The Micropreneur Manifesto

How to Stay Solo,
Bleed Passion,
and Build Products
that Matter

Rob Walling

There has never been a better time in history to be an entrepreneur.

The Internet has created an unprecedented opportunity for solo founders to create and launch products that make a difference, products that provide amazing value to niche markets and change their own little corner of the world.

At this moment in history, we as entrepreneurs are able to do something never before conceived: launch a product completely on our own, with no employees and no outside funding, from anywhere in the world.

And these single founders creating products for niche markets are known by a distinct name: micropreneurs.

Micropreneurs may write software. They might design themes for a blogging platform. They may produce exquisite wedding invitations or how-to books.

Micropreneurs are agile, inspired, independent knowledge seekers who can't live with the 9-to-5 status quo.

If this resonates with you, read on. This manifesto attempts to distill the key points you'll need as you begin your micropreneur journey. I learned every one of them the hard way, so you don't have to.

#1 | It's Much Harder Than It Looks

Micropreneurship is not a "get rich quick" enterprise. It's not even a "get rich" enterprise.

The success of some micropreneurs has made it all the rage to "start a company and make millions." But there's one problem: nearly everyone who tries it invests hundreds of hours and winds up with a product no one wants.

You may have tried it yourself. But it didn't work.

It was too hard to nail down an idea…

Too hard to get started…

Too hard to find the time to complete anything…

Too hard to find customers…

Too hard to maintain the frenetic pace of two jobs…

It's much harder than it looks. Accepting that will put you ahead of most people who try.

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#2 | There is Power in Working Alone

Steve Wozniak, arguably the greatest engineer of our time, said in his book iWoz:

> If you're that rare engineer who's an inventor and also an artist, I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take.

> That advice is: Work alone.

> …You're going to be best able to design revolutionary products and features if you're working on your own. Not on a committee. Not on a team.

Most people don't have what it takes to succeed as an entrepreneur. If you're working with someone who wants to take shortcuts or doesn't know what they're doing, they are going to slow you down. And even the smallest amount of drag can keep you from success.

#3 | Focus On Your Strengths

When you work alone, you are the sole practitioner—the only one making things happen. If you drop the ball, there is no one else to pick it up.

For this reason, you need to focus on your strengths. In the long run you will be happier and more successful if you do this, instead of trying to overcome weaknesses.

If you stink at public speaking, don't work on becoming a better public speaker. Instead, choose a market that won't require you to speak publicly.

If you have an amazing gift for writing, find a product where blogging will be an exceptionally productive marketing approach.

#4 | Freelancing is Dangerous

As you look for a way out of our job you may be tempted by a seemingly easy way out: freelancing. You might have heard that doing freelance work is a great way to break free. Maybe you've even taken the plunge.

Every corporate cog dreams of doing freelance work because they think it consists of working in a coffee shop with attractive baristas serving free lattes, cutting a deal on your cell phone just before logging off for the day around noon to go catch a matinee.

Bzzzzzzzzzzz.

The real story is getting a call at 7pm on Friday from an angry client telling you that their site hasn't been updated, or the server going down at midnight and having to take care of it while you're on vacation.

With freelance work, you essentially trade your one boss for many—except now they're called clients. And they don't pay for health care or vacation days, or worry about your job satisfaction. Some won't even feel obligated to pay you for the work you've done.

So while it may seem tempting, freelancing typically results in working more hours, not less. Which means it will take you that much longer to get your product launched.

I've lost count of the people I've met who became freelancers years ago as a temporary step to launching their own product. But the inertia of the hourly income vortex is too strong, and most people never make it out for long.

#5 | Seek Leverage

That said, for a micropreneur, dollars for hours is death. If you build a business where your earnings directly correlate to your hours worked then you aren't a micropreneur. You're working fast food.

To become a micropreneur you must let go of the employee mentality.

Forget freelancing. Forget consulting. Forget selling your time.

The way to escape it is to develop a product. It can be a software product. A website. A book. A song. An eBook. A game. A WordPress template.

Build it once. Sell it forever. That is leverage.

#6 | Stay Away from "Moonshot" Ideas

If your business plan relies on raising gobs of money or achieving "critical mass" with an audience, you will probably fail.

The press glorifies ideas that have a .00000001% chance of succeeding. They do this because it sells magazines.

Ignore the next big thing. By the time the press is writing about it it's already too late. Don't set out to build the next social network, mobile app, viral game, or social network mobile app viral game. You will fail.

Keep it simple. Keep it niche. Solve a problem.

Solve a real problem, a problem experienced by a group of people you can reach in one place. Don't try to help all small business owners; the market is massive and impossible to reach without millions in the bank.

But electrical contractors with under $1M in revenue? Boutique wineries? People who collect Matchbox cars? They have problems and they hang out in the same virtual places.

Keep it simple. Keep it niche. Solve a problem.

#7 | Product Last. Market First.

If you're going to solve a problem, find the problem before investing any time in your product. This means you must talk with people who may one day be your customers.

Real people?! Run!

I know, you thought you could get away with building something in your basement for a year, then unleashing it on the world and having them shower you with riches while thanking you for the gift you've given them.

Bzzzzzzzzzzzz.

This is a guaranteed fail.

Instead of hiding in a dark corner and building something you *think* people need, **find your market before writing a single sentence or line of code.**

That may be the most important sentence in this entire manifesto.

#8 | Charge for Your Product

If you have a seven-figure bank balance, feel free to ignore this one.

But if you are a bootstrapping micropreneur, you have to charge for your product. Don't even offer a free plan (time-limited free trials are okay).

Some companies give their product away. This is often because they have a venture capitalist on their back screaming for hockey-stick growth. There's no way they can get that many people to buy their product so they give it away with the hope they can monetize it later.

Having a million non-paying users has value to some companies.

Shocking News of the Day: that's not going to work for you.

You are working out of your bedroom, eating Ramen, and fighting like hell to build a product that provides value to your market. If you give that product away, you have no idea how much value you are providing.

Charge money for your product. If no one buys, add value until they do.

Keep it simple. Keep it niche. Solve a problem.

#9 | Passion Isn't All it's Cracked Up to Be

There's a misconception that you need to be passionate about your idea. This is not true.

You don't have to be passionate about plumbing if you build a product for plumbers. You don't have to be passionate about tracking bugs if you build bug-tracking software.

What you do need to be passionate about is the process. The process of fighting tooth and nail against seemingly insurmountable odds and emerging on the other side with a business you've built with your own two hands.

This is micropreneurship. And being passionate about micropreneurship is enough.

One word of warning: beware of confusing passion for micropreneurship with passion for money. If you're in it for the money, you will be sorely disappointed.

#10 | The Pressure of Freedom

Have you figured out why you want to do this? It shouldn't be for the money. Do it for the freedom.

The freedom to make the decision of what to build, how to build it, and how to convince people to buy it.

Of course, this freedom also comes with pressure. The pressure of knowing that there is no one else to blame if it fails. If you can't deal with that pressure, be an employee. There are plenty of people to blame when you have co-workers.

If you can't determine the precise reason you have this amazing entrepreneurial fire burning inside you... it's your freedom trying to make its way to the surface. Knowing this will help you make the right choices as you build, launch and grow your product.

Say "no" to choices that require you to work certain hours or live in a certain place. These types of constraints will destroy you over time because they are counter to the reason you started in the first place.

If your business forces you to work certain hours or live in a certain place, you may as well remain an employee. At least you'll have vacation days and health care.

#11 | Become a Black Belt Internet Marketer

Cold calling doesn't scale. In-person selling is too labor intensive. Direct mail is too expensive.

You're one person, which means you have to be everywhere at all times. You have to be the visionary, the technician, the marketer, *and* the manager.

Becoming proficient at online marketing is the best thing you can do for your business now, and for every business you start for the rest of your life. It's a skill that translates to any business. Any subject matter. Any niche.

And it scales insanely well.

#12 | Think Human Automation

No one will believe in the value of your time if you don't.

We know you can answer emails. And find 20 blogs in your target market. And hand-code HTML. And process incoming orders. But why do these tasks when they can be easily and reliably outsourced?

Find a virtual assistant early—like the day you begin to think about starting a business.

Time is your most valuable asset. Performing tasks that are below your pay grade is an easy way to build yourself a job instead of a business.

#13 | The More You Do in Public, the Faster Things Will Move

Blog. Tweet. Comment. Email. Engage.

You must do things that make you vulnerable. Things that bring public scrutiny. It's the only way you will get noticed.

Thinking you can release a product while hiding in a dark corner is a common mistake. And a recipe for failure. Even if you delete your blog in 3 months, or start a new Twitter account, with every action you take you beat back that terror you experience the first time you try anything.

Publish a blog post every week. Tweet 5 times a day. Comment on 3 blogs a day. Email bloggers whom you admire just to tell them. Engage with anyone who contacts you.

You'll find that once you start engaging other people, things will start to move.

#14 | Failure is an Option

In fact, it's a certainty. You will fail—many, many times.

You just have to get over it.

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#15 | Live Like a Pauper, Treat Your Business Like a King

While starting up, cut your personal expenses like a samurai warrior.

I sold a car, worked part-time, stopped contributing to retirement for a year, canceled cable, and sold a few thousand dollars of personal belongings on eBay and Craigslist.

These cuts will be uncomfortable. They might even hurt.

At the same time, spend liberally on your business. Buy books. Invest in your marketing education. Invest in your product. Hire a professional web designer or programmer rather than your nephew.

Selling your TV and hiring a designer may not be your idea of a good time. But if it were easy, everyone would be doing it.

#16 | Reject Growth

Everyone talks about growing their headcount. Forget about it. Focus on profit instead.

If you seek freedom, hiring employees is one of the worst things you can do.

Along with the headaches of payroll taxes, vacations, retirement savings, and health insurance come the requirement to train, mentor, and offer growth opportunities. This requires a huge amount of time, effort and expense that could be otherwise invested into growing your business.

Instead of hiring employees, build a network of reliable freelancers. This will be one of your largest competitive advantages. With this network you can scale up (and down) very quickly and start new businesses with minimal time investment.

What a one-person company lacks in number it makes up for in agility, innovation and intensity. ▣

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Walling is a serial micropreneur who recently published his first book, *Start Small, Stay Small: A Developer's Guide to Launching a Startup*. He blogs to a sizeable audience of web entrepreneurs at SoftwareByRob.com and has been profiled in *Inc.com*, *Entrepreneur.com*, and *Investor's Business Daily*.

Rob spends his days managing his portfolio of niche software products and websites, and mentoring developers and designers looking to launch their own single founder ventures. Rob lives in Fresno, CA and can be reached at rob@softwarebyrob.com.

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