

THE INTERNET AND AI AFTER 50

*A field guide from a man who recently shouted at Bluetooth
and regularly tells ChatGPT and Claude to piss off.*

I thought I was starting a YouTube channel.

Turns out I'd accidentally signed up for an unpaid degree in editing, thumbnails, lighting, microphones and shouting four-letter obscenities at Technology.

No qualification. No salary. No revenue.

Here's what it cost me.

I SPENT TWELVE HOURS RESEARCHING STUDIO LIGHTS.

I don't have a studio.

I already own a bloody light.

**It's still in the box under my desk, watching me
make poor decisions.**

Twelve hours is a working day and a half. In that time I learned what CRI means, why softboxes diffuse light, and how to make yourself look like you're being interviewed by police. What I did not do was make a video. I could have made three. Instead I became unexpectedly knowledgeable about softboxes, which has so far proved completely fucking useless.

MY FIRST VIDEO TOOK EIGHT TAKES.

Seventy seconds of footage. Three hours of editing.

By take six we'd entered mediation.

It took eight takes to get seventy seconds I could use, then roughly three hours recording and editing five minutes of footage. At one point I genuinely wondered whether I was simply too shit at this to continue. The next video was easier because I stopped trying to memorise paragraphs and started talking in short beats. Same bloke, same room, same face. Apparently the breakthrough was discovering sentences.

YOU WILL BECOME OBSESSED WITH THUMBNAILS.

Move the text three pixels left.

Hate it.

Move it back.

Marketing.

You can lose ninety minutes deciding whether the thumbnail should say I FAILED or THIS WAS A DISASTER, as if Western civilisation is waiting on the outcome. Then you'll move the text three pixels left, hate it, move it back, and call that marketing. Annoyingly, thumbnails actually do matter, which means this particular form of insanity is at least partially justified.

AI SAVES ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF TIME.

I use mine to waste time considerably faster.

AI genuinely saves me hours. I've used it to write scripts, build websites, make graphics and automate things I would have had no clue how to do a year ago. I have also asked it for twelve versions of one sentence, stared at them for twenty minutes, and picked the first one. We have finally invented technology powerful enough to industrialise procrastination.

NOBODY GIVES A SHIT ABOUT YOUR LOGO.

I spent two hours choosing the green.

Humanity remained largely unaffected.

I adjusted the logo, moved it, moved it back, changed the green by an amount visible only to me, then asked an AI whether it preferred the new green. Nobody has ever mentioned the logo. Several people have mentioned the video where everything went wrong. There is probably a lesson here about what people actually care about, but I still quite like the green.

THE 22-YEAR-OLD GURU HAS A BETTER RING LIGHT.

You've survived three recessions, two dodgy knees and Windows Vista.

Back yourself.

By your fifties you've survived careers, bosses, mortgages, recessions, restructures, children, and technology that required a manual thicker than a phone book. The 22-year-old has better lighting and joints that still work properly. You have thirty years of actual material. That's the one advantage nobody can download, subscribe to, or nick off YouTube.

EDITING SOFTWARE LOOKS LIKE A 747 COCKPIT.

The pilot has fucked off.

The first time you open editing software it looks like someone has handed you control of a 747 halfway across the Atlantic and then gone to lunch. You click something, an entire track disappears, and suddenly Undo becomes a deeply spiritual concept. A few weeks later you add a transition without breaking anything and feel absurdly pleased with yourself. This is how low the bar gets.

MY WORST VIDEO IS MY MOST WATCHED.

The two after it were better in every way I can measure.

Nobody came.

My worst video is still my most watched, which is irritating because I would prefer the evidence to support my opinions. It takes thirty-three seconds to explain what it's about, the sound isn't great, and I barely knew what I was doing. The next two were objectively better and nobody gave a shit. The internet does not appear to have received the memo about rewarding effort.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BECOME AN INFLUENCER.

No dancing. No pointing at floating text.

**No shouting STOP SCROLLING at strangers who
have done nothing to you.**

I had quietly assumed the price of getting anywhere online was becoming somebody I would actively avoid at a barbecue.

Dancing, pointing at floating text, shouting STOP SCROLLING at innocent members of the public. Thankfully, none of that is compulsory. You can just be useful, interesting or funny. Two out of three is probably enough. I'm currently working with one and a half.

THE CAMERA STOPS FEELING WEIRD.

Eventually.

At first it looks like it knows what you've done.

At first the camera feels like an accusation. You stare into the lens, forget how your face normally works, and suddenly become extremely aware of your hands. Then one day you forget the camera is there for eight seconds and the footage is suddenly good. The whole game, apparently, is extending those eight seconds before your face remembers it's being filmed.

I THOUGHT THE JOB WAS CAMERAS AND LIGHTING.

The job is having something worth saying.

The camera is a courier.

I thought YouTube was a technical problem, partly because technical problems are comforting: you can solve them by buying shit. The real job is ideas, stories, attention, trust and giving somebody a reason to care. The camera, microphone and expensive light still sitting under my desk are basically delivery drivers. I spent twelve hours researching the van and almost none thinking about what I was delivering.

FOLLOWERS ARE NICE. EMAIL ADDRESSES ARE BETTER.

The list is the only bit you actually own.

Which is precisely why you're reading this.

Platforms change their rules, algorithms wake up angry, and reach can disappear overnight for reasons explained only in a language spoken inside Silicon Valley. An email list is boring by comparison, which is probably why it matters. One of the subscribers on mine is still me because I signed up to test it, and I continue counting myself because technically I am a subscriber and morale is important.

YOUR FAMILY WILL NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DO.

Forty-minute explanation.

Pause.

"So... TikTok?"

Yes, Mum. TikTok.

You can spend forty minutes explaining the website, newsletter, YouTube channel, content plan and how all of it is meant to eventually make money. They will listen patiently, nod, and then ask whether you're doing TikToks. At that point the correct answer is yes. It's easier, and annoyingly, after saying for months that I would never use TikTok, it's now also true.

"HOW I DID IT IN 90 DAYS."

Step one: spend nine years doing it first.

You will inevitably find somebody with 1.7 million subscribers explaining how they changed their life in ninety days. What they leave out is the nine years before the ninety days. You uploaded your third video on Tuesday. Stop comparing your warm-up lap with somebody else's victory parade.

YOUTUBE VIEWS ARE EMOTIONALLY DANGEROUS.

Upload.

Refresh.

One view.

Your wife. Under duress.

Views turn otherwise rational adults into lab rats. Upload. Refresh. One view. Refresh. Still one. Check the title. Change the thumbnail. Question your entire future. Meanwhile, something you uploaded four days ago quietly starts doing fine while you're making dinner. Publish, look at the numbers, learn what you can, then go outside before you become one with YouTube Studio.

BLUETOOTH WILL EVENTUALLY BREAK YOU.

At some point you will call a speaker a cunt.

Out loud. Alone.

Modern technology has created forms of rage our parents never had to deal with. Auto-captions confidently rename you, Bluetooth connects to the neighbour's television instead of your microphone, and software updates relocate the only button you had finally learned. Eventually you will swear at an object in an empty room. This is not a breakdown. It is onboarding.

ONE VIDEO BECOMES TEN PIECES OF CONTENT.

Which is either efficiency, or nine new ways to be ignored.

The internet loves telling you that one idea can become ten pieces of content. This is true. It can also become ten separate opportunities for nobody to watch it. The most widely seen thing I wrote one week wasn't a video, Reel, Short or carefully planned post. It was a comment under somebody else's content. I have chosen not to think too deeply about what that says about my strategy.

IT TOOK ME TEN DAYS TO TURN THE CAMERA ON.

Ten days.

Spielberg called. No he fucking didn't.

The camera sat on my desk for ten days, charged, ready and completely unused while I researched formats, lighting and whether my voice sounded weird. The camera was never the problem. The problem was me waiting to feel ready, which turned out to be a lovely way of losing ten days while achieving absolutely fuck all.

I BUILT A SYSTEM TO COLLECT EMAIL ADDRESSES.

In four weeks it collected two.

Both were mine.

I built the system, connected everything, announced it and waited for strangers to arrive. Four weeks later it contained two email addresses. Both mine. Oddly, writing publicly about that failure performed better than pretending everything was going brilliantly. People seem to be quite interested in hearing from somebody while they're still in the hole, rather than six months later from the bloke standing beside the Lamborghini.

THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER TOOL.

It will 10X your workflow.

Yeah, bullshit.

It is always just a slightly different shade of purple.

Every morning somebody launches a new tool that promises to 10X your workflow, revolutionise your business and possibly improve your marriage. It is nearly always purple. I now pay for a handful I genuinely use, including software that helps me create an AI baby whose principal function is insulting me. Revenue at the moment: nought. So the transformation is well underway.

THE POLISHED PIECE DIES QUIETLY.

The irritated thing you typed over coffee gets shared.

**I have learned nothing from this and still spend
three hours editing.**

The thing you spend three hours polishing often dies quietly while the irritated sentence you typed over coffee gets shared around. I now have enough evidence to know this is true and apparently not enough emotional maturity to stop polishing things for three hours. Growth mindset.

YOU NEED A REASON BIGGER THAN VIEWS.

Mine is freedom.

**And never again asking another grown adult
whether I can have Thursday off.**

Views are a terrible source of motivation because they're completely unreliable. Mine can go up, down or nowhere depending on what appears to be the mood of a server rack somewhere in California. The reason I'm doing this is freedom: choosing where I live, how I spend my week, and never again asking another grown adult whether Thursday is available.

PEOPLE FORGIVE BAD VIDEO.

They do not forgive bad audio.

And they won't tell you. They'll just leave, and you'll assume it was your personality.

People will forgive an ordinary-looking video surprisingly quickly. Bad audio is another matter. Nobody wants to spend five minutes listening to a man who sounds like he's broadcasting from inside a biscuit tin. And the cruel bit is they won't tell you the sound was bad. They'll just leave, and you'll assume it was your personality.

"HI EVERYONE, WELCOME BACK TO MY CHANNEL"

is internet chloroform.

Nobody owes you thirty seconds while you warm up, clear your throat and welcome everybody back to a channel they've never seen before. Get to the bloody point. Give them a reason to stay. My first video ignores almost all of this advice and remains my most watched, so for the purposes of preserving my credibility I am calling that luck.

ANNOUNCE WHAT YOU'RE ATTEMPTING.

Quitting then becomes marginally more embarrassing than continuing.

Not noble. Effective.

Publishing your goals in public does something surprisingly useful: it makes quitting slightly more embarrassing than continuing. I publish the numbers even when the numbers are shit, including weeks where I work harder and somehow achieve less. It's not noble discipline. It's weaponised embarrassment.

EVERYTHING IS CONTENT NOW.

I watched chickpeas soak for five hours and thought:
that was the metaphor.

I'm not sure this is recoverable.

Eventually this gets into your head and everything starts looking like material. I soaked chickpeas one afternoon, spent four hours watching absolutely nothing happen, then saw them suddenly double in size and thought, "That's the business." At that point I realised I may have a problem. Still, the metaphor worked: most progress looks like wet chickpeas until suddenly it doesn't.

I AM STILL A BEGINNER.

I also know vastly more than I did on day one.

None of it came from research.

I'm still very much a beginner, but I know vastly more than I did when I started. Almost none of it came from researching beforehand. It came from publishing things that weren't ready, getting things wrong, fixing them, and discovering that mistakes become substantially less terrifying once you've made enough of them.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE THIS ENDS.

Which is probably why I'm still doing it.

**I never wanted to be a YouTuber. I wanted
Thursdays.**

I still have no idea where this ends, and I think that's part of why I'm enjoying it. I never really wanted to become a YouTuber. I wanted more control over where I live and what I do with my time. I wanted Thursdays. YouTube is simply one of the experiments that might get me there, along with apparently subscribing to software I didn't know existed six weeks ago.

Don't spend two weeks researching cameras. Don't build a studio. Don't wait until you understand the algorithm — I'm not convinced the bastards who built it understand it either.

Take the phone out of your pocket. Make something. It'll probably be a bit shit.

Then make the next one slightly less shit.

Every Sunday. Free.

The wins, the failures, the costs, the cock-ups, and the occasional completely unnecessary purchase made in the name of "content."

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