brightpod™

How Marketers Stay Productive!

INTERVIEW SERIES

PART III

This series focuses on the tips & tricks that

startup marketers and

founders use to stay productive.

Sit back with a cup of coffee and enjoy :)

Alex Turnbull of Groove

Shalin Jain of HappyFox

Robby Macdonell of RescueTime

Thomas Schranz of Blossom

Laure Parsons of Olark

Natalie Nagele of Wildbit

Nathan Kontny of Draft

Ezra Fishman of Wistia

Twain Taylor of FusionCharts

Sairam Krishnan of Freshdesk

Gregory Ciotti of Help Scout

Alex Turnbull
of Groove

💼 CEO at Groove

📍 Location: Newport, Rhode Island

📱 Your favorite gadget: A tie between my iPhone and my 6' 2" Sharp Eye.

☀ You start your day with: Too much coffee and a meeting with Groove's developers.

⏱ Your favorite time-saving trick: Screen sharing. Whether we're working through bugs or going over ideas for new designs or features, a ten minute screen sharing session — we use join.me, but there are lots of products out there for this — can save hours of email back-and-forth with people trying to follow along.

"Working smart is important, and you should automate as much as you can."

Describe an average day at Groove.

There's very little most days have in common with the days before. In general, we start with a developer stand-up meeting where we discuss what our team has accomplished, what we're working on that day, and what roadblocks we need to overcome. I usually spend about 80% of my time working with our developers. The rest of it is a combination of customer support, marketing, business development, and just about everything else that comes with running a business.

Because we're a remote team, we rely on tools like HipChat, Skype and Join.me to keep us all tightly connected.

As a founder, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

I find that using a project management tool is critical to staying on top of the thousands of tasks we have to do. We actually use two: Pivotal Tracker and Trello. Really though, it doesn't matter nearly as much what you use, as long as you pick something and use it consistently. It makes an insane workload much easier to tackle.

My other productivity strategy — I hesitate to call it a hack — is forcing myself to turn off. Sometimes that takes a glass of wine at the end of the day with dinner, but being able to step out of the office and stop thinking about work is massively important for staying productive when I am working. Otherwise I burn out, fast.

As a person who is well-versed with online marketing, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 3 tools you use?

I love HubSpot for automation, and of course we use Groove to automate a lot of our support workflow.

The Groove blog seems to be buzzing and the content out there is fantastic for budding startup entrepreneurs. Is this your strategy for customer acquisition? What made you start this blog keeping in mind there are numerous startup blogs out there.

The blog is, hands down, our number one channel for customer acquisition. Of course there are a lot of startup blogs out there. There are a lot of [insert almost anything] blogs out there. But there will always be room for unique angles that people find useful and interesting. We were never worried that there were too many startup blogs, we were only concerned with whether people would find ours valuable.

There are so many help desk tools out there. How does Groove stand out and how do you convey that in your marketing messages?

Groove was born out of a need that I had at my last startup: Gmail couldn't keep up with the number of support emails we were getting, and the existing tools (e.g., Zendesk and Desk.com) were too complex and overwhelming for what we needed. Groove is designed specifically for small businesses who find themselves in that position of needing a tool that's powerful enough to help them deliver personal support at scale, but simple enough to use out of the box without any training.

In our marketing, we make our positioning clear by singling out growing small businesses: we're admittedly not the best product for everyone, but that's okay. We know that we're the best for the people we built Groove for, and that's who our marketing speaks to.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

Working smart is important, and you should automate as much as you can. But don't obsess over productivity, because while you're doing that, your competitors are working on their product and on making their customers happy. You're going to have some long days, and there's not a whole lot you can do about that if you want to succeed. Work hard and work smart.

Shalin Jain of HappyFox

CEO of HappyFox

Location: Irvine, California

Your favorite gadget: Nikon D90 w/ 85mm prime lens

You start your day with: Spend time with my daughter, fun first, work later.

Your favorite time-saving trick: Delegating work to the right person in the team.

"Bigger customers have bigger timelines,
so we know that the path to purchase might take some time."

Describe an average day at HappyFox.

My average day at HappyFox is all about communicating with people. I start my work day connecting with customers: new, existing and prospects on the phone, via email or sometimes face to face. I spend some time responding to top support requests every single day.

I invest the later part of my day interacting with various teams at HappyFox. I also work in isolation for a couple of hours everyday with social media, emails and communication turned off. This helps me reflect on the progress we are making and adjust our execution strategy constantly.

As a marketer, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

Don't read news, don't read about your competitors. Double up your time listening to your customers and see how they are seeing your product. Ask yourself what makes them ask a particular question and how you could have communicated your value better.

Read between the lines. Marketers should engage in customer service – this would not only help customers, but also get real stories, keyword ideas. Gain insight into the customer's mind – why they prefer you over your competitors, what it is about your product/company that is attractive to them. Help your existing customers and you'll soon see them turn into your best advocates.

As a person who is well-versed with online marketing, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 5 tools you use?

We use multiple tools: HappyFox for un-planned and on-demand requests and tasks, Asana for planned activities, Google Analytics for visitor analytics, Moz & Semrush for Search Engine Marketing and Draftin for writing and collaboration. We are eyeing Brightpod for workflow based recurring marketing tasks.

Happyfox and your company recently moved to the US. Did this impact the way you'll be marketing your services?

We took HappyFox to the US as most of our customers are based here. We are much closer to our customers, we meet them more often and have learnt a lot from our interactions. We continue to market predominantly on the internet but with every customer interaction our marketing decisions get better.

Your company has been around for quite some time now and has a growing community of users. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

Our learning from the large community of our existing users and customers has a significant impact on what we build. A good product should market itself. One of our most successful customer acquisition channel remains word-of-mouth. Our customer service is our biggest marketing tool.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

Pick the right tool for the right task. Most marketing tools pay back almost immediately. For personal productivity, I use Zone app on mac (http://rinik.net/zone/), there is no better way to keep track of how you spend your time.

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Robby Macdonell of RescueTime

💼 VP of Product Development at RescueTime

📍 Location: Nashville, TN and Seattle, WA

📱 Your favorite gadget: Aeropress Coffee Maker

☀️ You start your day with: Aeropress Coffee Maker

⏱ Your favorite time-saving trick: Turning off every notification on my phone. Do that for a week and you'll wonder how you ever got anything done with all the beeping and buzzing going on.

"We want people to have a meaningful relationship with their time, and we try to enable that without creating extra work for people."

Describe an average day at RescueTime.

I guess since I work for RescueTime, I should probably give you the extremely literal answer. My average workday (based on the 3000+ hours I was on the computer in 2013) is:

- 25% software development
- 22% email, meetings, and other internal communications
- 13% general business stuff (customer support, planning, etc…)
- 10% social networking
- 8% visual design
- 6% blogs and news

then a few other random things here and there.

Honestly though, it really varies depending on what we're working on. We're largely a remote team, so each person has a lot of freedom to structure their day in a way that works best for them. I tend to start my day at a coffee shop, where I spend an hour or so working through email and customer support. Then I head into the office and shift gears to work on things that need a long block of uninterrupted focus. I'm not a morning person, so I usually start a little bit later and work into the evening, but everyone over here is different. We all experiment and find the balance that feels the best.

What are some of your favorite productivity hacks that helps you save time and feel more productive?

I've been tinkering for years with ways to minimize the amount of email I deal with each day. Email is one of those things that you really can't do without, but it's way too easy to fall into really bad habits with. Fortunately, there are some easy ways to keep it from taking over your life. Two that have worked really well for me are optimizing my Gmail inbox so things don't linger in my inbox and tweaking my schedule so I'm not dealing with email when I'm supposed to be working on other tasks. I've also been experimenting with services like Sanebox and Unroll.me to reduce the clutter from my inbox. They both take a little getting used to, but seem to do a good job of weeding noise out of my email.

For the past few weeks, I've been trying out RescueTime's ability to block

websites that I've marked as distracting for 30 minutes right at the start of my day. So far, it's doing a really good job of getting me out of the habit of saying "I'll get to work… right after I catch up on Facebook."

People use multiple gadgets today. I might be reading on my iPad and doing some work on my Macbook. How is RescueTime tackling this issue for multiple gadgets to give me an accurate view of where I am spending time every week?

RescueTime works on multiple devices, so I can have my tablet, my phone, and my computer all roll up into a single set of reports. If you think about how many times per day you unconsciously pull your phone out of your pocket to check one thing or another, it's pretty easy to see how important this is. I personally average about 2.8 hours per day on my phone, which is a bit more than I'd like it to be, so I'm working on cutting that time down. RescueTime works on Windows, OS X, Linux, Android, and ChromeOS. The unfortunate omission there is iOS, which we're working on, but it has some pretty thorny technical barriers for doing the type of tracking we do on other platforms.

Do you have some guidelines on which features go into RescueTime?

We want people to have a meaningful relationship with their time, and we try to enable that without creating extra work for people. Spending your time the way you really want to doesn't always come easy, so we try really hard to help people see what parts of their lives are getting out of balance, and then give them some tools to try to nudge things in whatever direction they want to go.

How has RescueTime evolved in the last few years? How do you signup new users?

The most interesting evolution has been with our users. When we first started, the idea of RescueTime was really appealing to a very specific type of person (usually highly technical, self-optimizer types like software developers). The Quantified Self movement was just in its very early stages when we started. Over the past few years, people have really woken up to the idea that they can use data as a really powerful tool for making their

lives better. It's been really awesome to watch that unfold. Now our user base is much more varied, and we've had to evolve as a service to suit their needs. We recently did a full redesign of the website and reports to make it easier for people to understand how they are spending their days.

RescueTime has a growing community of users. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

I try to look for any opportunity to empathize with our users. In the beginning it was easy, because most of the users were just like us, so I could sort of just design for myself. As more and more people got into the idea, I needed to work a little harder to figure out how we can fit into their daily routines in the most valuable way. Luckily, there are so many great channels for this. We learn a lot from social media, our support channels, and blog posts by enthusiastic users. But the real gold comes when we can just sit down and talk with folks. I try to get out to Quantified Self meetups as often as I can. Those are great for face to face time with super smart people that are really into self-tracking. We also regularly bring in people for usability testing. I think a lot of people think usability testing is just about site optimization, but it's an amazing opportunity to hear people talk about themselves and how they relate to your service or product.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers/ entrepreneurs to help them work smart and stay productive?

Cultivate two skills: empathy and experimentation. Like I said above, being able to put yourself in the shoes of the people you're building for is super important. Look for every chance to cultivate that skill. Also don't be shy about experimenting with everything you can to find a balance that works for you. Always be on the lookout for the small tweaks that might make a big difference. That might be a change to your workflow, a pivot on your products, or simply whether or not you work sitting down or standing up.

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Thomas Schranz
of Blossom

CEO & Co-Founder at Blossom

Location: San Francisco

Your favorite gadget: iPhone

You start your day with: A cup of tea

Your favorite time-saving trick: Saying "no" & understanding that the main value I create is through "editing".

"Make time to get to know your target audience. Spend time with them. Do customer interviews with them."

Describe an average day at Blossom.

Depending on where we are at the moment we meet either at a co-working space, in a coffee shop, or crash at an office of fellow founders. Then we usually have a cup of tea and briefly go through the most important activities for the day and update each other on what's going on.

After that we walk through our product board in Blossom. It shows us on which features we're working on at the moment, why we do them and how far along they are in the process. This helps to establish context for the rest of the day to really get into the zone again.

Then it's mainly focus time until around noon when we grab lunch. One thing that we've recently started is to block time for writing blog posts later in the afternoon to consciously free up time for content that helps our customers to get better at crafting software products.

We've picked the end of the day for this activity as usually we're already a bit lower on energy compared to the morning and making product decisions, doing code reviews and writing new code is probably not the ideal activity to unwind. Having these writing time-boxes also helps to get into the habit of writing regularly.

On days where we work distributed Hipchat, Sqwiggle & Google Hangout help to bridge the distance.

We also have specially themed days every few weeks where we focus various higher level things like product strategy, customer acquisition channels, partnerships, tech stack & software architecture, customer satisfaction & personal growth. These days help us set the theme and what to focus on the usual day to day.

As a startup marketer, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

I think the main productivity hack I use is trying my best to stay aware that every "good idea" needs to compete against other "good ideas" and the real challenge is not coming up with good ideas. It is picking the right activities/ideas to focus on with your limited resources.

It's all about opportunity cost. Committing to one thing means you have less time to do something else that might be more important. The art is getting a feeling for what that means and how to make better decisions and being great at saying "no" to things that initially sound like a brilliant idea if something else is more important at the moment.

This is one of the things that are very simple to understand but also very hard to actually be great at and I'm striving to consciously get better at it. If you care about making better decisions I can highly recommend books like "The Principles of Product Management" Flow, "Thinking fast and slow" and "Predictably Irrational".

As a person leading a small team, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 3-5 tools you use to bring people to the Blossom.io site and convert them into customers?

Most of our customers find us through three channels. Medium, Quora and Twitter.

Medium is a great platform to publish essays in a clear and non-distracting way. On Medium we mainly write about Product Management, Design, Development & Marketing.

Quora is another great platform for attracting customers because it is based on a Question & Answer format that helps to stay to the point and write helpful content that's easy to read & understand.

Twitter is a brilliant platform where people share what they like, whether it is our tweets, content or our product. Twitter really facilitates word of mouth. If you do something great, it spreads like wildfire.

On top of that we've also recently started to play around with the idea of setting up a drip campaign on our Product Resources page using Mailchimp. It's still early but the conversion rate looks promising.

Blossom has a growing community of users. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

Great point, I think when we look at our major acquisition channels we see that the people who actually drive those acquisitions are our existing customers that like our product and the content we produce and help us get the word out.That's our machine of growth. Our existing customers and the community around them that share our love for building great products.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding startup marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

Make time to get to know your target audience. Spend time with them. Do customer interviews with them. Rob Fitzpatrick wrote a fantastic book on what to watch out for when doing customer interviews, that really helps a lot.

Kathy Sierra gave a brilliant talk at the Business of Software conference on giving your users super powers. In a nutshell the idea is that if you want to sell digital cameras, find a way to make your users better photographers. That's what you should care about.

Another great framework to think about your customers, market and your positioning in that market is "Job to be done" by Clay Christensen. Basically it helps you to understand what your customers are hiring your product for. Once you grasp that it brings a lot of clarity to what you should focus on with your product as well as in your marketing activities.I first heard about it from Eoghan McCabe & Des Traynorof Intercom and use it all the time.

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Laure Parsons
of Olark

💼 Chief Storyteller at Olark

📍 Location: NYC. Olark HQ is in SF

📱 Your favorite gadget: My Nexus 5.
(Because I don't have a Vitamix).

☀ You start your day with: A cold glass of water.

⏱ Your favorite time-saving trick: Honestly, to try to do less
at the same time.

"Make time to get to know your target audience. Spend time with them.
Do customer interviews with them."

Describe an average day at Olark.

I don't mean to sound like a cliché, but there really is no typical day at Olark. We are mostly distributed, so we all work from different places with different work environments and schedules.

This makes life interesting, and is great for self-driven types. Yet we have a great sense of team and camaraderie, maintained through team meetings, Hipchat and our periodic live meetups. We're all interested in a common goal, to help people make a connection with their customers. Our full team does front-line support, which we call "All Hands Support" so we can stay in touch with our own customers and improve our product.

As a Chief Storyteller, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

I am a big fan of productivity hacks and when working remotely, they are essential. The key is to strike a balance between giving yourself the most optimal self to work with (e.g. getting enough sleep; giving yourself encouragement and empathy instead of negative self-talk; eating and drinking moderately) and managing technology. Our brains are not wired for the kind of multitasking demanded by multiple devices, screens, sites and channels. I'm always interested to find out what kind of dopamine responses we're training our brain for with technology and learn techniques to let go so I can get things done. (I did a talk on this for an unconference a few years ago). The best things to me are procrastinating on one thing by doing something else I need to accomplish, go for a walk around the block to renew the brain, and working standing up (I'm not sure it's a productivity hack but my back feels better).

As a person who is well-versed with communications & online marketing, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 5 tools you use?

To be honest, we are fairly low-tech in marketing, but we do use some basic tools.
Mailchimp – Nice newsletters and a brand we can relate to.
Formstack – We recently began using Formstack for online forms and they are easy to use.

Mixpanel – For tracking data and analytics on site.
Wistia – Video hosting and good tutorials.
Hootsuite – For social, it's a great platform.

Olark is a super popular product and used by many businesses around the world. What marketing strategies do you use to get people to your site and convert to paying customers?

Our most awesome secret weapon is the product itself. It's on thousands and thousands of sites and users often find us just by chatting with another site. We also have a customer base that we have a great, friendly relationship with and do a lot for us by spreading the word in social media and to their colleagues. We're moving into more robust content marketing to be able to give prospective and existing customers a richer experience and hope to see more videos and articles that can help anyone achieve better customer experience.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

The hardest part about startup marketing is that you could literally work 24 hours a day and not even scratch the surface of all the work you could do for your company. For that reason, the most important thing you can do is to set priorities and then put blinders on. You will have to say no to a million opportunities that seem amazing but aren't within the scope of your resources. Define your messages and stay on track. Do more things well, not more things. Set up some regular goals and meet them. And be sure to celebrate your wins, even if no one else notices.

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Natalie Nagele
of Wildbit

💼 Customer Advocate, Team Mediator at Wildbit

📍 Location: Philadelphia

📱 Your favorite gadget: iPad mini

☀️ You start your day with: Huge hug from our three year old daughter

⏱️ Your favorite time-saving trick: Saying no and delegating

"We set goals for our marketing efforts and then only evaluate once
we've finished what we're doing."

Describe an average day at Wildbit.

I usually start my day around 7:30 am, getting ourselves and our daughter ready for our day. We get to the office between 9-9:30 am. Usually, the day begins with clearing out my Inbox and responding to anything that the team needs since I left the day before. We also catch up with anyone who needs something or anyone who is being blocked. Then we have a family lunch at 12:30 prepared by our Wildbit chef. We take this time to just talk and catch up. The afternoon is when I get my project work done. Whether it's writing a newsletter, editing a blog post, or planning new releases with the team. We finish between 5-5:30pm and then go home to spend family time with our daughter.

As a CEO/ Marketer in a high growth company, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

I stay away from social media during the day, unless it's to make an announcement for the products. I also delegate, a lot. And I think most importantly I keep a lot of running lists. It's probably pretty archaic, but I organize a huge list of tasks I want to get done, then break them up into smaller lists, based on priority. Since so many things get thrown at me daily, it's nice to see some items getting checked off. I use these priorities to stay focused, and it also helps me when it's time to switch to something else.

Our team plans sprints with weekly/bi-weekly iterations. I haven't been as successful with those since my day changes all the time, so instead I try to come up with one large project for myself each week. That can be writing a new help article, writing a newsletter, reach out to 10 customers, etc. This way, I'll know what to work towards, even though my list is long and the tasks change daily.

I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 5 tools you use and how do they help you?

We have a very robust dashboard for all of our products that tracks a lot of business analytics. I live in there daily. We use Mixpanel to generate reports on all the data we collect. This helps with answering quick

questions, i.e. how many people upgraded to a certain plan in the last 10 days.

We use Google Analytics to track visits and pageviews. We also use CrazyEgg to keep track of site redesigns to make sure we're communicating what we want the way we want. We want to make sure that we design elements that resonate with people. For example, we may create something that isn't a button, but ends up being treated as one. That needs to be fixed and CrazyEgg helps us with that.

We've used some A/B testing apps in the past, but recently built our own. It's nothing fancy, but combined with Mixpanel I feel more confident in the results I'm seeing.

How do you'll market Wildbit? Can you give some details as to how you ramped up signups when you started out?

When we started Beanstalk we did a lot of integrations with other services. In return, they added us to their marketplaces or blogged/tweeted about us. That really helped get more people to see and try the product and really launched us to the market. We've repeated this with all three products and it has done really well for us.

Nowadays we spend some money on ads, conferences, and giveaways. We've recently started to send swag to customers who have been with us a certain amount of time as a way of saying Thanks. We want to remind them that there are real people behind the software and they seem to be really appreciating it.

We really think the best marketing is building a great product. We're not very analytics focused. We tried to be at one point, but as a small team we learned that our return on focusing to build a great product was much higher than trying to analyze and move the needles a few points in the positive direction. (if that makes sense).

Wildbit has very successful products and has a growing list of customers. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

We try to listen and pay attention to what our customers say, but we haven't always made this a big effort. Recently I've been reaching out to customers directly and offering to have phone calls with them to get to know their needs and what they're working on. It's been great to apply this understanding to our own product development.

One of our biggest advantages is that our audience is the same for all three products (all developer focused). So we're able to market the products to our own customers, and also understand their needs from how they use one of the other products. That knowledge is what led us to launching Postmark and recently dploy.io.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

I think staying focused is critical. I try to avoid the noise that happens around me. So I set a goal and work towards it, without letting what my competitors do distract me. So that means staying away from social media, keeping really good to-do lists and staying close to my team and what they are working on.

We set goals for our marketing efforts and then only evaluate once we've finished what we're doing. We try not to second-guess ourselves until we've followed through with our plan.

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Nathan Kontny
of Draft

💼 Founder of Draft

📍 Location: Chicago

📱 Your favorite gadget: Keurig coffee maker.
I love having coffee almost instantaneously.

☀️ You start your day with: Coffee

⏱️ Your favorite time-saving trick: I'd say using a Keurig again, but now I sound like a Keurig salesman. I'm not sure it's a trick, but I constantly try and get better at finding small solutions to problems. I find myself with all sorts of extra time when I stop worrying so much about perfect and complete solutions to things.

"We set goals for our marketing efforts and then only evaluate once we've finished what we're doing."

Describe an average day at Draft.

I wake up and make a breakfast of coffee + protein shake + a salad. My salad is usually just a bunch of spinach and broccoli. No salad dressing. Sometimes I'll throw some blueberries in there. Most people make a face when they see or hear about my breakfast. "A salad for breakfast?! And it's just raw spinach and broccoli?!?!"

It does take getting used to. Broccoli is the most ridiculous food on the planet. Most people seem to not like it. But it's the best "superfood" you can eat. For example, it has more Vitamin C than oranges. And it has more vitamins than any other food.

I then immediately go into Draft mode during my breakfast. I'll often start at the top of my email inbox and just plough through it. If I see an email, I'll reply to it or delete it immediately. Most often, it takes only a couple minutes to reply. If I procrastinate by replying later, I have to re-read the email and re-think what the reply is going to be. Procrastinating on email means double work. For the emails that might take longer to reply, I'll flag them as things I need to get back to.

I try and work out about 6 days a week. I'll do that usually before lunch. I'm such a homebody. I love working at my dining room table with my cat and dog nearby. And my workouts are the same. I prefer being at home and not wasting time in any commute to a gym.

My favorite at home workouts are things like p90x. I've done p90x multiple times. It's a fantastic all around set of workouts. My favorite these days is Shaun T's T25. It's hard to convince me I don't have 25 minutes to workout.

After lunch, on many days, I like to work in front of a TV.

> "Watch more TV."
> – Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Life Lessons)

I know this isn't real common, but I've always been pretty good about working while watching television. It can't be some really cerebral show that I've never seen before, but things like re-runs of Felicity or West Wing

are perfect. The core of Draft was built while watching the entire season of West Wing over again at 1AM.

I like to work really late at night. It's peaceful at 1AM. Sometimes, I get tired at 10PM only to get some kind of new wind and stay up till 3AM working on Draft.

As for what I actually do, I'm just trying to make things that help me become a better and more productive writer. And it just so happens, there's a bunch of other people that benefit from that.

As a marketer & founder, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

One of the most important productivity hack is simply how I manage my to-do list. I picked up this method from a book called The One Minute To-do List. It's got a great method of organizing what needs to get done. Now, Soon, Later.

Now is just three things – the top three things you need to do ASAP. Soon is ten things max that you might need to do soon. Later is everything else. It really helps if you realize there's only so much you can do. You can't actually work on ten things at once. Three is the max you can even really think about all day. If something is blocking me, I'll take a break and work on one of the other three.

The other thing that really helps me is just figuring out what the 20% solution is. For almost any problem you can name in your life, there's a tiny solution that solves 80% of what's going on. Most of us building things, are trying to do 100%. There's something called the The Zeigarnik Effect. It's this psychological effect that our brains go through where it hurts us to not complete something. I think that's why so many of us suck at coming up with simple 20% solutions. We're obsessed about trying to nail down 100% of our vision of what a solution looks like. But the paradox is that it's so hard to get to that 100%.

As a person who is going solo, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 5 tools you use? Does your blog, ninjas and robots help in getting signups for Draft?

I don't use many automated tools. I like to stay on top of my Twitter searches for mentions of my blog or Draft. But it's just usually me using those searches manually.

My blog, Ninjas and Robots, is definitely a great resource for my business and driving new users to Draft.

I think a lot of people have a pretty narrow view of marketing. They want to do X and measure Y and if that doesn't work like they expect, they give up or declare failure.

I like to just focus on teaching. And I don't try to automate. I do a lot of things that probably don't even look like they'd be good ideas if you measured them. I go onto Reddit and just answer random questions about writing or starting a business. Most of the people I'm sure reading those don't become Draft customers. Some do. But more importantly, I know I got to teach someone something that day. And what's also interesting, is I can take that teaching and turn it into a blog post, or a speech or even a chapter of a book.

Instead of automation and a focus on marketing, I think more people really need to just teach more. Worry about leaving people with something they can make their lives better with, and the rest will fall into place.

Draft has a growing community of users. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

Paul Graham, founder Y Combinator likes to tell his startups that all we should be doing when starting our businesses is building features and talking to users.

So I don't really look at Draft's community of users as a marketing resource. Instead, Draft's users are constantly helping me make a better product and I hope I'm helping them.

If you click on Help in Draft, many people are surprised that it doesn't take you to an FAQ. That's what most sites do. Instead, it pops up a box where you can immediately send me an email with your question. I love getting these emails.

After I answer a support email I often end it with, "Does that help?" instead of saying "Please let me know if you have any further questions." I explicitly ask the question in my email because I want even more conversation.

All those conversations turn into even more great ideas on how I can help people get better at not just using Draft, but at becoming great at writing.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

Teach.
Out-teach the competition. Ready Kathy Sierra's blog, especially her post on out-teaching vs. out-spending. Spend your time trying to help people get better at what they want to get better at doing, and you'll find yourself surrounded by people who are happy to spread the word about things you might be selling.

Write.
Consistently. Give yourself a goal of publishing one blog post a week that teaches someone else something. Do that for years. This game of startups and building businesses is a long-game. Too many people just try quick marketing hits. It is too late when they realize that the time could have been used creating an audience much more loyal than people clicking banner ads.

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Ezra Fishman
of Wistia

💼 Director of Marketing at Wistia

📍 Location: Somerville, MA

📱 Your favorite gadget: Wireless Mouse

☀️ You start your day with: A quick bike ride

⏱️ Your favorite time-saving trick: Keeping my inbox clean with followup.cc

"Focus on the long-term goal of building an audience.
An engaged audience is the most valuable asset
a content marketer can hope for."

Describe an average day as the Director of Marketing at Wistia.

There really is no typical day here at Wistia, particularly in the world of marketing. We spend a lot of time on content — we typically make a video a week for our blog and/or our Learning Center. This content is what drives our marketing efforts so it tends to dominate my day-to-day efforts.

As a marketer, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

Email can be a total time-sink and distraction. I turn off email for several hours a day and focus on getting "real" work done. Then I come back to the inbox and spend 30 mins responding to messages. There is generally very little that's so urgent it can't wait for a couple hours.

I also try to keep my to-do list as short as possible. If I can't fit my major items onto a single sticky note than I probably need to spend some time prioritizing. It's easy to fall into the habit of just adding on to a list as things come up. But if I need a separate system to organize my to-do list I'm now spending more time organizing rather than doing.

As a video and inbound marketing expert, I'm sure you rely on a few marketing tools to automate your efforts. What are the top 5 tools you use?

Yeah, we use a bunch of different tools to both organize and automate our marketing efforts. We are heavy Google Docs users for collaborations of all sorts. We use Litmus for email testing and Moz to help manage all of our SEO efforts. We use Crazy Egg to get some detailed website analytics. And of course we use our own product, Wistia, to manage all of our video marketing efforts.

Wistia has a large and thriving community of users. How do you use this treasure trove of customer insight to power your marketing efforts?

We rely heavily on our community to guide our content creation. We recently sent a survey to our entire community (http://wistia.com/blog/content-and-events-survey-2013/) asking what topics they are most interested in learning from us. We also look for this

feedback on a more regular basis through interactions on twitter, facebook and through support.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

My advice is to focus on the long-term goal of building an audience. An engaged audience is the most valuable asset a content marketer can hope for. The challenge is that you can't attract an audience over night. It takes time and it takes consistent, useful and relevant content. There aren't a lot of shortcuts but the long term payoff is massive.

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Twain Taylor
of FusionCharts

💼 Marketing Manager at FusionCharts

📍 Location: Bangalore, India

📱 Your favorite gadget: Canon 550D

☀️ You start your day with: Walking my dog, Tia

⏱️ Your favorite time-saving trick: Scramble!

"Set expectations/goals at the start: It's one of the most difficult things to do at a startup with so much flux, differences in perspective, and feisty teammates, but is probably the most important."

Describe an average day as a Marketing Manager at Fusion Charts.

It's quite a rush, and a lot of things happen, many at the same time. Here are some of the things on my mind during the day – take the blog post live, email newsletter needs to be tagged, check our adwords account, send collateral to event organizers, reach out to industry bloggers, plan outreach for the lead gen campaigns, implement the new google analytics feature, keep track of competitors and external forums like StackOverflow, get help from support and respond to that new comment on our facebook/twitter/blog, submit & review weekly reports, and lots more.

What makes all this easy and fun to do is the amount of flexibility, and autonomy in our work culture. That's one of the main the differences between marketing at a startup, and marketing at a corporate.

As a marketer, what are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

A to-do list is an oldie but a goodie, I make one everyday. I also take notes on what I read/learn, so I don't forget it, and can access it easily later.

What are the top 5 tools you use to automate your marketing efforts?

Evernote – I use it instead of post-its, to-do softwares, notepads, and MS word.
Google Docs – Great for collaboration.
Google Analytics Custom Reports – To see my most important web stats in an easy to access, customized report.
BuzzStream – To manage outreach and link building campaigns.
Feedly – To keep track of the industry & competitor websites.

FusionCharts has thousands of users all over the world. How do you use this treasure trove of consumer insight to power your marketing efforts?

We have 21,000 customers, most of whom are enterprises, and a user base of 450,000 developers. With this backdrop, a lot of what we do at FusionCharts is to solve for enterprises and their developers. If you check out our blog, you'll notice how we do this with topics ranging from

developer tutorials, to data visualization best practices, to inspiring dashboards, and even the occasional fun infographic. We have enterprises and developers at the center of all we do.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

Set expectations/goals at the start: It's one of the most difficult things to do at a startup with so much flux, differences in perspective, and feisty teammates, but is probably the most important.

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Sairam Krishnan
of Freshdesk

💼 Marketing Communications Manager at Freshdesk Inc

📍 Location: Chennai, India

📝 He writes at: Freshdesk Thoughts

⚙️ Favourite Marketing Automation Tool: Scribe SEO

"As part of the Content team, my currency is ideas.
I read a lot, and when something interesting strikes me, I note it down
and see if this is something our audience would want to hear about."

Describe an average day as a Marketing Communications Manager at Freshdesk.

I come in around half past nine, and start with writing down what I want to get done for the day. There are morning strategy meetings roughly once a week, when we outline plans for the next few days and their relevance to our long term vision.

On normal days I try to get the bulk of the day's writing done in the morning, and spend the afternoons reviewing and revising copy with Vikram (Director of Marketing at Freshdesk, & my manager), after which I work with the design team to get things live. We are all sticklers for detail, including our quite brilliant design team, and this means there are a lot of ideas thrown around, a lot of cutting and editing and so on. This takes time, so by the time we look up, its already 7.

This doesn't apply during emergency mode – when we have a new feature going out or we are doing a marketing activity of some sort – mailers, ad campaigns and the like, during which we are continually running around getting things done and workdays stretch very late. And we do work a lot in emergency mode; we are a startup, after all. But when I'm doing a larger project, a whitepaper for example, I'm left to my own devices until I finish what I want to.

Marketing involves extreme multi-tasking and it's difficult to stay productive. As a Marketer, what are the top 3 strategies you use to stay productive?

I don't know about that. In a startup, you can't really not work, can you? You always have to be productive. I only have one strategy, and it's not really a strategy at all. When I'm walking back home from work, I need to know I've done my bit for the company today, that I've done justice to the amazing people I work with. And that is very important to me.

What are the top 5 tools you use to automate your marketing efforts?

My favorite is by far Scribe SEO, but I'm a content marketer and I'm biased. We useGoogle Analytics, of course, MailChimp, and Google Apps for Business.

As a Content Marketer at Freshdesk, you churn out fresh, insightful content regularly. What's your process?

As part of the Content team, my currency is ideas. I read a lot, and when something interesting strikes me, I note it down and see if this is something our audience would want to hear about. My CEO Girish Mathrubootham has been in the industry for a decade and a half, and I regularly tap into his experience for ideas and guidance. Our customers also give us ideas; most of our product related content comes from their concerns, questions and suggestions.

We want whatever we create at Freshdesk to give some kind of value addition to the people who read it; our content should be informative as well as entertaining and our audience should want to come back and read some more. Which means content creation doesn't just end with writing it. There's packaging, as well as a whole lot of thought put into distribution so it reaches who we want it to reach.

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding marketers to work smart and stay productive?

Of course not. This is only my second year at Freshdesk, and I don't think I can give anyone advice! Though what I can say to someone starting out is to do work that you can identify with. Freshdesk is first and foremost a customer support company, something that I can relate to, and find meaning in.

> If you don't, you just won't have fun and won't be able to stay productive.

And yes, break free of the "I'm an MBA. I know everything" mentality. There's a lot to learn for us Business School types.

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Gregory Ciotti
of Help Scout

💼 Marketer at Help Scout & Blogger at Sparring Mind

📍 Location: Delaware

📱 Your favorite gadget: My crazy headphones!

☀ You start your day with: Writing, always

⏱ Your favorite time-saving trick: Batching, and creating email shortcuts for common questions I get via email with TextExpander.

"As part of the Content team, my currency is ideas.
I read a lot, and when something interesting strikes me, I note it down and see if this is something our audience would want to hear about."

Describe an average day as a Marketing Director at Help Scout & Blogger Extraordinaire at Sparring Mind

As 'Chief Content Astronaut' (a self-given title) for Help Scout and an avid blogger, my day almost always begins with writing. I've found that when I create a list the night before of 1-2 big writing tasks to accomplish in the morning, I'm much more likely to get started right away, as I don't have to think about, "What should I do right now?"

The rest of the day consists of a lot different things, and changes weekly, but usually you can find me:

- Researching new posts
- Writing new posts
- Checking analytics and search rankings
- Thinking about long-term strategy and market positioning
- Networking
- Doing interviews!

Basically, if you don't love being at your computer, reading, and writing, you should stay far away from this job!

You're a behavioral psychology expert and have written tons of articles on the science behind productivity. What are some of your favorite productivity hacks?

I'm the kind of person that practices what I preach, so everything I mention in The Science of Productivity is something that I follow personally.

- That said, some of my favorite hacks that didn't make the post (because they don't relate to research) include the following:
- Batching (from Getting Things Done, a system where you only work on a single task once during the entire day, like spending one big chunk checking email instead of checking it all day long)
- Using tools like StayFocusd to block distracting websites (looking at you Reddit!)
- Writing a to-do list the night before, so my morning can begin on auto-pilot
- Doing the 'hard work' first, so the end of the day (when I'm tired) can be

used to complete any busy work that needs to get done

- Switching my work location once a day (usually around noon, I go to another desk)

Lastly, I've found (and some research has touched on this) that I'm not the type of person that benefits from 'getting motivated', it's usually best for me to just look at a situation objectively ("This is going to be rough…") and just sit down and start anyway, trying to get motivated actually kills my motivation!

As a blogger and inbound marketing specialist, I'm sure you're no stranger to marketing automation. What are the top 5 tools you use to automate your marketing efforts?

- There are a number of different things we could touch upon here, but to keep things short and sweet, here are a few tools that I highly recommend:
- AWeber
- Buffer
- HubSpot
- Marketo
- Pardot

It really comes down to which tools are the best 'fit' for your business, so evaluate alternative options and then get decisive!

Sparring Mind is a great blog (one of my personal favorites!) and you churn out content that's unique and insightful. What's your process?

With Sparring Mind, one of the best things that I did for topic ideas (hat tip to Derek Halpern for this strategy), was to ask people in my initial 'Thanks for Subscribing!' email what they would like help with.

People have recommended strategies for creative thinking, habit building, etc., and I use these ideas as a foundation for a new post.

Next, it's all about finding great research, and I'm sorry to say that this part can't be made easier—I simply have to keep my ear to the ground by

checking in on my favorite academic journals, psychology blogs, and books that cover topics within human behavior.

You won't always find the research you need to justify a post, but when you do, it really resonates with people and as you can see on my homepage, nearly every post that I've published has been a home run!

Is there any advice you'd like to give to budding content marketers to help them work smart and stay productive?

One of the most important pieces of advice that I can give, as silly as it may seem, is to have a 'cheering section'. My team and I are always making sure to congratulate each other on big wins, as there is nothing that fuels the fire quite like someone saying 'You crushed this, great job!'

The next thing I recommend is to create a 'To-NOT Do List', or a list of things that you know simply waste your time and aren't going to help really move your business forward. For me, some things listed are 'Do NOT habitually check Google Analytics!', or 'Do NOT check Twitter more than once a day'.

Write them down, put the list next to your desk, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you snap back from those time-sucking activities.

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