for parking.

It was like the Airbnb for parking, which if I had a nickel for every time that someone has told me that they've heard of this idea, I would not be working on a startup at this point, I guess.

But basically through building that, you know, people really liked it.

The news loved to talk about it.

The homeowners liked it, but as a terrible business model, awful business model could never scale because in order to get to meaningful revenue, you need millions of driveways.

And on a one sale equals one driveway basis, it just never would have made sense.

And so basically in May of 2018, we started shifting and saying, how do we make a sale and get 50 or a hundred parking spaces?

And so we started working with a couple of churches near campus that were already selling parking.

They just hired attendants off the street that they would stand there for 12 hours a day in the Phoenix heat and collect cash.

And we were like, okay, look, your church, you're spending 75% of your time managing a parking lot and 25% of your time with a congregation should be the other way around.

If even that, how can we automate this for you?

And so what we wound up doing was with those initial customers, co-creating what we do now, which is air garage basically now is a 21st century parking operator.

So we come in, we work with parking lot parking garage owners.

We basically do everything from advertising their parking spaces to collecting payments from drivers to installing signage, installing license plate reading cameras, and even doing

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the enforcement to get illegally parked vehicles off the property, things like that. So we are, you know, kind of this full-fledged operation, taking parking lots from being pieces of asphalt with stripes on them to a full-fledged parking operation that generates income.

Amazing.

And how many different parking garages or parking lots are you working with?

Yeah, good question.

So in August, we had a little under a hundred locations across the country.

So that's up pretty significantly in the last few months, which is awesome considering things have been slow because of COVID.

Yeah, I was going to say you're one of the businesses that probably are negatively affected by COVID.

People aren't driving around as much.

Yeah, definitely.

It was a negative impact in the short term.

I mean, you know, our revenue dropped from like, you know, basically say it was like a hundred percent in February.

In March, it was like 50 percent.

Then in April, it was like 15 percent.

So it was very painful in the short term, but it actually has turned out to be this great thing in the long run because it forced us to really ask like, okay, why can't we grow and, you know, really we're such a small company when we're sufficiently small, the market is sufficiently big that even in light of COVID, we should be able to grow regardless.

And so what's stopping us?

It's really just ourselves.

And so we started, you know, focusing on different sales channels, different customers, that kind of thing to get back to growth.

So what is it now?

If you 100 percent went down to 50, then 15, you know, here we are in start of September.

Where is it?

Is it at 50 percent?

60 percent?

Where are you at from where you were pre-COVID?

Yeah.

So in August, we were at about 80 percent of our pre-COVID levels, our pre-COVID high, which is much, much faster return to normal than I definitely expected, you know, when we were, you know.

Yeah, because the world hasn't returned to normal, right?

No, not at all.

And I mean, you know, a lot of like, I basically, you know, write investor updates every month and in our investor update, I said, you know, if you're an astute reader, you might be wondering like, is this some sort of rebound effect or is this new growth?

And actually last month, about 80 percent of our revenue last month came from new parking

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lots that we signed on since like basically in 2020, basically since COVID.

Which is great because when COVID returns, you'll sort of, you'll see the true gains of this.

Ideally.

And also, is it true that, you know, now these folks who are the owners themselves who have lost their foot traffic and revenue, they're now looking for additional revenue streams or is that not true?

So it's somewhat true.

You know, what we've found basically in the last six months is, you know, basically the way the parking industry works is there's like the owners on the bottom level, right above that is like the parking operators and the parking operators are the equivalent of the property managers in this world.

And then on top of that, there's like all these tech companies that have come out in the last 20 years that have tried to sell technology to the parking operators to improve the industry, hasn't really worked.

But we work directly with the owners, not with the parking operators, right?

So we are a parking operator.

And so what we've seen is a lot of the old school parking operators, the way their business model works is they will come to you and say, Hey, I want to lease your parking lot for five years at \$8,000 a month.

And you say, Okay, sounds good, steady revenue, you know, income stream for me as an owner.

And then they turn around and make 16 or 20 grand a month on your parking lot.

And they take the cut.

And so they've been happy to take that, you know, upside when times have been great.

But then as soon as COVID hit, they were basically going around talking to owners and canceling your leases.

And so we were kind of scooping up a bunch of parking lots from that, where people were rubbed the wrong way by these old school companies coming back to them and canceling leases or just not making payments during COVID.

And do you guys do it the same way?

You offer them a fixed rate and then you, you're very, you might exceed that or you're on the hook, or do you just say no rate, but let's share the revenue or how does it work for you?

Yeah, exactly.

So we do a revenue share.

So we split 70 30 with the owner in favor of the owner.

And so we always tell them, you know, this is better for you in the long run because you're going to see the upside when times are good.

And the biggest thing for us is there's no upfront cost to get started, whereas some of these other operators, they make you buy the parking machine that you need to use to sell parking.

And then they also charge you to manage your lot.

And so like for us, we don't install parking machines, we don't install gate arms and things

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like that.

So it's all software based.

So it's all, you know, no upfront cost is one of the big benefits.

Gotcha.

Okay.

And I see like a bunch of your ideas are sort of like in this kind of peer to peer or you know, marketplace style thing.

Just the way that you're doing with Ergonar, I just see it like, here's a couple of them that you have, right?

So another USPS idea is partner with them to create a real time street, you know, street view competitor for Google Street View.

That's a similar thing.

You take sort of excess capacity that they have, you use technology to create new value, right?

You have another one that is, let's see, this adds one that you have, which is basically like it's Airbnb for billboards, people in cities have a bunch of unused space called their windows where you could put a bill, like a mini billboard.

And so you could turn a non revenue generating asset, your window space that you're not really using or looking at, and you could start generating, you know, some, some revenue from that.

So is this where your brain goes?

Is this what you like to brainstorm the most or why is that the case?

Yeah, I think it definitely is kind of a theme in startups that I talk about.

It's like just seeing underutilized resources sitting around, like really just gets my, I guess, brain flowing and gears turning.

It just is exciting to think about like, Oh, there's this thing that nobody else sees as valuable.

It's just a byproduct of what they're doing.

And you know, it could be monetized in some way, shape or form, whether or not it's actually a good idea is a different question.

Like the ad society one where it's like, you know, monetize people's windows.

You know, I thought about that at one point and then I was like, well, but I really want to be the person that was known for like, basically plastering, you know, ads all over every city.

And so what I want to be, and not to say that I wouldn't want to be, but that company, like, I think it's like Firefly that puts ads on top of Ubers, it's like, would I really want that to be my legacy?

Like, I don't know, but I think it's a cool underutilized resource.

Same with the USPS where it's like, they're driving all these miles anyway, because they have to do door to door delivery as part of their mandate as a government entity.

And it's like, what else can you do with the work that they are putting in?

And so like for us, we spend like, I spend hours a day in Google Street View, looking at parking lots, determining where signage is going to go, all these things.

And the most frustrating thing is that Street Views only updated once every year, two years,

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some places every five years.

And so it's like, you know, there's all these miles being driven by USPS carriers anyway.

Why aren't they collecting Street View imagery and data?

So I definitely think there's, you know, something to be said about, like, that's just where my brain goes because that's what I work on all day is finding resources that are sitting underutilized and trying to monetize them.

Like, here's another one you have on yours, which is a shipping service that's peer to peer. Basically, you used, when people don't use their checked bag allowance, and you could use that to ship an item, which I think is practically so hard to do.

But I love that you're just identifying what are all the inefficiencies and underutilized resources.

And, you know, some of these, one of these, when you get them right, these really do change the world, right?

They really do make the world sort of more efficient, more effective, bring people new revenue streams where they didn't have it before.

Yeah. And I think the interesting thing about them is like, even if they're terrible ideas, like that one would probably be super logistically difficult to make work, and the airlines would probably catch on so fast and just cut you off.

But, you know, for example, like every time I fly, I'm flying on like Southwest or whatever, two free bags.

Like, why am I not using those?

Or if you're flying international, especially, but yeah, I mean, it's like, it's so interesting because the resource is so, so just widely available, like those checked bags are just so widely available.

And if you could crack the code and get it quite right, you could scale up so quickly because that resource is available among so many consumers and so many flights being done each day that if you could figure out the formula for actually how to distribute the product and make it work and not get caught and, you know, figure out the logistics, then you can scale from, you know, zero to the moon really fast.

Right.

Yeah.

I feel like two of my favorite ideas are in this category, which is, I forgot the name of it, but there's a company that started a while back that does, they go to hotels and they say, Hey, you know, person stayed here for one night, they opened up the shampoo, they use it once and then half the bottles left and you have this plastic bottle and half the shampoo.

And so they basically said, let's collect all that we will recycle it, create a new product of the leftover sort of shampoo, soaps and conditioners and whatnot that you guys can't serve to the next guest.

And they created quite a big business sort of recycling this inventory and these assets and it's a feel good story for people who want to be, you know, more environmentally conscious and, and, you know, take advantage of some of this otherwise, you know, luxurious waste that we create.

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And the other one that's like that is unclaimed baggage, which we talked about on the podcast before, so I won't go into too much detail, but basically like, I don't know, 0.3% of all bags that get lost never get picked up.

And so like the airline has to get rid of this.

So they basically say, they basically get paid, I think, to take these bags away and then they auction off the items in there and give the, you know, a portion of the proceeds to charities.

And I think, like, who knew, right?

But of course, if you look around, there's just excess capacity, there's excess resources, there's sort of these inefficiencies in the world where you can sort of tie two things together and say, okay, we've created value on one side and we've reduced waste on the other.

Right.

Yeah, definitely.

I remember being fascinated by the concept of there are these people that basically go to like fast food restaurants.

I don't know if this is still a thing, but go to fast food restaurants and they're like getting rid of all this oil that they used to cook and those people would go and basically convert that oil in their garage into biodiesel fuel.

I remember being fascinated by that and wanting to do that, but I was like eight or nine or 10 or whatever.

And like, of course, my parents are going to let me, you know, make biodiesel fuel in their garage.

And then one of the other things that goes along that same lines is, you know, I participated in a hackathon once in like college and basically we talked to, it was the premise of the hackathon was it was like this trash hack.

And so it was sponsored by the city of Phoenix waste recycling, you know, department.

And there was this guy there who was super knowledgeable and he was like, yeah, you know, you'd be surprised how recycling works.

Like most of the things that you send to the city of Phoenix for recycling, we can't do anything with and, you know, we actually pay people to take that.

And so he was like, yeah, if you could figure out a business model where you can use this harder plastic that we don't have the means to recycle, that we're paying \$100 per ton to get rid of, like we would let you have it, or you could pay us \$50 a ton to take it away.

And sorry, we would pay you \$50 a ton to take it away.

And then you could use it to create a product.

And so I think, you know, someday if I am done with air garage and starting another company, like it's going to be in some sort of space like that.

But I mean, there's so many things to work on.

Like I'm also right now reading this book about like the energy grid and how broken it is.

Like things like that are just exciting to think about how they're massive problems with huge waste and have so much opportunity to impact people's lives.

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So you're an interesting dude.

What's your information diet?

What are you?

I'll ask you a couple of specific questions, right?

You wake up in the morning, you look at your phone.

What are the first two or three things you check?

Great question.

So actually I try to avoid looking at my phone first thing in the morning.

So my habit lately is that I wake up first thing and I read a book for an hour.

So that's not always been the case.

You wake up and you read a book for an hour.

It's incredible.

I try to wake up.

I try to read a book for an hour.

So right now I'm reading this book, like I said, called Super Power.

Right before that I was reading this book about Genghis Khan, which is an amazing book.

It's called like Genghis Khan and the making of the modern world or something.

Hold on.

I don't care about any book.

I don't care about this habit.

This habit is incredible to me.

So do you even get out of the bed or do you just turn the lamp on and start reading in bed?

Yeah.

You get up, you brush your teeth, you do whatever, or do you just start reading?

No, because if I get up, I will start basically getting into the morning routine and then start working.

So that's what I'm trying to avoid doing is I'm trying to like basically spend the first hour forcing myself to read a book because I don't get any other time to read during the day.

And usually at the end of the day, I'm too like wired and like amped from working all day.

And then I don't want to sit down and like read a book.

And so I'm distracted.

And so I try to do an hour a day in the morning because like it's the morning time.

Nobody's bugging me.

None of the, you know, team members have asked me any questions yet.

There's nothing exploding.

So it's like one peaceful hour in the morning of like getting some reading in.

Okay.

Amazing.

I didn't, I didn't expect that.

Okay.

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So your information diet.

So you're reading books.

You're reading the gangest con books.

Sounds like you read books that what's your criteria for books?

Is it stuff I see people recommending on Twitter?

Is it I like biographies and I only read biographies.

Like how do you pick your books?

Yeah, I've been trying to make it a more diverse set lately because I realized that I read a lot of like obviously books that, you know, tech startup founder would be a fan of about like, you know, biographies and, you know, things that are, you know, like tech companies that have been built and things like that.

So definitely been trying to diversify, but, you know, usually what I'm doing is either seeing people reading, recommending books on Twitter or finding books in old used bookstores and then buying them and just going based on the cover and totally judging a book by its cover and picking it up and reading it.

So the superpower book that I'm reading right now, I saw because this guy on Twitter who works at Stripe in their clean energy department, I think his name is Ryan or book.

I don't know if I'm saying that right was, you know, he posted this thread about, you know, does anyone have resources about the grid and like how to learn more?

And this was one of the books that was recommended there.

Love it.

Okay.

So that's the book side of things.

What else is your information diet?

Where do you, where do you find yourself spending?

Tell me about your, either your junk food or your healthy food for your information diet?

Like what are the resources that are helping feed your brain or, you know, relax your brain?

What do you, what do you like?

Well, let's start with the junk food is definitely tick tock.

I don't know about you, but as a, as a member of the Gen Z, quote unquote, like tick tock is, is a drug.

How old are you?

Uh, I am 20, 23, 23.

Yeah.

I love that.

You didn't know.

I'm the same way.

I actually just keep saying the wrong number and people think I'm like trying to, I'm like, no, in my head.

That's just the last time I remember my age and then I just keep saying it.

But I think I'm 32.

Yeah.

Okay.

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So that's amazing.

You're 23.

That's great.

So you, so tick tock is good.

I mean, tick tock is crazy.

Like I liked a video once of someone, someone sang, um, you know, that song old town road.

Yeah.

They sang like a Jesus version of it.

And I thought it was a, it was a clever little remake.

So I clicked it and now tick tock thinks I'm like this devout Christian and just gives me like all of like religious tick tock, which is kind of a rabbit hole.

I didn't even know existed or it'll switch to like sports or whatever.

But, uh, what do you like on tick tock?

Well, so I think one of the things that I love about tick tock is like when I go on Twitter, sometimes I'm just so sick of being in the information bubble that I'm like always in, which is like tech and VC Twitter and like, you know, there's, there's benefits to being inside that bubble, but there's also detriment.

And so the thing that I like about tick tock is it does not have any clue that I like work in tech or that I like work on air grudge.

And so like, I've basically curated my feed to be mostly like gardening videos, cat videos because I adopted this cat from like, like basically a stray cat like six months ago.

Uh, like all these things that are like totally just like pure fun and release and information.

And so like, but I think there's, you know, there's, there's value to tick tock.

Like, um, we get a lot of ideas for like DIY projects on tick tock.

So like, I'm literally sitting here.

I'm sitting in our backyard staring at these two like giant, uh, basically, uh, raised garden beds that we built this weekend over, you know, the weekend and used instructions that we found on tick tock.

And so there's actually like a ton of valuable information on tick tock, uh, but it's nice for me and like the reason that I like it for like 30 to 45 minutes a day is because it's just a pure escape from my reality.

Whereas like going on Twitter is just more of the same.

And I feel like I walk away.

Yeah.

I walk away from it just super frustrated because I'm like, all these people are like annoying and just talking about these dumb things that don't matter.

Like, you know, who is the VC Braggs meme thing.

So yeah.

Yeah.

Everybody's talking about how it doesn't matter, but then they're all talking about it.

Um, so, so, okay.

So I like that.

So that's the part of the junk food.

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Anything else in the junk food category, or let's go, or we could switch to the stuff that's feeding your brain.

No, that's the other.

It's mainly the junk food.

Uh, I don't think there's really any other junk food besides maybe like going through Craigslist in the free section, like it's kind of like junk food too.

Did you go pick up the stuff or you just want to see what's out there?

Oh, well, I mean, we pick up stuff like most of the furniture in my house, I think has come from Craigslist free section.

Uh, like we have these Adirondack chairs.

We have these like sofas in the backyard.

We have this, uh, you know, these couches that we got for free on Craigslist.

Uh, it's just such a dope hit to like find something cool on Craigslist.

I think it's the same, like same dope hit that I get like from like recruiting when you're like going through like on Angelus looking for people and you find one, you know, diamond in the rough and you're like, this person's amazing.

Like match with them.

It's the same exact dope hit and it's like trying to direct the dope hit in like a positive constructive direction.

Right.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

That's very, very true.

In fact, I think more product should be designed for that.

Like the human brain loves this, like scan, scan, scan, scan, scan, scan, find and then like, might not find again for a while, but like, you know, that, that, that the rewards of the hunt, um, as near aisle would say, and so I think, uh, there should be more products designed not to just give you good stuff, but to give you a very easy slippery slope to browse and find something good, um, that it could be in the most arbitrary way and people will do.

Right.

No.

And that's, I mean, that's, you know, how TikTok works exactly.

And it's like, you find the one TikTok that you want to watch and it's like such a dope hit, but then like TikTok, you walk away not having gotten anything, except maybe information about how to build some garden beds, but you know, with Craigslist or, you know, Facebook marketplace, you're scrolling through and you may find something that actually, you know, has a positive impact on your life, I think.

Right.

Right.

Uh, okay.

I like that one.

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And, uh, what about on the, uh, feed your brain side, how, how do you get smarter more knowledge?

But what do you like to, what are the like kind of best sources for you of that, of that information?

That's good.

And I'm trying to think, and I mean, I think the vast majority of it.

It is just through reading books, like I just love reading books and like try to do as much reading as possible.

Like I'm not going to claim that I like read a hundred books a year or whatever those fake metrics are, but like I just try to consistently do the input of reading like an hour a day or, you know, X, X number of hours per week.

Um, and I think with that comes a lot of like positive information and like, you know, I learned so much about, for example, I read this, um, long biography of Deng Xiaoping, um, you know, basically about, uh, you know, he was basically the, the premier leader, the top leader of China for X number of years.

He was never actually officially premier or chairman of the party, but there were so many things that I just hadn't even heard because I live in this American bubble, such as the fact that like China went to war with like Vietnam in, you know, like the late seventies and it's like something that I had no clue existed.

I also had no idea that, um, China and the Soviet Union were like basically arch enemies for a while during the seventies and eighties.

And it's like, those are things that in the American bubble, I just assumed were not even true or not even possible.

Right.

I was constantly learning those things through books, but I mean, I do definitely listen to a lot of the podcasts, um, just through, you know, walking and going on walks just to decompress, especially during quarantine, like trying to get outside and just go for walks and listen to a podcast.

So, you know, your podcast has been one of those that I've been listening to consistently. I think my other favorite podcast is probably, um, Patrick Koshani sees invest like the best. I think he just does a great job, especially when it's like operators on there of asking them the right questions that I, I want to hear.

And so I really like that.

And what about, um, you strike me as somebody who I think might have a good answer to this. No pressure.

Uh, but Tim Ferriss has this question, which is like, what's the best purchase you've made for like under \$120, a hundred, a hundred, under \$100, that's like improved the quality of your life.

And for you, you might not have even purchased it.

It might have been free off Craigslist, but, uh, is there a thing that's improved your quality of life, um, a purchase you've made?

If not, if not a purchase, then, you know, maybe a habit you took up aside from the reading an hour a day.

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Okay.

So the first thing that came to mind, but has not, sorry, doesn't fit the criteria of like under \$120 is actually, actually, uh, it does fit it because I split the cost with my roommate.

Um, but we just bought a new Dyson vacuum and like before we just had like this crappy stick vacuum that my parents had handed down to me and I had the all through college and these are the electric ones, right?

So like kind of cordless electric ones, right?

Very fancy.

Like it's like this, you know, uh, this amazing contraption that you can carry around your house.

It sits on your wall and charges and then you could just like pop it off and go walk and, you know, it makes it so much easier and more enjoyable to vacuum because I think they designed it correctly where you see everything that you vacuum up.

And so it's like this amazing satisfaction at the end.

It's like the story.

I don't remember where this is from, but some book talks about how like Fabrice was this big flop until they added the scent and then it became like, Oh, you know, if you clean your house and then you for reason, you get the nice like completed sense of like accomplishment and I cleaned my house and I freezed it and I smell it.

It's the same thing of like, you know, with my old vacuum, like a, it wouldn't suck anything up because it was a terrible old school vacuum and B, uh, you know, you couldn't see anything that did suck up while you were vacuuming.

So you didn't know, you didn't know what you were doing.

And so weirdly, I think that's one of the things that's been amazing the last couple of weeks, we just bought it two weeks ago, which is why I'm weirdly still excited about it.

I have, I have that same vacuum and I vacuumed for the first, probably the first time in my life.

Uh, the other day, just like, I was just trying to show my cleaning lady how this, like it try this one.

I think this works and I did it and I was like, Oh, never mind.

I'll do this.

You go do something else.

Like, I love this.

It was very therapeutic.

Yeah.

Uh, like the suction was great.

The, like you said, it's being able to see like all the dirt just going away was like amazing.

It was like totally cordless.

It was like the Tesla of vacuums.

I loved it.

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But as you said that, it would kind of remind me, I think somebody could make it a kind of DTC competitor of this vacuum and brand it better because I don't think most, I don't think they advertise well or advertise in the modern channels or in the modern ways.

And also, uh, it should release a scent.

It should have the Febreze thing where your room smells clean, uh, through the vacuuming and not just the lines on the carpet or on the wood or whatever.

And so I think that that would be a nice little addition.

So DTC, DTC vacuum, I think would be another little idea for you.

Yeah.

The other DTC thing that I had on my list was, um, basically DTC printers and ink.

Um, like it seems like this is a huge market.

Everybody hates their printer.

Nobody likes using their printer.

Everybody hates that ink is so expensive.

It's like, why isn't there some sort of DTC company that has come out and said, Hey, we'll give you the printer for free because that's basically what they're trying to do anyway.

And we made a printer that just doesn't suck and also will send you ink and it's going to be like five X less expensive than the other ink, but we're still going to make a margin of like 80%.

It's the Southwest model.

It's, Hey, free ink three times a year.

Like this, this printer comes with free free ink, uh, your recharges and it just has some caps so you can't like totally abuse it.

But just build that.

It's like the free shipping thing.

It's like, okay, cool.

You add \$12 to the price of the thing and I'm happy to like, you know, do that or whatever.

I don't know how much it costs, but like whatever you get the idea.

Um, and I thought printers were dead and then now I just like somehow constantly need a printer at home.

I think that's like getting older.

You just need printers.

Yeah.

It's weirdly, um, convenient to have a printer.

I mean, it definitely is not something that you should have to buy with work from home.

Yeah.

Cause you can't print at work anymore.

Well, and personally, like one of the things that, uh, okay.

So actually I have, I have another answer to your question about what has been a purchase that I've made recently.

Um, I love using like paper.

And so like, I just bought one of these paper tablets.

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I don't know if you've heard of these, um, but what's that one called?

I get ads.

I think for this.

Yeah.

It's called the remarkable tablet.

And so I just bought one of these.

I don't have what their version two of it, but the version two is getting roasted on their subreddit because it's been delayed like five times in the last few months.

It doesn't seem like a massive upgrade to me.

So I just bought the version one, which now is like 300 bucks, uh, from them directly with the, like with the pen and with the case that were like an extra 75 or a hundred before.

So it was like \$600 before now.

It's like \$300.

I've always wanted one.

And I love like writing things down.

Like when I make a to-do list, like I am just like always like scribbling on papers.

Right now.

Yeah.

Like I'm always scribbling on papers.

And then I always lose them.

And I was just like hating my workflow and this fits so perfectly in my workflow.

So I would say this is the thing, uh, for me, because then also I can read ebooks on it.

I can read PDFs on it.

Uh, and it's been great because I, I literally carried around with me all the time.

Um, and it's replaced like, I literally, like when I would read like lease agreements or documents for a company, I have a printer just so I can print them out because I can't read those things on my computer for some reason, I just have too much like ADHD of like sock notifications coming in and emails and X Y and Z and it's like hard to focus on reading a legal document because they're so boring.

And so I'd always print them out, but now I've been reading them on this tablet instead and you know, saving the earth 15 pages at a time.

So this thing is good quality.

This remarkable one, you know, I'm, I'm satisfied with it so far.

I think I've had it for like three weeks and I bought it because they have a 30 day unconditional return policy, which was awesome.

Uh, but I have, I have no intention of returning it.

You know, I've basically forgotten that I even paid \$300 for it, even though that seemed like a ridiculous sum to pay for something that is literally just like a digital notebook.

Uh, but it's totally worth it.

They're big, they're big claim to fame is that writing on it feels just like writing on paper.

And I would say it's 90% accurate.

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Like it, it's very close, very similar to the feel of writing on paper, close enough that I am, I'm willing to live with it because I'm not a snob about what paper feels like, but people on the subreddit, you know, are very picket, picky as you might expect. Right.

And people on Reddit, you know, they go to the nth degree about everything, which is their blessing and their curse.

All right, cool.

Man, I, we're going to have to wrap it up in a second.

How should people find you?

How should they, who should be talking about air garage?

And then how should people be finding you for any more of your thoughts?

Cause I think you're an interesting guy.

We had never met before.

So this was kind of like a first date and we did ideas and then I asked you a bunch of questions that I was curious about.

I don't know if people will care about your morning routine as much as I did, but I sort of have this thing where when I meet interesting people and you're, you're clearly an interesting person right off the bat, um, I try to figure out a little bit about what is their method.

Interesting.

This is a byproduct of a set of habits or lifestyles, um, or lifestyle that you live.

And so I try to understand what's this person's routine?

What's their, what's their information diet?

What are the products that they use?

Because I think that that's the thing everybody sees and likes and gets interested in, um, is the output and, uh, you can't copy the output.

The output is impossible to copy.

Uh, it's the input that you can start to, you know, pick up pieces or try things for yourself and, uh, become yourself a more interesting person.

So that's why I asked those questions.

Yeah.

No, that's absolutely true.

And I think, you know, your inputs need to be unique to you, but like finding other inputs that make sense and kind of mesh with what you're interested in is always something that you should be doing and like changing your inputs daily or like monthly or whatever to iterate and find what those inputs should be.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Exactly.

Like I'm definitely not going to wake up and read an hour in the morning.

That would be an awful input for me, but, um, I have been thinking about this because I pick up my phone every day and I, because like right now I'm in some weird, like financial, uh, fall, uh, fall season where I'm just reaping rewards everywhere and stock markets going up and cryptocurrencies going up and all, all my shit, you know, sales are up and all

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that stuff.

And so I'm like, this is very addictive to wake up and just see the green right away.

But I'm like, this is an awful habit, um, first because these will turn red and not be green.

And then I'm letting my first kind of reaction of the day be to something I'm just not control that I can't control.

And frankly, it doesn't matter.

Um, it doesn't matter over any short period of time over long haul shirt matters.

And so I was, I was thinking to myself, what should I replace that with?

I don't want to go into Slack or email and just start doing work.

I don't want to be checking Instagram.

I don't want to be checking the stock app.

Um, so I was thinking like, what do I want the first thing that I take in for the day to be?

And that's an open question for me, but I was thinking about this morning, which is partly why I asked you that question.

So I'm going to figure out what's the right first input that will set me up for success every day and having a great day.

Um, and I don't know what that would be, but if people are listening and they have a good system, tweet it at me and I'd love to steal from your system.

If you figured out one that works.

Yeah, that'd be awesome.

Cause, uh, the thing that I used to do first thing in the morning was, you know, workout and I would basically force myself to not look at my phone, not look at Twitter, not look at Slack, not look at the Wall Street Journal before I finished my workout.

And then my reward for finishing the workout was I got to like stand in the shower and browse my phone on Twitter and, you know, Wall Street Journal and just veg out after the workout.

And so it was kind of like this good reward system.

But if you give yourself the reward first thing, then you never do the harder thing, which is like you could sit and, you know, scroll Twitter for half an hour and then you're like, Oh shit, I was supposed to work out and you never do.

So, right.

And now you have Twitter plus guilt.

Yes.

Uh, cool.

Our event, uh, where should people follow you or find your, what's the URL for air garage?

Shout that out.

Uh, yeah.

Good question.

So, uh, the URL for air garage is not the dot com.

Unfortunately yet we're working on it, uh, but it's basically air gara.ge.

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Out on Ideas**

So it's air garage with a dot before the G and the E. Uh, so easier to just Google air garage or you can also go to air garage.co and I'm pretty sure it'll redirect you.

Maybe I don't remember.

I haven't checked in a while.

Uh, I'm on Twitter, uh, at Jonathan Barkle also spelled weird.

So probably just Google me too.

Right.

Okay.

Just Google air garage and find you.

Yeah.

Listen, man.

Thanks for coming on.

This was fun.

And, uh, yeah, let's, let's keep it touch.

Yeah.

Sounds great.

Yeah.