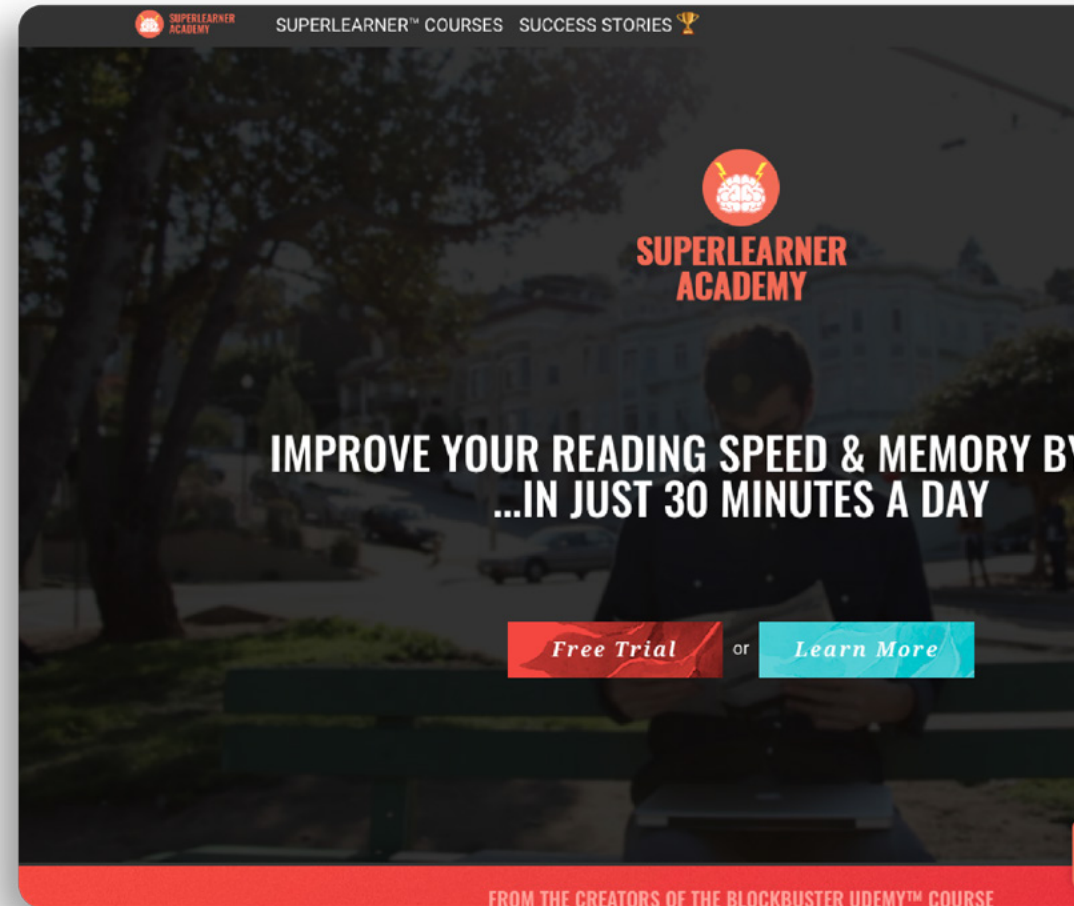


Thinkific Case Study

How Jonathan Levi Built a 7-Figure Online Course Business Teaching Speed Reading & Memory Skills





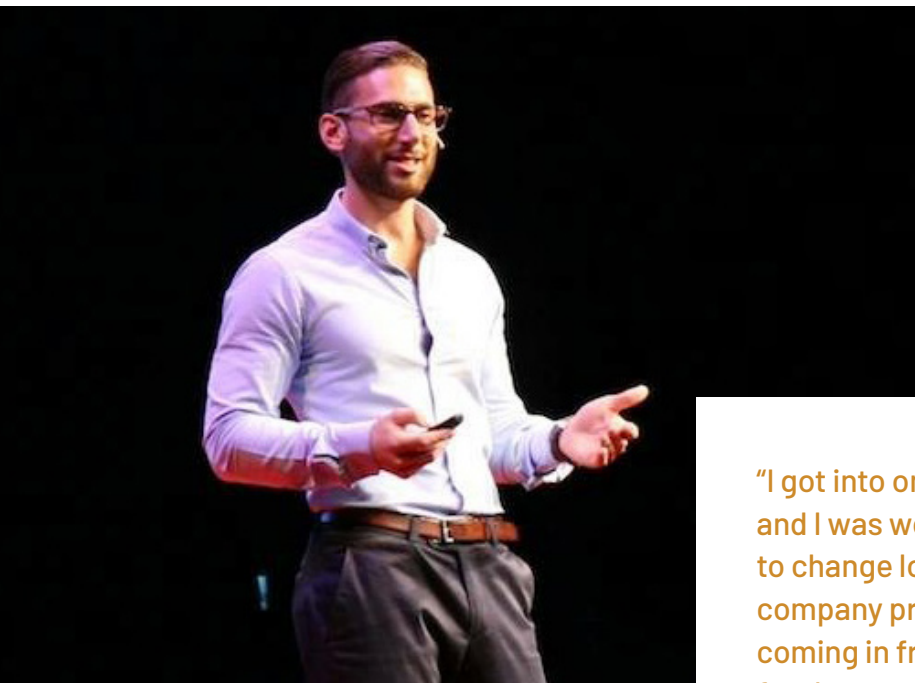
Serial entrepreneur Jonathan Levi has been involved in a fair share of business ventures over the last 10 years. Some of these ventures have been wildly successful, others not so much, but collectively they have all helped Jonathan acquire the skills and knowledge to build the successful online course business that he runs today.

In fact, whenever we're asked by our community of online course creators for examples of successful courses built on Thinkific, we often point straight to Jonathan's [SuperLearner Academy](#) – the online school where Jonathan teaches speed reading and memory skills to thousands of students from all over the world.

We recently interviewed Jonathan to learn about his journey, how he built his business, and to share some tips with other course creators.

Having generated over \$1.5 million in revenue since launching his own online course on Thinkific in 2016, it's safe to assume that Jonathan knows a thing or two about teaching online and building a successful online course business.

Recognizing the growing demand for online education



When Jonathan first started toying with the idea of creating and selling online courses, he had no idea that the market for online courses would grow to be as big as it is today. In fact, when he created his first course, his main goal was simply to make enough money to cover his living expenses while he searched for other opportunities.

A big source of inspiration for Jonathan was seeing other entrepreneurs create and sell online course successfully. He had recently taken a growth hacking course taught by **Mattan Griffl**, for example, and after watching Mattan's business evolve from selling courses in an online course marketplace to selling them

on his own platform, he could see the potential. "I saw that and was like, wow, they built a whole business by basically starting in one small marketplace website and then creating their own. That's pretty cool."

Naturally, the next step for Jonathan was to choose a topic to teach. By this point, Jonathan had already spent several years learning various speed reading and memorization techniques, and people in his network at business school had been asking him about these skills regularly. To Jonathan, this was a clear sign that others were interested in learning these skills from him. He just needed to figure out how to organize his knowledge into an online course that others would be willing to buy from him.

"I got into online courses as a side thing", Jonathan recalls. "I had left business school and I was working on this startup idea and it kind of wasn't going anywhere. I decided to change locations and drop this startup idea and look for new things. I had sold a company previously so I wasn't in dire straits, but I did want to have some income coming in from the side to cover my living expenses so that I could mill around and look for that next big opportunity."



Validating market demand before creating his first online course

Putting his marketing skills from previous ventures to good use, Jonathan decided to do some market research to validate demand for his course topic before he created it. "I did a little bit of market research, as any good entrepreneur would", Jonathan explains. "I reached out to my target market, talked to people, posted on social media asking for feedback, and saw what my ideal customer's concerns were."

Jonathan also began learning as much as he could about the process of creating and selling online courses as he could. "To be honest, I simply took the skills that I teach every day – accelerated learning, speed reading, and memory – and I was like 'okay, let me figure out what this online course thing is about.' What does it actually take to create successful online courses? How do marketplaces work? How do you beat the algorithms to be the top ranking course? What is good pedagogical design?"

I remember I opened up something like 45 tabs and I just read everything there was to know at the time about online courses.”

Once Jonathan had a good understanding of what his target audience wanted to learn from him, what lessons to include in his course,

and a plan for launching his course successfully, he got to work on creating his first course. He published his course on a popular online course marketplace on December 26, 2011.

To his surprise, Jonathan’s speed reading and memory skills course became one of the tops courses in

the marketplace within 30 days. “I remember I hit publish, and then I went on a ski trip. It was January 2012, I was in Switzerland with some friends, and I happened to get to Wi-Fi and I looked on my phone and I was like, ‘Oh crap, we already made \$2,000!’”

Fast forward to 2018, Jonathan’s course is still one of the bestselling courses on that marketplace, with more than 10,000 student reviews and more than 75,000 student enrollments (the first version, with 52,000 students, was replaced in 2016):



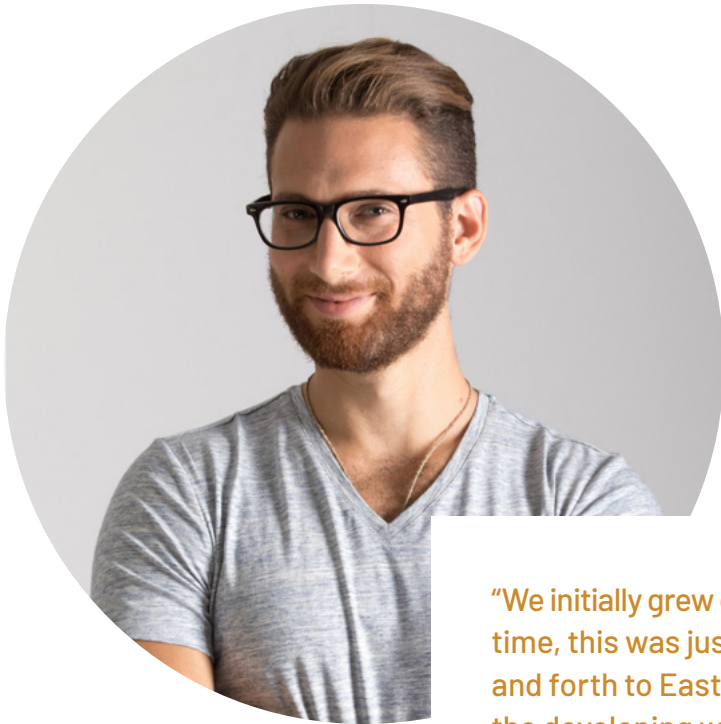
Become a SuperLearner™ 2: Learn Speed Reading & Boost Memory

BEST SELLER 61 lectures • 5 hours • All Levels

Learn faster & more effectively by harnessing the skills of the world's fastest readers & memory record-holders. NEW V2! | By Jonathan **Levi**

★★★★☆ 4.4
(10,655 ratings)

From a single online course to a thriving business



"We initially grew our audience very organically." For a long time, this was just a side project for me. I was flying back and forth to East Africa and looking at opportunities to serve the developing world with different tech solutions, I was volunteering at different startups, and it just gave me the freedom to work on things that maybe I wouldn't have worked on if I didn't have a few thousand dollars coming in every month."

While Jonathan was enjoying the steady passive income that came from having a bestselling course on a well-known online course marketplace, he was also reaping the benefits of an often overlooked advantage of publishing a course in an online course marketplace: exposure. By having a course published on a marketplace, Jonathan was receiving free exposure to thousands of students from around the world.

As the number of students enrolled in his course grew, so did the number of requests for additional training and resources. "People started demanding a podcast, and then they started saying 'well, why don't you have a book?'" Jonathan recalls. "So we did a book, and then we did another course, and then we did a podcast."

Intent on riding this momentum, Jonathan decided to dedicate more time and effort to growing his business. And although he was grateful for the income he was earning from his courses, the limitations of having his courses in a marketplace were becoming more apparent.

One of the biggest limitations of selling courses in marketplaces, as Jonathan began to realize, was the lack of control he had over his course pricing. The marketplace that Jonathan sold his course on regularly promoted steep discounts in order to boost course sales. So even if an instructor priced their course for \$200, for example, the majority of their sales would actually occur in the \$10-\$20 price range. And what's more, the majority of these sales net between 25 and 50% to the course creator themselves!

"It started to grind on me, all these little things that you can't do when someone pays \$10 for a course, and the marketplace takes \$5-7.50 of that", Jonathan explains. "You can't fly around the world to interview an expert because that doesn't fit into the model."

When another successful online course creator, Dr. Anthony Metivier, showed Jonathan what he was earning by selling

premium courses from his own website in comparison to what he was earning from online course marketplaces, the next step for Jonathan became clear. In order to scale his online course business, he would need to create premium online courses that were hosted on his own website. This would give him full control over his branding, his course pricing, communication with his students, and other important features needed to give his students a better learning experience.

"What if I could offer a no-holds-barred ultra-premium course? Where if tomorrow one of the world's experts tells me that I can interview him for thousands of dollars, I say yes, because it's worth it?" Jonathan asked himself. "Or if tomorrow, I need to hire a new staff member to help me do customer service because we want 24-hour premium service, I can do it. None of those things are even remotely possible when you earn \$1-5 per student."

With that in mind, Jonathan got to work. And on December 26, 2015, he launched his premium online course, **Become a SuperLearner – The Master Class**, on Thinkific:

FROM THE CREATORS OF THE BLOCKBUSTER UDEMY™ COURSE

BECOME a SuperLearner

THE MASTER CLASS



Master Speed Reading & Advanced Memory Skills
Jonathan Levi, Anna & Lev Goldentouch

Trusted by 135,000 customers in 203 countries

This course will teach you how to hack your learning, reading, and memory, empowering you to learn ANYTHING and everything faster and more effectively.

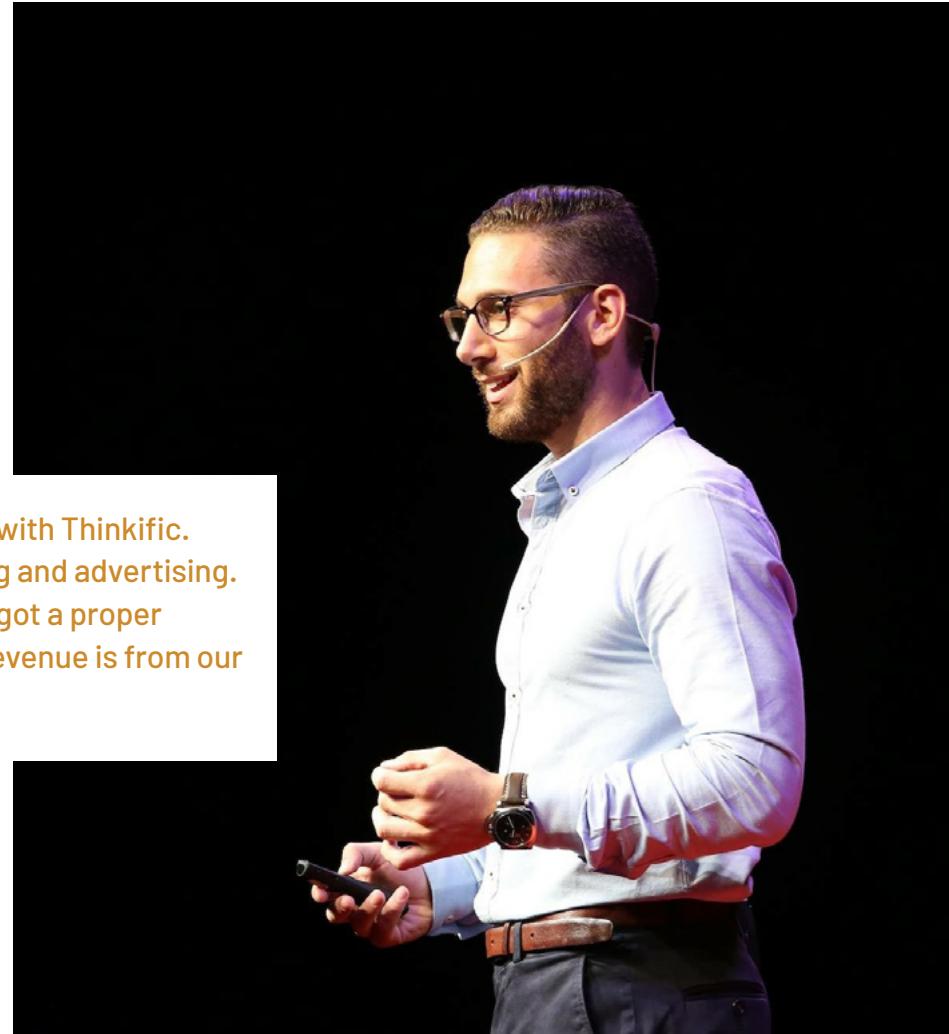
[Free Trial](#) [Enroll Now](#)

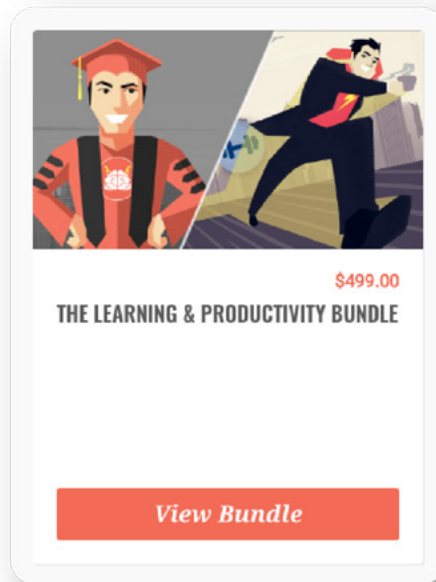
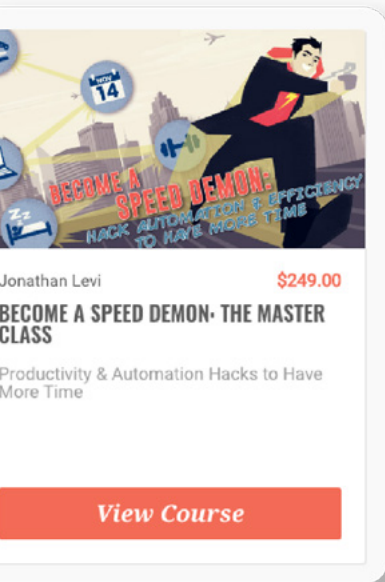
Although Jonathan didn't know it at the time, the timing of launching his premium online course on Thinkific could not have been more perfect. Just a few months later, the marketplace that Jonathan sold his other course on announced a major change to their pricing model, forcing a \$20-\$50 price range on all courses sold in their marketplace. Though this change was intended to dramatically increase instructors' earnings, the effect was the exact opposite. Literally overnight, Jonathan and thousands of other online instructors watched the revenue from their course sales plummet.

"They had this huge crash when they changed their pricing model", Jonathan recalls. "And suddenly, it went from being 25% of our business, this fledgeling Thinkific website, to being 50%. That was meaningful - and eye-opening."

Experiencing this sudden drop in revenue from courses sold on that marketplace revealed a major risk associated with depending on a marketplace to promote and sell your courses for you. Today, between 80 and 90% of Jonathan's revenue comes from his premium courses, and he relies on his own marketing efforts to build his brand and sell his courses.

"We far outpace our marketplace sales with Thinkific. We have dedicated people for marketing and advertising. We hired a full-time video editor. We've got a proper business, and the vast majority of our revenue is from our premium courses."





Creating a content marketing system to sell premium courses

The next challenge Jonathan faced was convincing people to purchase his premium course, which was significantly more expensive than the price of his original course. “It’s a whole different animal to take people who at one o’clock in the afternoon have never heard of you, and by three o’clock in the afternoon are paying hundreds of dollars for a program they never even knew existed”, Jonathan explains.

For Jonathan, the solution to attracting and converting prospects into paying customers was to create a multi-channel content marketing ecosystem. By consistently publishing free content (such as blog posts and podcast episodes) that attracts and helps his target audience, he is able to earn the trust of potential customers before inviting them to purchase a premium course.

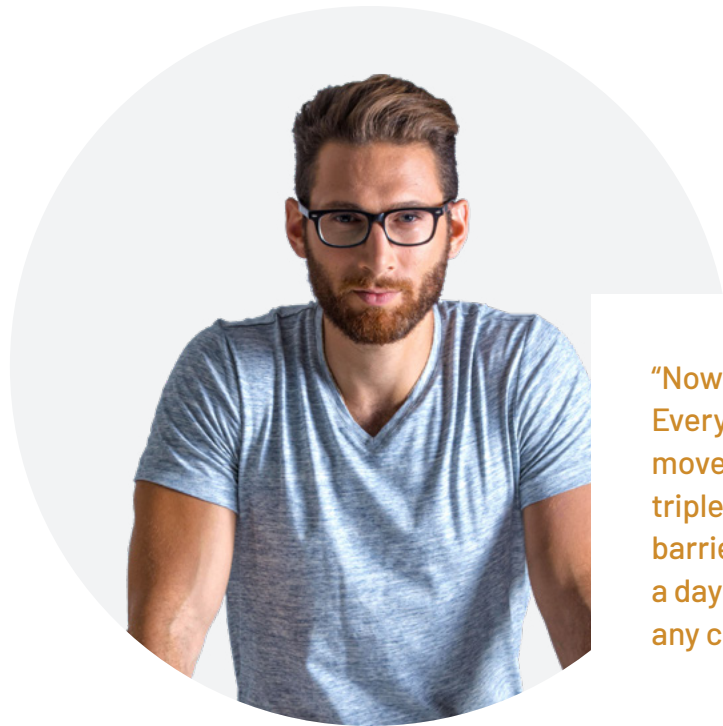
“We see all these things as the top end of the funnel. So I get you into my ecosystem and as opposed to merely ads, I’ll bring you in via ads, via podcast, via book, via blog, via Audible, via Amazon, etc. It’s a great way to qualify buyers, and instead of paying \$2-7 for leads I’m getting paid \$2-7 for leads”, Jonathan explains. “The amount of warm traffic that we drive is fantastic, even in the face of recent ‘clampdowns’ by the marketplace websites on this type of marketing.”



Marketing premium online courses requires a significant amount of time and money to implement and maintain. By selling his online course for several hundred dollars, he could afford to experiment with different marketing and advertising strategies. “There are a lot of strategies and innovations that I’ve worked on”, says Jonathan. “And this is the beauty when budget is no longer an issue - because you’re selling premium level courses and getting paid what you’re worth.”

When you exclusively sell your online courses at low price points in a marketplace, your ability to invest time and money into marketing your online courses is significantly limited. You’re constantly forced to create the next course and the next course just to reach your income goals, and that takes time away from sufficiently marketing and distributing the content you’ve already made. When each course sale is only worth a few dollars to your business, it is very difficult to generate a positive return on investment (ROI) from your marketing and advertising efforts.

Jonathan's course creation process



Jonathan's online course business has grown and evolved significantly since he created his first course back in 2011. And with every one of the online courses that he's created, his first step in the course creation process was to create his course outline.

"I sit down and write an outline, and then I write lecture by lecture, one by one", Jonathan explains. Perhaps more importantly, Jonathan deliberately crafts a lesson plan that follows the psychological journey of someone learning his topic for the first time. "I outline it in such a way that it takes a

very specific psychological journey, and at every point I think: what is the exact psychological state of the student after having completed the prior lecture?"

The production quality of Jonathan's online courses have also improved. "The second course I did, I hired someone to film, and I used a professional studio", Jonathan recalls. "So that's a huge jump in quality, and a huge jump in user experience."

Today, Jonathan has a professional studio that is ready at all times for him to create new content and courses.

"Now, I've gone all the way to the other extreme, which is a ready, plug-and-play studio. Everything is configured in such a way, down to the millimetre. The microphone never moves. The lighting never changes. The room is acoustically sealed. All the windows are triple glazed and everything. I have that level of consistency, and most importantly, the barriers to recording top-quality content are absolutely 0. If I have to rent out a studio for a day for \$1,000 or spend an hour adjusting the lights and the camera before I can record any content, it just won't happen."



Jonathan is not alone in his course creation process, either. By hiring a full-time video editor, he is able to focus on the things he does best: creating new content, serving his customers, and growing his business.

"In 2017, hired a full-time video editor, as well. We have rigorous standards and procedure. For example, for all of our titles, we have the colours specified, the times specified, the different camera angles and how frequently they should be changed. We record in 4k, so that any time I make a mistake, we can cut camera angles instead of jump-cutting, or rather, make it seem like we cut camera angles."

"I like Thinkific because it's the Shopify of online course platforms. It takes a lot of decision-making out that I don't want to be making, and it just works. It works really, really well. The uptime is really solid, and above all, the support has been phenomenal. I feel like you guys give a damn about me as a customer, and work to constantly improve my experience and the experience of my students. That's huge."

Creating courses that foster student success



An important reality that Jonathan keeps in mind as he creates his courses is that people can learn anything online for free. This means that, as someone who sells online courses, there needs to be a very clear benefit for purchasing one of his courses.

“People can learn anything online for free. You can learn everything I teach on YouTube. So why do people pay me hundreds of dollars? Because I craft a learning journey, I take the guesswork out of learning, and I take some investment in their success”, says Jonathan. “It’s the environment, the certainty, and the hand-holding that people are paying for. And I know this, so I very deliberately craft structured learning journeys that build on themselves.”

“If someone wants a bunch of non-sequential information, they can learn that on YouTube for free. They pay me to take them on a learning journey that is very deliberately designed.”

“My whole model is built around automating absolutely everything”, says Jonathan. “We market to people even after they have bought the course. I check in with them, I send them automated emails, saying like, ‘Hey, how’s it going? Let me know if there are any problems.’ We have worksheets, we have a Facebook Community, we have premium service and support. In our Master Class level products, I personally answer the questions. And we have guides, quizzes, daily training logs, all kinds of different games. It’s a really active learning experience.”

In building out a personalized automation machine for his courses, Jonathan can ensure that no student falls behind even if he's not actively there to help. He also wants to make sure everything in his courses are clear or sees that something is lacking in his own process. "I view every question as a minor failure. So any time a student has to ask a question, that means something is unclear in the course", says Jonathan. "And obviously, every refund is a major failure for us."

"We take customer feedback very seriously. I view questions as failure points in the course. If someone says "I don't understand this, what does this mean?" I view that as a failure point because someone is buying my course instead of going to a private tutor. They're coming to me because they want to learn in the comfort of their own home, they want to learn on their own time, as they please. If they want to learn at 4 in the morning, they should be able to. So the whole experience of asking a question - some people look at it as premium customer service - the way I really see it is as a failure of my material."

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING



Benny Lewis

Language Learning Expert

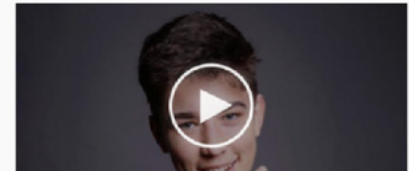
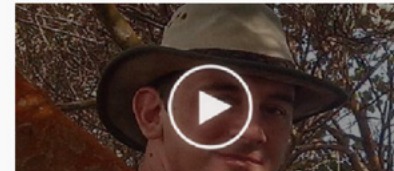
"Jonathan has done an excellent job at collecting many different approaches and schools of thought regarding various forms of faster thinking techniques and bring them together under one umbrella. It should be the go-to reference for anyone looking to upgrade their mind's firmware!"



Nelson Dellis

4X USA Memory Champion

"When I started with memory techniques years ago, I WISH that I had had all the resources that are available in this course. Jonathan does a great job teaching it. It's a fantastic course, and I highly recommend it. It will take you just as far as I am, without as much time as I had to put in."





The impact of course pricing on student success

The various price points at which Jonathan has sold his courses has also had an impact on his students' engagement and completion rates. Having sold both premium online courses and inexpensive online courses, Jonathan confirmed that the more he charges for a course, the more his students are likely to complete the training.

"If someone buys a \$10-15 course, it's pretty unlikely that they're going to actually open it", Jonathan explains. I've seen this with our students, and I've seen it with my own learning. Sure, I can listen to a lot of the Genius Network talks for free online, but I don't. It wasn't until I paid \$25K to actually be in the room that I started really paying attention - and more importantly, implementing the things that I was learning." That's why, according to Jonathan, "the easiest thing you can do to boost engagement is increase your prices."

Celebrating student success

One of the things we most appreciate about Jonathan is his commitment to student success. Revenue from course sales isn't the only metric by which he measures the success of his business. Another key metric is the number of positive testimonials and success stories from students that have implemented what they've learned in his courses and improved their lives in some way.

To help celebrate these stories, Jonathan and his team created a website specifically for showcasing success stories from his students. "We don't focus on what they learned in our course, but rather what did they actually do with it", says Jonathan. "I don't really care what their reading speed is or how many words they can memorize. I care about what they did with what they learned. Did they start a business? Did they learn a 7th language? Did they finish their degree a year early? And yes - those are all real examples!"

Advice for entrepreneurs that are creating and selling online courses

As we wrapped up our conversation with Jonathan, we asked him to share a few words of advice for other course creators who are working hard to build their businesses. Here are some of his best tips for other people who are building an online course business:



1. Figure out your differentiating factor – why would someone pay you?

Be deliberate about how you structure and position your online course. “Everything that you are teaching can be learned online for free”, says Jonathan. “So figure out why someone would want to pay you to learn something that they can learn for free. And that can mean premium service and support, it can mean hand-holding, it can mean direction, it can mean innovation in the way that you teach it.”

Secondly, never stop investing in your own personal and professional development. The more that you continue learning and developing, the more valuable you become to your students as you share your newly acquired information and wisdom with them.



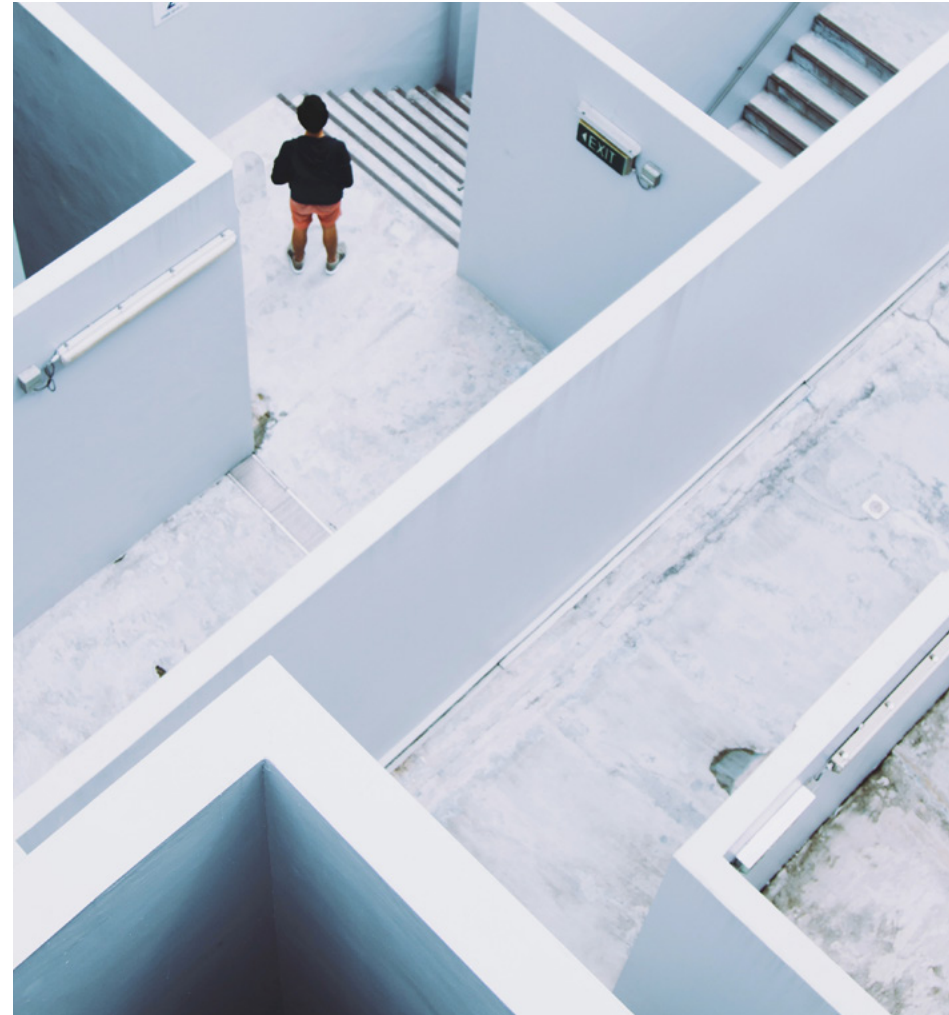
“I’m constantly learning. I’m flying to seminars every other month. It really gives me an opportunity and an excuse to work on my business, work on my content, and then turn around and teach what I’ve learned... which just makes me a better entrepreneur.”

2. Have a marketing plan for your course

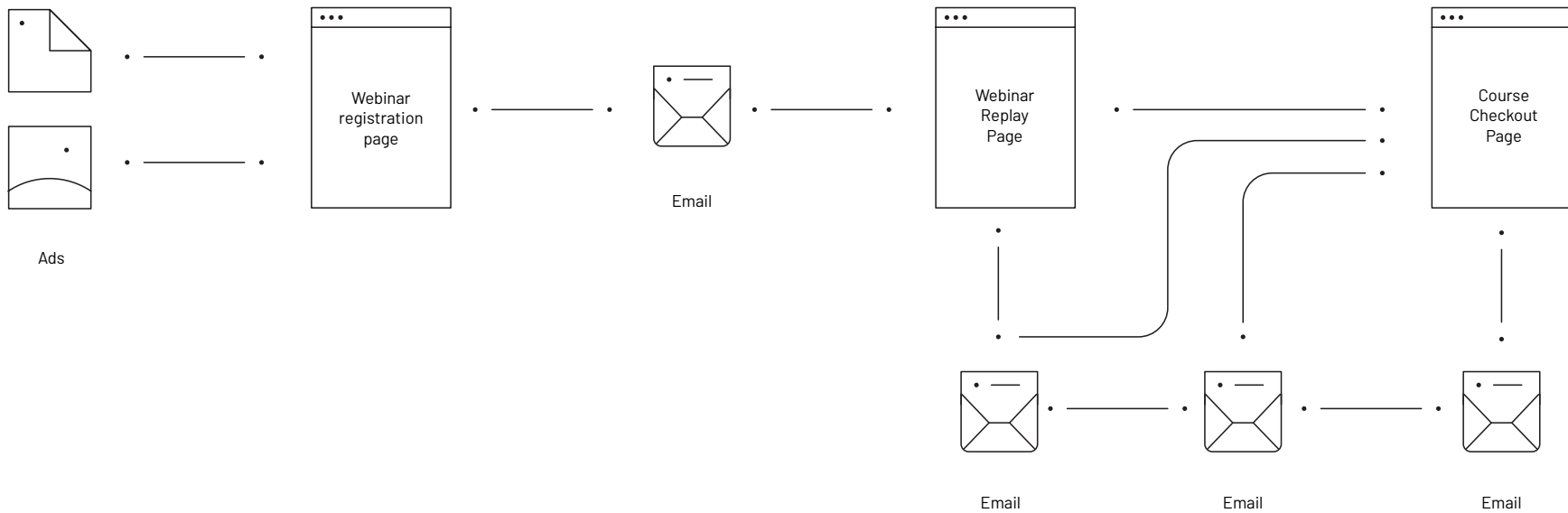
“Just because you build it, doesn’t mean they’ll come”, says Jonathan. “Have a marketing plan in place. Do the market research to know that there are people out there who are going to pay for this stuff before you invest time, money, and effort. And know how you’re going to reach those people.”

In Jonathan’s case, the majority of his online course sales have come from a single, automated webinar. “We only have a few funnels, the most powerful of which is currently a webinar”, says Jonathan. “It’s a 1-hour webinar with a pretty aggressive offer (huge value) that is very time-limited. They have to act within 48 hours if they want to get a free coaching call along with the purchase of our course.”

To help drive traffic to his webinar, Jonathan and his team utilize a combination of organic and paid marketing strategies. “Our traffic comes from all over the places”, says Jonathan. “We get traffic from our podcast and from our YouTube ads, and Google AdSense.”



Free content



They run ads to new audiences based on their interests, as well as retargeting ads to all of their website visitors. These ads help drive traffic to the registration page for Jonathan's webinar, an automated one that runs 24/7.

At the end of the webinar, instead of directing viewers to the sales page for his online course, Jonathan directs

them straight to the checkout page. "We've discovered that sending people to a sales page does not convert well", he explains. "By the time they go through this whole webinar process, they're ready to buy. Just put them where they can put a credit card in." Email marketing has also played an important role in generating leads and sales for his business. "We have an automated follow-up series for any

action that people take, whether that's signing up for a free trial, signing up for the podcast, registering for the webinar, etc.", Jonathan explains.

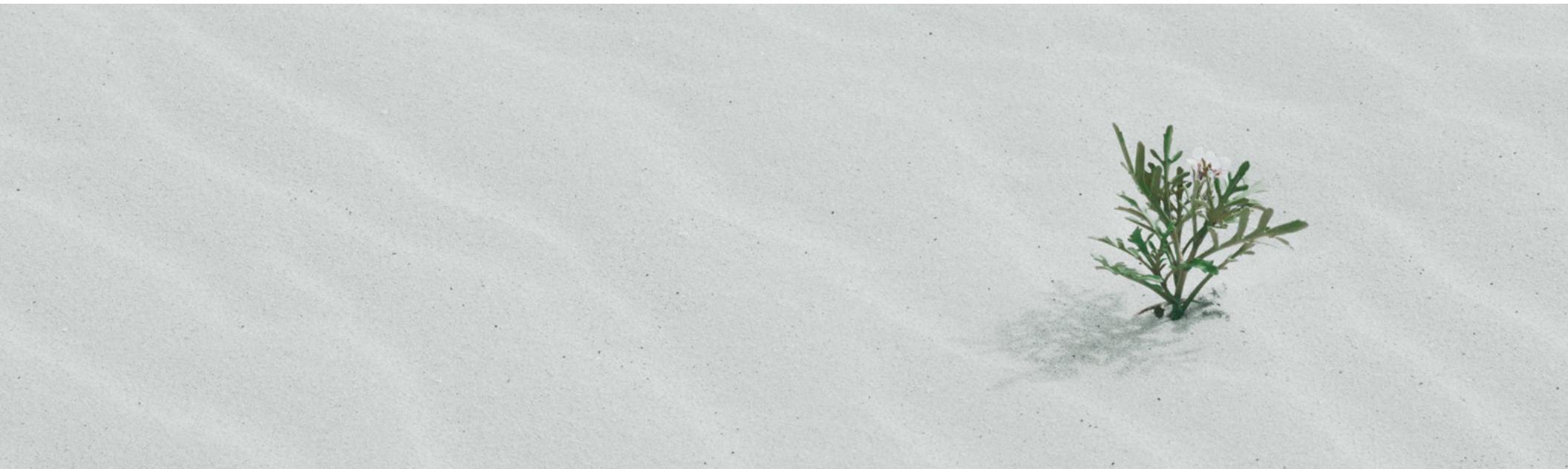
"Studying copywriting is going to make the biggest difference in your email marketing, more than what time you send your emails, or how many emails you send. Those things don't matter if people aren't reading them."

By utilizing content marketing, paid advertising, an automated webinar and a carefully crafted email follow-up sequence, Jonathan and his team built a marketing funnel that enabled him to scale his premium course business to more than \$100,000 in online course sales per month by 2017.

3. Create an MVP (minimum viable product)

Don't try to create the perfect course with the highest production value the first time. Create a minimum viable course. Launch it. Obtain feedback from students. Then, re-invest the revenue from your course into improving it, creating additional resources and training for your students, or creating more courses.

"I was embarrassed by the first version", says Jonathan. "It was recorded with a webcam and a blanket taped on the background. The microphone was my MacBook with a towel over it to try to reduce the echo." This is in line with the thinking of most great entrepreneurs, and is based on "The Lean Startup" by Eric Ries, a book Jonathan suggests that all potential entrepreneurs read.



4. Offer different tiers in your sales funnel

Create different levels of training for your audience. Then, create a sales funnel to guide our audience from your free content to your inexpensive or introductory level courses, and from there, to your premium and more comprehensive courses.

"If there's anything really to be learned from what I do, it's to have tiers in your

funnel. I think it makes a lot of sense to have people come in at entry levels of the product. And if you look at guys like Tim Ferriss or Lewis Howes, they're doing the exact same thing", says Jonathan. "It's basic microeconomics, right? Try to capture willingness to pay at any possible place."





Once you become an expert in your field, you have a moral obligation to turn around and teach to others. I see that as a ripple effect. It's elevating individuals and giving them the power to have a ripple effect on others. By doing that, we'll impact way more people than I could possibly try to reach with just one product. And that's exactly the logic behind our newest Thinkific website, Branding You™ Academy

To learn more about Jonathan and his projects, visit jle.vi