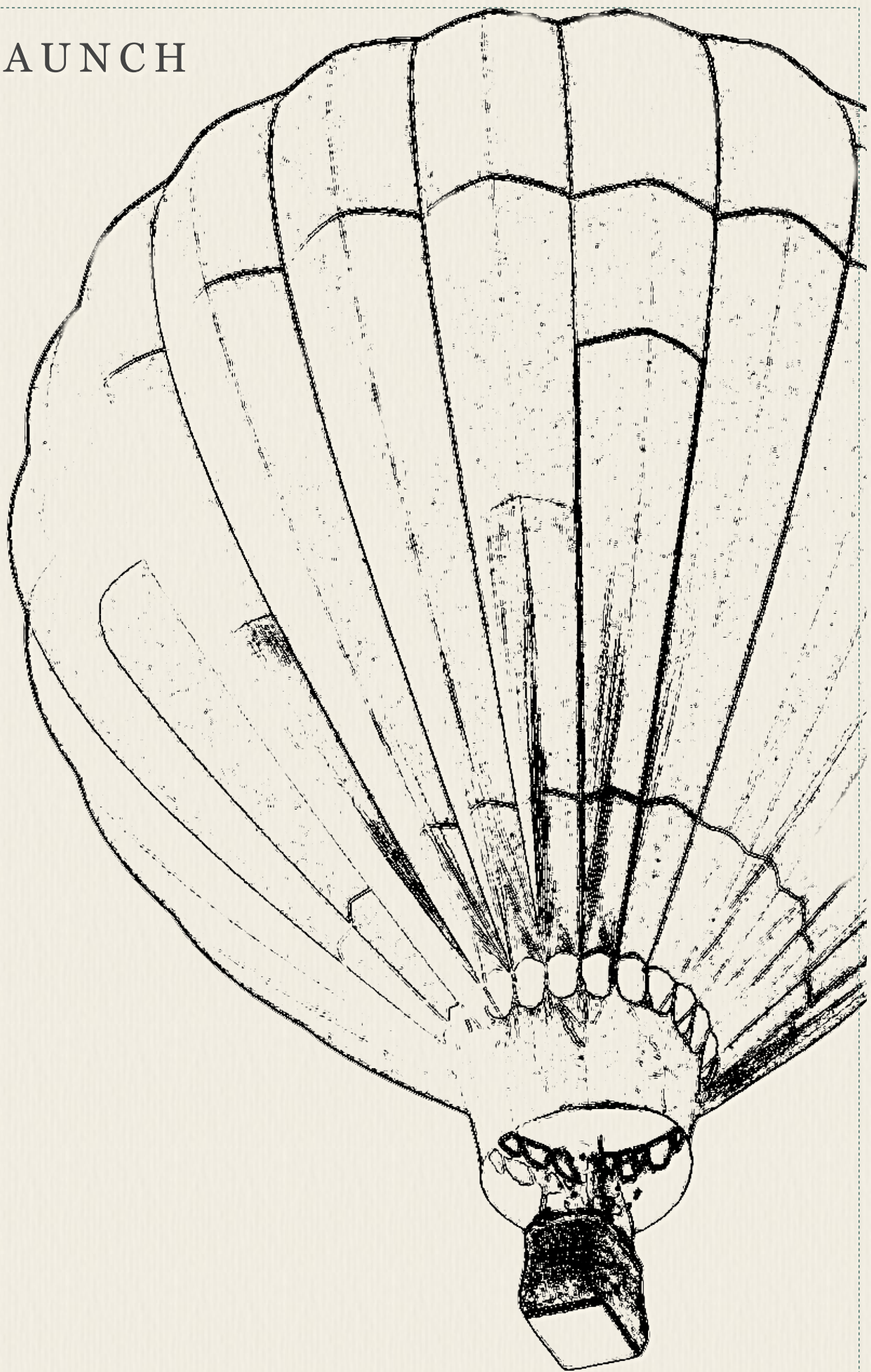


BUILD AND LAUNCH  
MINI-BOOK



Writing



# Writing good stuff

After I published my essay, “**This is a web page**”, I heard from a lot of writers.



Many were impressed with the amount of traction it had received. They emailed me and asked for my advice: “how can I *really* reach an audience?”

Instead of replying purely from my point of view, I decided to contact my favorite writers and ask them this question:

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*How do you write good content that people care about?*

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First: why is writing important?

I have a varied audience: it’s a mix of product people, marketing folks, and content producers. Writing is a skill that transcends all of these disciplines. Simply put: good products, good marketing, and good content all require words on a page.

Words are powerful because they enable us to reach out to people and influence them.

People were so impacted by “**This is a web page**” that they asked me if they could translate it into their native language. At the time of writing, it’s been translated into 16 different languages.

Writing is also a great way to test out ideas. For example: if you’re thinking about building a product, you could start with a blog post and see if the idea behind the product resonates.

## Second: why is having good content important?

What's amazing about the web is that it empowers creative people. We can create something on our own, and share it with thousands around the world.

My son is 7. He just published his **first video** on YouTube. But he's not the only grade schooler making video game walkthroughs; there are **literally thousands**. This illustrates one of the main problems facing writers (and other content producers): **commoditization**.

Like my son, we as writers have a lot of competition. If we want to rise above the fray, we need to write pieces that are different, compelling and unique.

I hope that the advice that follows inspires you to do just that.



My name is Justin Jackson. I'm passionate about building products that delight customers.

To learn more about me, check out my website:  
[justinjackson.ca/about](http://justinjackson.ca/about)

# It's not for you, it's for them

*by Derek Sivers*

You're posting for them, not you. If it's just for you, you can keep it in your diary. So whatever goes out into the world has to be worth taking someone's time.

#1 = Ask, "What is surprising about this?"

If it's not surprising, then you're not telling them anything they don't already know.

#2 = Ask, "Are all of these words necessary?"

Then cut out every un-necessary word. I often pay translators to translate my blog posts to other languages, so I really am paying by the word.

Great way to make yourself succinct:

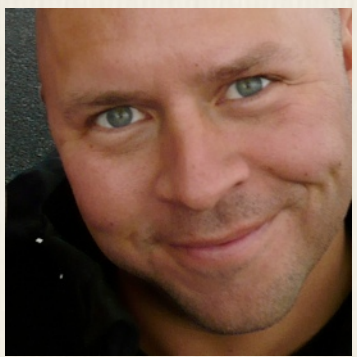
- Drop the tangents and disclaimers.
- Save a side point for another post.
- Having one point per post will cut through the attention fog better than a big multi-faceted rambling.

## #3 = Ask, "How will this help them?"

Are you just venting? Or is this something constructive and actionable that people can use to improve their life in some way?

## Inspiration

Use any of these questions as inspiration to keep developing your idea before posting it to the world. **If it's not surprising yet, look for the surprising element.** Think of a way that this idea can be really helpful to people. Then chop out all the unnecessary words.



Derek Sivers created CD Baby in 1998. It became the largest seller of independent music online, with \$100M in sales for 150,000 musicians.

Visit his website: [sivers.org](http://sivers.org)



# How Jason Fried writes

*by Justin Jackson*

I recently asked my friend Jason Fried how he writes. He responded:

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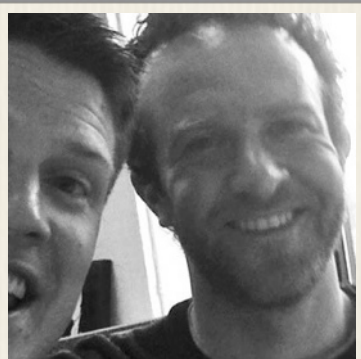
*"I write the things I want to read."*

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Jason has a popular company blog (*37signals' Signal vs Noise*), a viral ebook (*Getting Real*), and a best-selling hardcover (*Rework*).

I remember being introduced to *Getting Real*, his ebook. I read one chapter and I was hooked. Simply put: I wanted to read more.

Jason is a man of simple rules. He doesn't overcomplicate things. His strategy is simple: "when I write something, I want to make sure it's something I'd enjoy reading. Always."



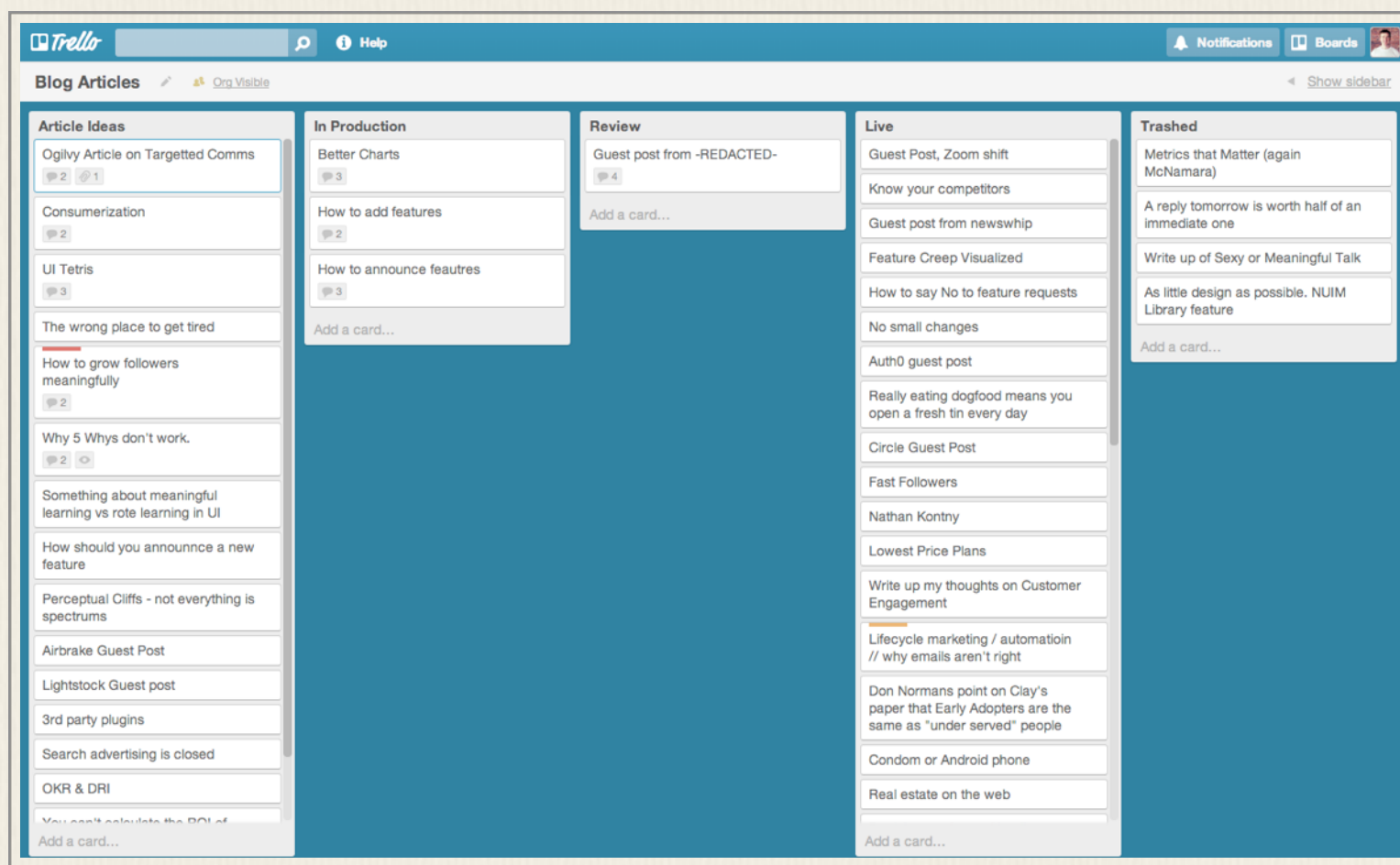
Jason Fried (and his co-founder David Heinemeier Hansson) released one of the first *Software as a Service* products on the web: Basecamp in 2004.

Find his writing at: [37signals.com/svn/writers/jf](http://37signals.com/svn/writers/jf)

# Keep it simple

*by Des Traynor*

My writing process is pretty simple: I keep a Trello board full of ideas I'm still thinking about. As I go through a day at **Intercom**, or as I read through my feeds, I'll occasionally gather data, anecdotes, or examples, that support a point. I add these to the cards as they occur.



When I feel I have enough fresh ideas, I start writing & preparing images. I try to support every key point I make with 3 things, an explanation, an example, and an illustration. I



prepare visuals in wireframe/sketch form, and our visual design Frantisek turns them into beautiful graphics.

In terms of finding good content people care about, it's all about fresh thinking.

**You have to say something that either:**

- hasn't been covered well before (Being first doesn't matter)
- is contrary to popular opinions (e.g. All content is marketing, If it's important don't hack it)
- or supports popular opinions but argued from a new standpoint (Strategy means saying no)



Des Traynor is the COO at [Intercom](#), where designs the end user experience.

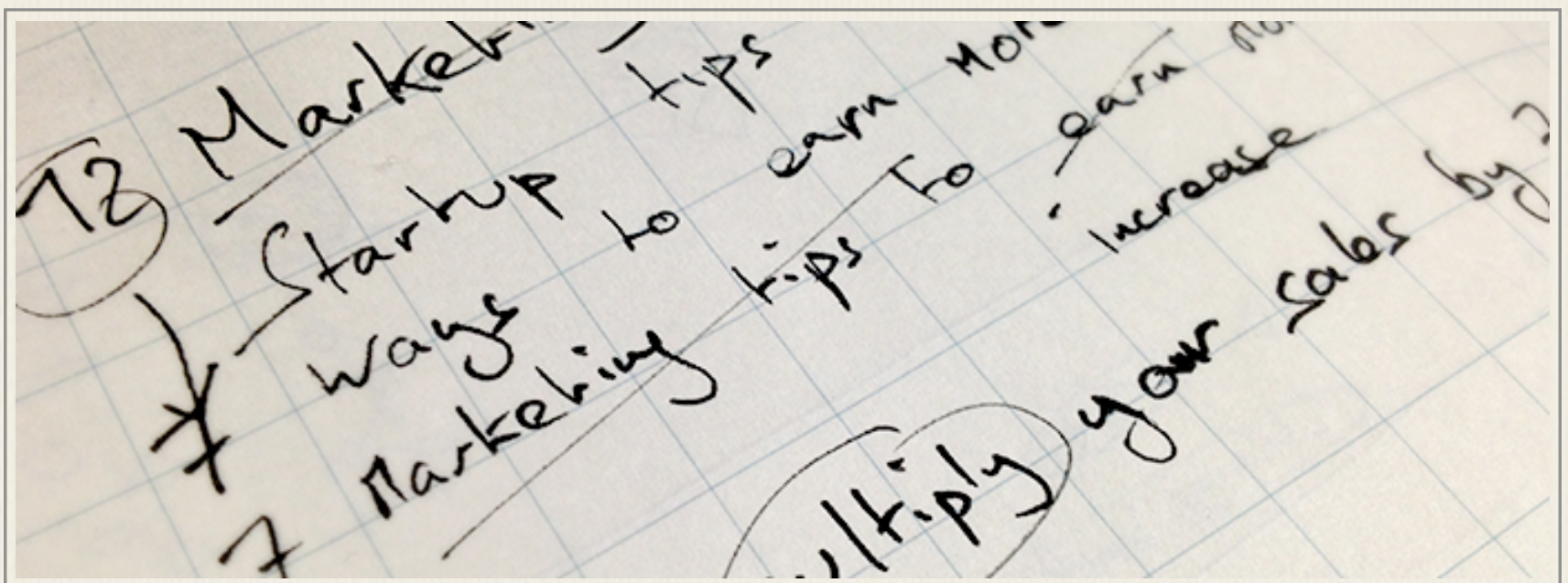
He writes about UX, Customer Acquisition/Experience and Startups at [insideintercom.io](#)

# Teach the reader

*by Sacha Greif*

**Personally, I think that the main feature of good content is that it teaches the reader something new.**

Sadly, I think the vast majority of online writing fails to meet that criteria. It seems that for every new idea you'll encounter online, you'll find nine other similar articles that simply reformulate the same concept in a different way.



So how do you make sure that you're not falling into that same trap? **Simply put, you have to create value first.** If you have years of experience in your field, that value can simply come from your own knowledge. But even if you're just starting out, you can still create value by doing research, compiling stats, translating a text, or interviewing someone.

In other words, don't think about writing as the goal in itself. Instead, think of it as merely the medium that delivers the value you've created to the reader. So focus on how you'll create that value first, and I promise writing will come naturally!

(Although I'll admit that yes, that's a lot more work than simply telling the world why you hate iOS 7!)



Sacha Greif is the creator of **Sidebar** and **Folyo**, as well as co-author of **Discover Meteor**.

You can find him at [sachagreif.com](http://sachagreif.com)



# Writing is product

*by Ryan Hoover*

Writing is introspection, therapy, branding, learning, teaching, relationship building.

I write for all the reasons above, but it's my genuine interest and passion to articulate and share my ideas, that fuels my writing.

As I've invested more time in writing this past year, I've begun to see the fruits of my labor. To my surprise, I've built an audience - albeit small - of people who genuinely care about what I have to say. And several of those followers have asked me about my writing process.

Startups and writing have a lot in common. In some cases, I treat my writing the same as building a product.

## The First Rule

As mentioned, I'm inherently motivated to write. But not about just anything. As in startups, you better be passionate about the market, product, and problem to persevere. And like product, writing isn't easy but passion carries you through as labor

becomes fun and routine. The best writing comes from a place of honesty, authenticity, and passion.

## Measure Interest

Instrumenting lean startup practices in my writing allows me to measure interest in a topic or idea that I think others care about. I use **Help Me Write** to record blog post ideas to share with the nascent community. In some cases, the idea is met with little interest and other times there's an explosion of appeal (**see Blog-First Startups**).

I also pitch questions or comments on Twitter about a specific topic I'm considering writing about. I recently tweeted:

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*There's a lot of talk about product design, less on company design. Culture and org structure is arguably most important.*

— Ryan Hoover (@rrhoover) **July 12, 2013**

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Clearly there's interest in company design, something I'm particularly fascinated in as of late.

## The Braintrust

Getting validation through a short description or tweet is useful but as with any product, you never really know if people will like it until they get their hands on it. Once I've written my first draft, I share it with a group of bloggers and people I respect

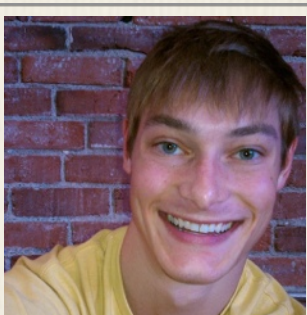
using Draft. Their feedback is immensely valuable, providing suggestions to improve the piece, identifying inaccuracies, and poking holes in my ideas to make it better.

## So Now What?

What do you do after it's written, published, and (hopefully) met with enthusiasm? Most writers stop there. I always encourage readers to follow me on Twitter and subscribe to my email list (see what I did there?). After all, as with any product launch, you might get a spike in traffic but without a way to re-engage your audience, attention is short-lived.

I also do things that don't scale, personally thanking everyone that shares my work on Twitter or subscribes to my email list. It doesn't take much effort but builds a deeper relationship with my readers as they often reply with enthusiasm, surprised by the personal note.

That said, writing isn't for everyone and neither is building a product. But if you have the passion and capability, act on it. Writing is a powerful tool that can change people's thoughts and sometimes even their life.



Ryan Hoover is a Product Manager, and the creator of **Startup Edition**.

Visit his website: [ryanhoover.me](http://ryanhoover.me)



# Write to one person

*by Nathan Barry*

**To write good content that people care about, write to one person.** A specific person. My book **Designing Web Applications** was written to my brother-in-law, Philip. I wrote what I knew would help him.

Writing to a specific person helps keep your writing style natural and authentic, rather than too casual or condescending.

If your writing is truly valuable to that one person, your ideas will be valuable to many.



Nathan Barry is a designer/writer at [nathanbarry.com](http://nathanbarry.com)

He is also the founder of **ConvertKit**, a email marketing platform aimed at writers and startups.

## Thank you for reading! What's the next step?

In this mini-book we've covered what it takes to write exceptional content for the web.

**You writing good stuff is only the beginning. For something to get noticed on the web, you can't depend on people finding you. You need amplification.**

*good content x amplification = bigger audience*

That's the idea behind my upcoming course: *Amplification*. You'll learn how to take a good piece of content, and get it noticed by thousands of readers. This includes the tricks and weird secrets I've only discovered through experimentation. I'll also reveal my traffic numbers!

**You can use these tactics to:**

- Promote yourself as a writer, speaker, or authority
- Build a mailing list for future product launches
- Increase traffic to your corporate blog
- Write compelling landing pages that attract visitors (and sales)

**The course includes:**

- A PDF eBook with all my stats, lessons, and step-by-step instructions
- A video walkthrough of the lessons

*You can pre-order the course now and get \$10 off >*

**Who am I?** I'm Justin Jackson, and I've been building things with computers since 1985. I sold my first product in the 10th grade. I built my first website in 1993. Now, I'm the Product Manager for a profitable web app, and the host of the **Product People** podcast. I'm passionate about building products that delight customers.

You can email me a [words@bizbox.ca](mailto:words@bizbox.ca).