

[Transcript] My First Million / \$1M By 19, \$100M+ By 35 -- Here's How He Did It

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.

It was strange.

I was pulling up to my university or to the college and I would pull up in like a drop top Lexus, like a \$70,000 car, and that was like \$19,000, right?

Dude, so Val, Sean, he's not making it today, but that's okay.

So your thing went viral today.

How many likes did you get, like 3,3300?

Something like that.

I had to turn off my notifications.

I can't do when you work with, I don't know how you guys do it.

I don't know how people do it while running full businesses, but I had to turn that off because I just can't concentrate.

That thing just, my phone was just blown up all day.

Now you know how I feel.

It is crazy, right?

It's crazy.

So you had 3,000 followers and now you have like 9,000, maybe 9,000?

Something like that.

Yeah.

I mean, it took me how many years to get up to like 2,700?

Yeah.

Now it's, I don't know, I didn't look to be honest with you, but I'm probably at like 8,000, 9,000 at this point.

So all right.

The background here is I met you through my, like we share like a best friend, Joe.

And Joe told me about you.

He goes, this guy's crazy.

And so Val, let me tell you what I know about you and you tell me if it's right or wrong and then I want to hear your story.

But basically he goes, and I'll, I won't reveal too many numbers.

I'll let you talk about any number that you want to talk about because I don't know if what I know is confidential or not.

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So I'm not going to, I'm not going to mention them, but you, as a 19 year old, you came from Russia, you came from Russia?

I came from Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan at the age of 11.

And then you come here, you get a computer at like 16 or 17.

You start this affiliate marketing business.

You're the only employee by age like 22, 23, you've made something like 30 million in profit from this like one little business.

From there, you parlayed that into in a Lyric website that was like one of the biggest Lyric websites in the world, which doesn't sound that impressive, but most people don't realize that Lyric websites are some of the most biggest websites in the world.

And so that made like another eight figures in profit from there.

You parlayed that into an ad network that now is like huge from there.

You've now launched a jewelry business that apparently Joe has said it's bigger than all your other companies, but I don't know if that's true or not.

And then throughout all this, you've acquired and sold and developed like a hundred plus million dollars of real estate.

Is all this accurate?

Uh, some of it.

Okay.

So well, actually my first, by the way, the reason I'm having you out here is because we've had a lot of really successful people on here do interesting stuff.

And there are like a lot of them are well known, but you don't, I basically the other day begged you to like tweet something and I helped you write this tweet and it took like a few days and we got it out there.

But like besides that, you've pretty much have never done any press.

You've never talked about this publicly.

And when I met you, I was like, this is a gold mine.

This guy has so many interesting stories.

We got to tell this story.

So anyway, what was wrong and what was right?

So okay.

So well, actually the funny part is that the, the first business I had was a PlayStation, like a video game website.

So it wasn't like huge, but you know, I was in high school and making like 5,000 bucks a month and that actually taught me a lot of lessons.

So the, so the, the search mark and you actually told me, I actually tweeted another thing about you where you said, Hey, my 12 year old son has a website that's making like two G's a day or something like that.

And he needs an email service provider.

Which one should he use?

And I tweeted that screenshot.

And it went viral.

That was anonymous.

I guess it's not anonymous anymore, but so he's, yeah, that, that, that is interesting.

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I saw you post that and he still has a website.

It's not doing it as well, but not quite a 2000 a day anymore, but he's, he's working on like coding this thing away and he's like figuring out all these things.

So it's actually amazing to see it, you know, at his age, at, you know, so where'd you get, it's crazy that you and your family, you're just finding all these opportunities.

Where did it start?

So you, your thing, first thing was a PlayStation website, which what is that?

So it was a site called PSX extreme.

We, this is like, I launched like a 98, 99 or something like that.

Like actually it was 99.

It was right before the, the, the bubble, the dot com bubble burst.

I was like about eight months into the, the, the bubble and it was doing really well.

It was very easy to, to generate revenue and, you know, once I got the traffic, the site was all about anything related to PlayStation.

So like get cheat codes, your reviews, screenshots, whatever, right?

Anything for like PlayStation fans.

So it was like a PlayStation fan website.

Then the dot com bubble hits.

My revenues disappeared 90%.

My traffic was still up there, but I had no revenues because all the ad revenue disappeared.

Like it went from being \$3 CPM down to 30 cents CPM, if you could be lucky enough to get that.

How many people were going to this website?

It wasn't huge, but I had like, like 10,000 uniques a day, maybe 20,000 in 99 and 98.

That's got to be a massive site.

Yeah.

It was good.

It was a good amount of traffic and it was all free.

So it was interesting like experience because I had to quickly learn how to generate revenue and I, I had to go out there and sell advertising myself.

And you know, like I, and then once I figured out that I could sell advertising, I didn't have enough traffic.

So I went, I started going to other video game sites and saying, who had much more traffic than me.

I said, Hey, I got all these advertisers who would spend more if I had more traffic.

Like I'll, let me put ads on your sites.

So I went to all these other video game sites and like just was a broker for advertising.

So that was kind of like my first, you know, making decent amount of money.

I was making five and like just from the site and I was making probably another 10 a month from being a broker.

And then the thing that you tweeted today or maybe last night, it basically, you told the story about how when you were 19 after this PlayStation site, you built an affiliate ad site and it made like, I forget the, I forget the numbers, but in two or three years, it was like over 30 million in profit.

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So what were you, you were selling stuff on behalf of half.com or eBay, who were you? Or no, New York times, you had like 800 basic, basically you had like 800 ad accounts that sold different stuff.

So like a New York time subscription for, or which sold for \$100, but you were able to sell it for only 30 bucks, so you were able to keep the difference, something like that.

Yeah.

So, you know, it's affiliate marketing, but I used paste search, which was very new back then.

And at the time, when after the.com bubble burst, all the advertisers got all of a sudden advertising, digital advertising stopped being interesting.

You know, for a moment there, people thought, businesses thought, it might, you know, internet might be over, over high ad, right?

So all of a sudden you see kind of all these budgets get, ooh, you know, just get pulled back, right, especially all the brand advertising and, but nobody really, you know, so everybody had to still figure out how to get customers.

So they said, okay, you know what, we won't do brand advertising.

But if you drive, if somebody drives as customers, we'll pay per customer, like we can't lose on that, right?

So performance marketing.

So that was around and it was very accessible.

And at the same time, the media wasn't expensive, right?

Because the supply was there, but the demand wasn't there.

So that's what I took advantage of.

I started buying up a lot of the supply, mostly was search, search, page search.

And that's what made everything so profitable because I was just playing into those supply demand dynamics that were working in my favor.

But yes, what I would do is I would find an advertiser that had a product.

I would test it on at the time, you know, kind of like the modern day Yahoo page search or back then it was called goto.com.

And then later Google came around.

And so I would test that ad.

If it works, I expand on it.

If it doesn't work, right, I would figure out how to make it work, right?

If there is a way to make it work.

Yeah, just like it just, you know, they would spend it all over in January three.

And what things were you selling?

Oh man, everything, everything.

Yeah.

And all of this, and all of this was making like, like many millions of dollars of sales for your little one person operation every year.

Yes.

That's crazy.

Yeah.

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Tell us a little bit about like what was going on in your life at the time.

Like, did you try and go to college, were you doing this while you were at college?

Did you drop out?

Like, what are you doing with your life?

So I already had the business and I went, I got into, like I love finance.

So I was like, all right, so I'm going to do business finance.

And I didn't really feel like I should be, but I only did it because, and I had no time for it.

You seem like you'd be awful at that.

I am.

I was awful.

I was actually interested in the topics, especially the topics I was interested in, like law or fire.

So business, accounting, all those things were interesting.

Like I couldn't, I couldn't see through biology.

But even, even though they were interesting, I had no time to study.

So I would suck the tests.

My GPA was horrible.

I can't remember what it was, but it was just horrible because I just didn't care to, you know, get prepared for the tests.

I slept in half of the class.

I was just catching up on sleep because I would go to sleep at four o'clock in the morning.

And then I, don't you, don't you still do that?

Don't you go to sleep at four and get up at noon?

Yeah.

I average four, five.

Yeah.

So if I go to sleep at, I think yesterday I went to sleep at four, today I woke up at 11.

So I try to get, try to get seven hours of sleep.

It doesn't happen all the time.

You know, a lot of times I have to, you know, live on five, six hours.

But do you, do you recognize that you're a weirdo?

I'm used to, I'm used to it.

You know what?

I'm a weirdo.

Um, I, I know I'm, I'm do, I do everything in reverse.

My wife keeps telling me like, like you do everything backwards.

So you're, you're, you're studying finance, but you're not doing well because you're running these businesses.

I'm in school just because I have a Jewish mother and she wanted me to go to like, you have to be in college, right?

Or you have to go.

But did they know that you're like, Hey mom, like I bet you I'm making more money than

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you?

Uh, I think she, she kind of knew, I don't know if she knew, but uh, what I was making, I don't remember.

Um, but it was, it was strange.

I was pulling up to my university or to the college.

Uh, I went to Baruch, um, um, New York city, Baruch business of, uh, finance, Zickland business of finance.

Um, and I would pull up in, uh, at some, I would pull up in like a drop top Lexus, like it's \$70,000 car and I was like 19, right?

So 18, whatever it was.

I think it was 18 at that point.

I think, I don't think I even started the paid surgeries at this point.

So this business is just like crushing it.

So like a few years in you've, in your tweet, you said it made over 30 million in profits, like three, four, five years in.

So it's gone really well.

You're paying like a crazy amount of taxes, you said.

So you decide to move, uh, to the burbs a little bit outside of New York city and you like buy a cheap house and cash.

So things are going well, right?

Like it's, but you, you said, you know, I'm a little bored with this or I'm not, I don't really want to go much further into this, in this racket.

I want to try something new.

And then the next business was, uh, mobile fuse, which is around today, right?

Um, so I actually launched around the same time, um, we launched two businesses.

So after so long.

So I, I launched, I launched the, let's call the, the, the, the music content distribution company.

Oh, that's right.

So that, so we didn't own, I didn't own actually lyric sites.

What I did is I built a service, uh, I built a system that connects called ringtone matcher.

And what I realized was there was demand for ringtones and it was all this traffic for, um, for all this music related traffic, especially in lyrics.

And so what I did is I built a service and the other thing I realized that the traffic was very much international, like 70% of a, of a music side or a lyric side was non-U.S.

And I noticed that some of the advertisers, like ringtone advertisers were advertised, they'll, they'll do okay, but they would have only, they could only accept U.S. customers and they could only accept like Verizon customer or only T-Mobile customer.

So I built this thing called ringtone matcher and ringtone matcher basically integrated like 60, um, countries into one system.

So if you have a music site, you could drive, um, that those users to ringtone matcher and ringtone matcher will figure out based on geo, like what country you're in, right?

Based on what carrier you use because it was carrier billing.

So it's important that, you know, I figure out like you have T-Mobile and to match you

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up to a ringtone service that actually, um, is compatible with T-Mobile.

And then the third thing we look for that content is available.

So if you're clicking on, hey, get this, get toxic by Britney Spears ringtone on your phone, I need to make sure that that song is also available in their catalog because some, some ringtone providers had, um, uh, like Warner music and some of, some of them maybe just had the EMI.

There were like four major music companies at the time and, uh, you know, these ringtone providers didn't have all those catalogs.

So they might have one or two at a time.

So I would take all that data and put it into one simple link and how big did that get?

How big did that business get?

I wasn't in front of, ringtone matcher was in front of a half a billion people a month.

Yeah, half a billion.

So, um, and it was everywhere.

I mean, it wasn't just lyric sites.

I was on CBS radio, AOL radio, Yahoo Radio, Last FM, like every, pretty much every music site.

I remember even talking to musically, which is TikTok now, right?

I remember even talking to those guys.

I was talking to, uh, we were talking to WhatsApp in the early days, like when they were just two guys or something, like we wanted to integrate because anytime somebody mentions music or a song or something, like I want it to be, I want my, I want a ringtone matcher there to show up.

So and, but, but, but you're using the word we again, it's not we know, this company was so actually that company, I started ringtone matcher myself.

And I was a one man show at some point I, um, we, you know, there was one little group of guys who were pretty good at dealing with advertisers and, uh, or actually ringtone providers and I felt like I need help on that front.

And so I merged those guys in.

So there were five guys that merged into my company, um, to form, when you say merge, who bought who?

I was a majority owner of the company and then the, the, the five guys had the, like they, they, they had a third of the company I had two thirds.

How big was it when it was just you?

All right, a quick message from our sponsor.

You know, I was thinking about the shortest day of the year earlier and while we technically had the same amount of time as every other day of the year, the lack of daylight makes it feel so much shorter, which is exactly the same kind of feeling as working with disconnected tools.

The work days, the same length as always, but before you know it, we spent three hours just fixing something that was supposed to be automated.

Thankfully HubSpot's all-in-one CRM platform can serve as a single source of truth for managing your customer relationships across marketing, sales, service operations with multiple hubs and over a thousand integrations and an easy to use interface HubSpot lets

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It was just, I was going nuts up, but I think, I believe the year, I think the year we merged, it was 10 million.

Again, just you, 10 million profit with just you.

Do you, why do you think, so this is the, we'll get to the rest in a minute, but why do you think that you find this weird stuff and why don't you hire people?

Two different questions, but how on earth do you find this type of stuff?

You know, it's funny, like I know, I see how organized you are, right?

Like you make your goals, you lay everything out on paper, right?

You're very organized and you could think about it, you ask people for feedback.

I'm totally opposite of that.

I just kind of go with where, like I talk to testings and I guess I'm very curious.

And I could be very, very focused, but if I get distracted, I get very easily distracted, right?

So it could be like sometimes it's a curse, but sometimes it's a blessing.

A lot of times it's a blessing and I come across these interesting things and my curiosity just takes it further.

So when I, so the way I actually came across this thing was because I felt that there was a point of my life where I was seeing Google was just too dominant part of my business and I didn't like that because I didn't want to rely on any one thing.

So I started looking outside of page search for supply.

And I came across these music sites and I actually started testing Rhapsody on them because I had such a good deal with Rhapsody.

I was like, let me start marketing outside of search.

I did okay.

And I had these, you know, I started building these relationships with the music sites.

And then, then I kind of tested a ringtone service and it just crushed.

Like it was not even close.

Like it did three times better.

And I was like, wow, these things did three times better than Rhapsody and that ringtone provider was just covering us just like one or two music labels and like two carriers out of four.

I think I had four, there were four major carriers at the time.

I was like, hold on a second, if it's already doing three times as well, what happens if I start integrating everything globally, right?

So that's how ringtone matcher came about.

Was there, when you launched stuff, what's your first version like?

Junk.

Like you get the idea and it's alive in 12 hours.

It was a kiddie script.

I wrote, this guy was kind of freelancing for me a little bit.

I didn't even want to tell him about the idea.

He's actually a CTO of one of my companies now.

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He was like 15, 16 years old.
And I didn't want to tell him the idea.
So I said, hey, how do you script this?
How do you script that?
So I scripted it myself.
And so yeah, so it was pure junk.
It was literally just a bunch of if and then statements and ASP.
We were running Windows Server on ASP infrastructure.
So I had a bunch of redirects that were just doing a bunch of if and then statements and redirecting people based on certain parameters.
And when you're doing it, are you like, every time I've hung out with you, the reason I like hanging out with you and Joe, I consider Joe one of my best friends.
And so I have like his attitude.
You and Joe have the same attitude, which is like, he's a little more laid back than me and you, I think.
He is, he is, I've never seen him lose his temper.
He is very calm and I'm like, Hey, this didn't work out for this reason.
And he goes, Oh, that's okay.
Like he's super calm, but you have that too.
I think, I think that like, I think that what you have this, like, I don't know if the right word is like, if the right word is like, I don't know what the word is, but it's almost like things I've heard, we're going to get to the rest of the stories because there's like this jewelry business that you started, which is like, seems like even bigger than all the other things that you've done potentially.
And you like do these things where I'm like, but like Val, you don't know anything about that.
And like, you don't even have any employees, like you don't know anything.
But you just are like, yeah, but you know, whatever, I'll just, we'll just go a little bit further and then we'll see what happens.
And then if it, if it sucks, I'll bail.
You know what I mean?
Like you have this like, aw shucks attitude like, Oh, you know, yeah, we'll see what happens.
It's very interesting.
Whereas like, if I was doing what you were doing and I started seeing those results, I'm like, is this illegal?
Am I breaking the law?
Am I going to go to jail?
What is going on?
Like, it's almost like I would have, most people would have self-destructive tendencies when they see this like going so well.
Yeah.
Look, I see that all the time.
I feel like people tend to overthink things and spend a lot of time like analysis paralysis.
And the reason I think a lot of people are successful, like especially somebody like

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me is while somebody's thinking about making perfecting one thing, which by the way, we'll still have a, you know, 60% failure, right?

And that one thing that you just overthought, I rather test 10 things by within that same time period.

And I will likely have, I have a better accuracy or I'll have a better chance of hitting it out of the ballpark with one of those 10 things, maybe more than one of those things.

Yeah.

How did you get into the jewelry business to start with?

So after I sold those two music related companies, which I took like three years off, you know, I thought I retired, but it was anything but I just got, started getting like, my curiosity was just taking me into all different, like I was on all these boards and I was like investing into a bunch of things.

And I realized after three years that I need to build something again.

So I started looking at, I knew that I wanted to do something where it's fixing or disrupting a fragmented space.

I didn't really want to go after like corporate America.

I wanted to go after like mom and pops that when I say mom and pops, it could be like, you know, I'm thinking like car dealerships, right?

They do tens of millions of dollars.

It doesn't mean they're tiny.

All right.

So I wanted to go after something like along those lines.

And I had some investments in the jewelry space, had some family in the jewelry space.

It's a pretty tight knit community.

I just happened to be, had some family that knows that business.

I actually worked as a teenager.

I worked every weekend.

I worked in a jewelry store.

I knew how to fix jewelry.

I mean, I would sit on the bench with a blowtorch at like 15 years old because my cousin taught me.

He was a family business, my aunt and uncle's business.

They had a couple jewelry stores.

And they taught me how to fix jewelry and to, you know, so I knew the business a bit from the retailer's perspective.

It always seemed like a very weird way to do business.

I always had questioned everything like they're doing.

And so the idea was, hey, like these retailers, if we could integrate, build a platform and services and we could integrate into them.

And this is a \$300 billion industry, by the way, globally, which fragmented but controls is actually bigger.

Independence are bigger part of the business, fine jewelry than the majors, the chains.

So I knew that, again, if I could build distribution, but I had to bring some, then there's a lot of power there.

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But I have to bring value.

And that's where my expertise in data and marketing, digital, all that came into fruition.

So we basically put this thing together, we integrate into the stores and help them grow, help them bring customers cut costs, increase their revenue.

How much did you invest to start it?

I mean, to start it, I think we started off a couple of million.

So you put \$2 million of your own money?

In the beginning, yeah.

How big is this?

But you've done more.

I think you've put more in since.

How big is this going to be?

I put in way more.

I mean, at this point, I put in eight figures into this business.

I think it's a multi-billion dollar company in the future.

For real?

You think it's a multi-billion dollar company?

Like to sell?

Yeah.

Market cap.

I believe that, hey, I don't know if there's any really big enough to buy my company or this company.

We actually have a lot of people this time around.

It's no longer just Val.

We have a lot of employees.

I believe this company will be, if it's successful, we could do what we need to do and we could really help all these retailers step up their game.

I don't think there's really a company in that space that will be big enough to acquire us.

But are you the CEO of that company?

Is that smart?

I mean, that doesn't seem like you're just, you get up at 11 AM and you go to bed at 4.

How are you the CEO of a company that could be a billion dollar company?

Yeah, no, good question.

We have a great team that is able to execute at different, how many people?

It's hard to say.

We became pretty global, but our offices outside of US are not all, they're not employees, right?

So all in, if I had to talk about factories, our tech teams, our marketing teams, we're probably talking about 70 people at this point.

Wow.

And who's like, you're not running the day to day of the business, are you?

Oh, hell yeah.

Yeah, 95% of the time goes into this business.

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So then are you like talking with the employees and things like that?

I mean, you're like running all hands meetings and things like that?

Yeah, I'm not big on meetings.

I'll be honest with you, but I'm very accessible to all my team.

I mean, everybody on my team has access to me.

I go into the office in the city.

We actually had the, we were in the office June, June, 2020.

I mean, we had, you know, COVID, like it was ghost town in the city and we had to figure out how to be in the office because it's not an, it's not just a digital ad business that

I could just operate from work from home, right?

We had to have people in the offices and we did all kinds of things.

We got cars to pull people in to the office, but anyway, yeah, I'm there, I'm in the weeds.

But it's not like, you're kind of downplaying it.

I invested in one of your properties.

We bought a Sixplex in Greenpoint, I think.

I forget.

Well, we essentially bought land, right?

We bought a house because it's going to be knocked down.

We're going to build a brand new, we're going to ground up construction.

It's going to be like a nice condo building.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

That's what I mean, but I didn't even look at the details.

I was just like, anything that Val does, I'm part of, but it's way bigger than you're, you're just saying like it's a project.

I mean, I think you've bought like a hundred million dollars with the real estate, right?

No, I haven't, I haven't bought a hundred million.

We have six projects, a couple of them already completed.

Third one is just about to be completed.

Actually, the first two were completed and completely sold out.

The third one is about to be completed and go on the market.

And then we have three other projects and they're all getting bigger and bigger.

The value of the combined sale value of value of those projects would be approaching a hundred million dollars.

What are you thinking on now?

What excites you now?

And someone asked a good question, which is, what is the equivalent of ringtones today?

What's the equivalence of like, it's just crazy that it's just like, you're kind of like this like digital cowboy.

You're just like this one guy in the wild west doing this shit with like no rules.

It just, I just think it's hilarious that you are just a pirate who's taking it to the extreme.

Where are the digital pirates at right now?

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It has to be like TikTok.

What do you mean?

It's, you know, you look for like those spaces that haven't been touched, right?

I guess people ask me, and I think that's what you're saying, like what can you, what can be marketed these days and how to get that kind of scale?

And I don't, it's hard because what I've seen over my career is that the windows of opportunity, those white spaces, right?

The windows, windows are becoming shorter and shorter and shorter every iteration, right?

There was the page search probably lasted a good six years.

After that, or around that same time, there was display that probably lasted a little less.

And then there was social media that, that window probably, you know, the arbitrage window, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

That probably lasted two, three years at best.

Now you talk, you know, now you've got like Instagram and TikTok and you've got the Instagram Reels.

I mean, those are probably also one year windows of opportunity.

If you could kind of catch that lightning and build on it, then you've got something, but your, your window.

And it's all rooted in distribution, which is how do you get distribution quickly?

And you're saying that you think that's TikTok.

Do you think that window is still open?

I think if you have a knack for understanding how get virality or get content, then, then you have your own distribution.

If you don't have that knack, you got to figure out how to work with people that have that, that access.

So there's one company that could work with all the SamPars, right?

All the podcasters.

How much is that worth?

Like we're using a platform here right now, right?

That is the smart, they're, they're doing the right thing.

Like they're focusing on guys like you who have all this access, but they're not selling anything, right?

They're just selling you a platform.

If somebody could sell, figure out how to sell a product across number of podcasts, that's worth a lot.

And you could sell, move a lot of product.

And by the way, it doesn't have to be podcasts.

What about all the TikTokers who are doing all those dances, right?

I know, I know like for one company, they, they scale to like 80 million in sales a few years ago.

I'm not going to mention the name of it, but they scale up to like 80 million in sales just on the back of YouTube influencers.

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What was the product?

It was cosmetics.

What was that?

Cosmetics.

So it was just like makeup or something or lotion.

Yeah.

Yeah.

The numbers were just insane.

And yeah, it was just a long, it wasn't just big influencers, even the like thousands of mediocre influencers or the smaller ones that just drove it.

So stuff like that, like latch on to something that is big, especially if you could latch on to like the long tail of it, because not a lot of people look at the long tail part of businesses.

Well, so one thing I wonder, you know, like this thing that Val talks about of testing out 10 different things before the other guy can put his pants on, right?

Like you're building your perfect thing that's going to take you six months before you even get to market.

Great.

I'm going to test 10 things in that time.

That sounds really nice.

But also like, I guess I'll actually ask Sam first and I'll ask you Val.

Like what do you think it is about Val?

What do you think it is about either his skillset or his personality that allows him to do that much testing where other people just like can't figure that out apparently?

I think that this is a common thread that I've seen.

My buddy Joe is just like this.

There's this thing particularly, I find it amongst immigrants or children of immigrants.

And maybe because they've like experienced some type of hardship where they're like, like, dude, I've experienced some crazy shit or my family has experienced crazy shit.

I have zero fear in looking like a fool.

If that's the worst, if the worst that's going to happen is I'm going to look stupid or lose a tiny amount of money, I'm okay with that.

And I don't, so I don't have any fear about that.

That's what, that's what I think I've noticed.

That's the trend I've noticed amongst people like Val.

Look, I think there's a, I think that's, I think there's a huge, that's a huge factor.

And one of the things that I look at, like I'm raising kids now, right?

How do I make sure that they kind of, because they're not going to grow up the same way I grew up, right?

They're not going to come out the resources they have, the access they have.

It's very different from what I grew up with.

So what I think I realized is the power is in resourcefulness, okay?

I was able to make a lot or do a lot, I should say, whether it's money or whatever it is, right?

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It doesn't have to be just money.

It could be whatever, whatever excites you, right?

But I was able to do a lot with very little, but it's because I had no choice and I had very little.

Like, we weren't poor.

Like, I didn't come from poverty or anything like that, but, but again, my parents couldn't afford a computer for me for the first six years of my life here, right?

So I got to think, like, how do I recreate that?

And you can't really recreate that for your kids, but I figured, okay, I'm not, you know, I'm not going to give my kids everything on a silver platter.

So, so, I mean, you just talked about my son, like he is, he's, his DNA is very like, like mine, like he's way ahead of me because he has all these tools, like, you know, he has a computer way before me.

I didn't buy him a computer.

I made him save up the money.

I don't care how he does it, birthdays, work, whatever.

During that time, he researched all parts and everything.

I think at the age of like seven or eight, he built a computer, bought the parts by himself.

He built a computer from scratch by himself.

I didn't even help him.

That's crazy.

So he now built two computers, like, and he taught himself how to code and, um, so I, I suppress resources for my kids systematically.

Not like I don't feed them, like they're, they're, they're, they're very, they're doing just fine.

That's good to hear.

And everything.

You live in a nice neighborhood, but I systematically, um, make sure that they're not, uh, given all the resources because that's how you naturally learn to become resourceful.

What do you think it is?

And ultimately it's about doing more with less, essentially you're saying.

Yeah.

Yeah.

But it has to start from day one.

Are you driven by money?

Yes and no.

Um, I, I, yes, because it's, uh, it's, it's, it's, it's, uh, it's kind of like a score.

Right.

I don't see how money, it's like a, it's a number in a bank account, right?

Like, you don't, it's not like back in the days where you look, you know, you, you know, it's not like we're Scrooge McDuck.

Like when you get to jump through the, through the vault of cash, right?

Like I, I, um, we watched as a kid and I was like, wow, I want to be that guy one day.

Um, um, and, um, but, uh, no, I think, I think what I'm driven really is by just winning.

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And, um, there is, I think there is a bit of sense in me of, um, that I'm one step from losing it all.

You still feel that way?

Uh, I feel like it's still possible.

I think, I think it's a, I think it's like an immigrant thing, um, probably.

By the way, I feel exactly the same way.

I was like in bed last night telling my wife, I was like, I need to go to like a therapist or something.

I'm freaking out, we're going to lose everything is this is all going away.

I feel the exact, I feel like I, for a long time I like had a plan on where I would go if I was homeless, like I still believe that it's all going away in a weird way, kind of excite you.

I don't know about homeless, but that you got a chance to figure it out from scratch again.

Yeah.

Cause I like, uh, it does kind of make me because when you have nothing, it's kind of fun to play games because it's just easier to bet sometimes.

You can't bet as much, but it's kind of exciting to be like just like a hood rat with nothing like which I, which I was, um, it is kind of exciting, but I get fear of like the anxiety I feel of losing everything.

Like I, like I have so many spreadsheets that map out like, all right, when the money gets to this number, then I got to go and panic and get a job and start like uber-ing.

Like I have like a plan for that.

We, um, the reason why I had you on and Ben, the reason why I wanted to show you this guy is now it's, he's hard to explain, but I wanted people to understand like a truly unique and original thinker and I don't, you know, I, you're going to have to come on again, but like do you, does that, do you understand what I'm saying, but it's very original thinking. Yeah.

And you can see that just in the way that like you've out have attacked, have tackled like a, a different set of problems than anyone else I've ever talked to, uh, just like, I've never talked to someone who's like, yeah, I tackle bring tones and then ad networks and then peer to peer lending and then the jewelry business.

Like I just think that kind of belies how your mind functions differently than other people.

Do you, do you feel that way?

Like, do you feel that you just have unique perspective?

Have you met anyone that looks at the world the way you do?

And if you acknowledge that it's weird, because, and you're saying that you didn't, you didn't actually realize it was weird until I talked about you in the podcast like half a year ago, which is weird.

Cause how old are you at like 39, 38 and you're now just realizing that you're, you're, you're an oddball.

Um, yeah, so I, I, I didn't see myself that way until you did the whole expose, um, with that show on that, on that one episode, um, that you didn't tell me about, but, uh, after

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our lunch, but, um, I know, I told Joe, I was like, dude, I'd never do that.

I almost always asked for permission before I talk about it, but I just was too excited and I forgot.

Um, it was, I have a shot, I have a story, but I'll tell you that after, um, okay.

But, um, so to me, like when you said like, oh, this guy goes from this industry to that industry, he's like jumping all over the place and he's just, you know, kind of successful or successful and doing it.

This is like crazy.

I was like, huh, I didn't, I never thought of it myself that way that, but they make sense.

Like, I don't know.

I keep jumping different categories.

I guess again, I'm like, that curiosity just kicks in and, and, and I just, but I, I go after it instead of just what if, you know, I just kind of go after it.

But, um, no, I, I, I, until now I really haven't realized, uh, that, that how odd that is.

But thank, thank you for letting me know that I'm, I'm really strange.

I just think that like there's just a bunch of unique, there's just a bunch of unique things about you.

And I think it's so cool.

And when I say weird and odd, that's a really good compliment, by the way.

Yeah.

Listen, I know you well enough now to, to know that's a compliment.

And, um, uh, so, so the funny story about, uh, and before you, I was pretty under, under radar, right?

Like, yeah, you can find stuff.

I mean, you have to really look like nobody really put it out there, right?

And so then Joe tells me like, you're going to do the podcast and I didn't tell my wife and then the podcast comes out.

I'm like, Hey, Sarah, um, um, the, the, um, this guy did a podcast on me.

She's like, who cares about a podcast?

What?

She's like, you know, but he's going to talk about me.

She's like, who cares?

Like what, what a couple hundred people going to listen.

I'm like, apparently this guy has like a million people listening.

She's like, oh, great.

Um, she's like, did he ask you permission?

I was like, not really.

So I don't really know what he's going to talk about.

Um, so he's like, okay.

So the thing comes out, like, so we're listening to it and, and you keep saying Val, you keep saying Val, Val, Val, like you never say, uh, right?

Never say my last name.

And then you, you and Sean go into like this tangent talking about red pill and blue pill

or whatever.

So she's like, and so we thought, like it said, Val part is over, right?

She's like, okay, it wasn't so bad.

He never mentioned your last name.

Who'd have, who'd have to figure out who's Val and then after you went off to your tangent with the, about the pills, and you're like, Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention his full name.

Let me spell it out for you and you literally spelled my last name.

So she's like, I'm going to kill this guy.

Oh, she was bad.

She was bad.

She's, she's very, she's very, she's very nice.

Everything I thought that everything we said, you could find publicly and we didn't reveal anything like crazy.

And um, I tried to only like, I just read your LinkedIn.

That's basically all I did.

Yeah.

You can find stuff about, but it's, you know, it's one thing to the information to be out there for somebody to look for it.

Um, but it's another one when you're on full blast, right?

Like, and it's being discovered.

Um, so right by audiences.

So, so that's all new to me.

I know.

I felt like an asshole when that happened.

I'm normally always good at that.

So like if someone, if we're out with friends and people are talking about stuff, I'm like, Hey, is this private or not?

Like they have to make sure they say it's private around me.

Um, you're, you're, you're a nice guy.

So I'll, I'll let it slide.

Yeah.

I blew up your spot.

And yeah, I, that's something I remembered the day that happened.

I was like, Oh my God, Joe.

I didn't even realize it.

Cause sometimes when Sean and I were recording, I forget that it's the podcast.

I just like, it's just like friends talking to one another and I forget.

I'm like, Oh my God.

I forgot that was, I just said that on air.

I can't believe that.

So that, that was one of those examples, but, um, dude, this was awesome.

What do you think, Ben?

This is, this is pretty badass.

This is great.

It's got me fired up to go, I know you're doing your Airbnb's this year, Sam.

That's kind of your thing.

Val told me not to do it though.

Right before this podcast, he said, don't do it.

Oh really?

Yeah.

I think I'm going to do it anyway, but he, I told him these two ideas that I might work on and he basically said, uh, dude, I was like, should I work on going hard on content?

Should I work on this job board idea or this Airbnb thing?

And he goes, do content.

And I was like, Oh, that's what I don't want to do.

I said, don't do it now.

Well, I didn't actually, he literally sent me his response like three minutes before the podcast.

So I didn't entirely read the, I haven't read the whole, his whole reply, but he's, he's like the, he's like the, the, the, the layup thing that's just going to bog you down.

That's what he said.

Yeah.

I think something you could do in the future, but not now.

I do feel inspired after hearing for about and from Val of like, I need to be trying more things.

Like just taking more swings and like putting more experiments out there to see kind of what, what lands.

I like that.

Yeah.

Throw stuff against the wall.

Like, see what sticks.

Um, what's the worst?

But when you throw, most people throw stuff against the wall, it's a half ass attempt.

When you throw stuff against the wall, like you spend money or like you said that when you were like, when you didn't have much, you spent like six or \$7,000 on ads to see if this X thing could work.

Whereas most people will like, like, oh, that's, I'll lose a couple hundred bucks.

I don't want to do that.

It's like you, you actually try, but that was an accident.

Like, like in that thread, that was an accident.

There were no budget caps back then.

So I turned it on and go to sleep and I woke up to a \$6,000 spend.

Yeah.

But you still did it.

I mean, I guess just like most people just don't do your, your attempts are like good.

So when I was going through all these music sites, you know how I get their attention?

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I would go to a site and I would just kind of, through Alexa or whatever, I kind of do how much traffic they have.

And I knew these guys were outside the country and to get their attention, I would literally email them and say, Hey, I'll give you \$100,000 or give you \$50,000 or give you \$20,000 prepaid a wire tomorrow just so you could test my ringtone matcher link for seven days.

If you don't like it, it doesn't make enough money.

Take the link off.

We never talk again.

If you want, if you like how much it generates, we'll sign, you'll sign a contract and everybody's signed a contract because those two text links were generating like five times, like somebody who was making like a, like there were sites that were making like top sites were making like \$100,000 a month.

I would pay him \$400,000 a month on top of that.

And how many people actually took you up and said, all right, fine, I'll get the money and then I'll put yours.

They all wanted the money first.

Oh, the money.

My success right on that email was just, I mean, who the hell is going to take money like upfront?

I would be like, you know what, I don't need you to do it upfront.

I'll give it a try just because you're serious.

And you actually told the story on pumps podcast because you like, you were like bold, but you have high integrity because like, I think there was a guy who you owed a lot of money to because they were a customer of your, or they were a vendor and you just had a bill that you had to pay them and they like changed their address or something.

And you like, dude, I can't find you.

I owe you \$60,000 and you like held onto the \$60,000 for like a long time and you just were seeking them out everywhere.

Like, Hey, where'd you go?

I'm going to pay you your money.

Yeah.

Yeah.

It pays off.

Like we, because we had so many international people in the music business, when the great recession hit and they were in all these countries and where their banks, a lot of them were, banks were located in weird areas, weird countries like Cyprus.

And they would literally tell us, Hey, stop, stop wiring this money.

We don't trust the bank.

We're talking about what I got to get a new bank account.

Like we held their money for, they told us to hold their money for, I mean, we had millions in our bank account that didn't belong to us.

And all these sides basically told me, told me, like I was kind of like their bank for a while because they didn't want to get paid and they didn't, they didn't trust the bank.

It was phenomenal to me.

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Like I couldn't understand that they, they, they trust us, trust me with their money for it.

I mean, it was, I think some, in some cases up to a year, we were holding their money because he had nowhere to send it.

That's crazy.

Dude, this is a good conversation.

I'm happy you came on.

It's awesome.

Listen, you're, you're doing, I told you before, I love your podcast.

It's very, it's very like, it's, it's very like layman terms, right?

It's actually takes a lot of intellect in my opinion to dumb things down.

Well, thank you.

I appreciate that.

It helps.

Yeah.

Oftentimes I wonder like, I've, all of my friends are English as a second language.

Maybe a, it's like, I'm always amazed.

Can you imagine coming to another country where you don't speak the language at like 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and then like just crushing it.

So I think that's just like amazing.

I've got a bunch of friends who are ESLs and they'll, they'll like, I'll help, I'll help them write stuff because they're just a little rough and I'm like, dude, how are you so badass?

I just, I'm amazed that you, you're, I'm just amazed at some of these guys.

Yeah.

And you're one of those people.

Yeah.

Whether, whether you're a cell, I'm like, my English is pretty good now, but I still can't put my thoughts together in a way that makes it so interesting for people to understand and you know how to break that down.

So like, you know, you help me with some of my, some of my, you know, one of my pieces on that.

So that's, that's power.

Well, thank you.

I appreciate you coming on.

This is badass.

I appreciate you guys having me on.