

**EPISODE 20**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:01.3] DT:** Hello hackers, thanks a lot for joining us for another episode of the Hacking UI podcast where we hack our way through design, development, and entrepreneurship. I'm David Tintner.

**[0:00:09.1] SS:** I'm Sagi Shrieber.

**[0:00:09.9] DT:** today we have Kelsey Ruger on the show. Kelsey is a professor, a designer, a developer, pretty much a jack of all trades and we met and got to know Kelsey because he's also a member of the Side Project Accelerator.

**[0:00:21.0] SS:** Kelsey loves learning and consumes a lot of books, articles and podcast. In this episode here, a couple of incredible tips of how he reads about 50 books a year. He also produces tons of his own content. Before he joins Side Project Accelerator, he had already published more than 100 articles and he shares with us his method for coming up with ideas. All right, you ready?

**[0:00:41.9] DT:** Let's get hacking.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:55.2] SS:** Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Hacking UI podcast and with us today is Kelsey Ruger. Kelsey, what's up?

**[0:01:02.4] KR:** Hey, how is it going guys?

**[0:01:04.3] DT:** Hey Kelsey.

**[0:01:05.6] SS:** Great to have you on the show man. So before we start everything, how about you just tell us a bit of a background about yourself?

**[0:01:14.1] KR:** Sure. So my name is Kelsey Ruger. I am a consultant in the United States, here in Houston, Texas. I have a pretty I guess broad background. I started out as a developer when I graduated from college. Mostly because when I re-graduated from college, there wasn't the opportunity to do a lot of UX work, which is what I do right now. So I graduated from college and I started out as a consultant building financial software, I think I might have mentioned this to you guys before but right out of college I built financial software for a company here in Houston. At that time it was named AIM investments.

So we were working on a project with a company named Marian Financial and what ended up happening is they needed a project software package and so because we didn't have anything else, we built it using, at the time I guess it was asp.net, and that was really my first foray into doing web software. And ever since then, I've been working on web and mobile projects for fortune 500 startups and agencies. So I've had a lot of opportunity to do different things throughout my career. I would say that if you had to sort of label me as something, I'm a problem solver because I've had the opportunity to work in different industries as well.

**[0:02:27.7] DT:** You're coming at us from Houston, right? I know you're also really involved in the Houston scene now, you're involved in Houston startup scene and everything going on there too, right?

**[0:02:36.6] KR:** Yeah. so I guess back in, it must have been about 2003 when I had moved back from Austin. The company I worked for had been acquired by Prodigy, which for some of your audience, they'll remember that it's one of the old internet dial up companies and so we all got moved to Austin. We did pretty well and we were purchased by AT&T and so after that purchase, I decided I wanted to move back to Houston and I was working for a search marketing and web design company and I got the opportunity to do my first BarCamp and so bar camp really was my introduction into working with the Houston community in the startup world.

**[0:03:22.4] DT:** What is BarCamp exactly?

**[0:03:25.2] KR:** BarCamps are "un-conferences" and so basically you show up at the conference, there is really no structure, usually there's a white board and people can fill in ideas

about what they want to talk about and so, the participants create the conference. So there's been regular BarCamps, there's been podcast BarCamps, video BarCamps, BarCamps that focus on specific topics and I think what's evolved from that is really sort of, things that I've seen that I've seen evolve out of BarCamps are co-working spaces, we've seen new startups come out of BarCamps, we've seen other types of conferences because I think where the BarCamp came from was one, it was a response to Foodcamp and I don't know if you guys know anything about Foodcamp. Foodcamp was a get together that was structured much the same way but it was by invitation only. I think BarCamp, you guys interviewed Matt Mullenweg not too long ago right?

**[0:04:14.7] DT:** Yeah, he was just on the show.

**[0:04:16.7] KR:** So Matt was one of the first people to really get on board with the idea of BarCamps because it allowed, you know, it made it democratic versus invitation only or setup by a certain group of person as a structured conference, that's allowed the community to talk about what they wanted to talk about versus having that structure set for them.

**[0:04:35.2] SS:** How was it like, how did you go about — I mean, is it like a hackathon where everybody writes ideas and everybody then votes and then the idea as like people talk about those ideas but then they don't have a presentation prepared or anything. So how does it work?

**[0:04:48.4] KR:** It's kind of like that. Some people show up with prepared presentations, one of the rules of BarCamps is it's okay to get up and leave if you don't like what's being talked about and so, generally, the structure is there is some spaces that are setup so maybe three or four spaces and on the board, people get the opportunity to write in to usually it's 20 minutes or 30 minute slots.

You go to the presentation or the session you want and it could be anything from automation for your dog to growth hacking techniques. It just depends on what that person wants to talk about. The way you decide is whoever shows up in that room, they don't really vote on the slots, you just get to fill it in and if someone doesn't want to go to your session, they just don't go.

**[0:05:32.4] SS:** Sounds like a cool concept. So you started out like BarCamp scene in Houston like you are one of the first that got it started?

**[0:05:40.5] KR:** Yeah, it was me, another guy named Mark Nathan and a lady named Erica O'Grady who were primarily responsible for putting together the first bar camp here in Houston and then we got an opportunity to interact with lots of people who were doing this around the country. So from Indie Hall, there is the founder there, Alex. In Austin, a good guy, his name is Whirly, I don't know if you guys have ever met Whirly but Whirly has done everything. Whirly is an IBM genius and he used to go all out for his BarCamps and typically they would do them sometime around South by Southwest.

They're huge. You get local people, you get people coming in from different places around the world so those BarCamps are always really fun too. The BarCamps really gave us an opportunity not only to talk about technology and design but you got to talk about it with people from all around the world and that sort of led us to start another group called Refresh Houston. Refresh Houston was probably the first precursor to all of the meetups that happen now. So for Refresh Houston, it was just to everyone. If you wanted to talk about technology, design , marketing, everyone would get together and I think from Refresh Houston, it sort of broke out into different meetups.

**[0:06:52.4] DT:** You're involved over the place and you're doing all sorts of different groups, can you take us through your day and what are you working on right now and what are the most important things to you right now?

**[0:06:59.2] KR:** So right now I'm working primarily as a consultant. I'm working on a project for an oil and gas analytics company here in Houston, so that takes up a lot of time. But what the real project that I've been focusing on here recently is my personal blog and newsletter. It's [kenziecreative.com](http://kenziecreative.com) and that is really where I have started to share a lot of the ideas that I've either catalogued over the years or lessons that I have learned and a lot of it comes either directly from work or things I've taught when I'm teaching user experience at the university of Houston.

That actually may have been sort of the catalyst for me, redesigning my blog, it was originally the moleskin.com and I figured out that wasn't really the brand that I wanted, especially since people always assume that I was the guy who made the notebooks. So I figured it was time to change that and so I started to really focus on sharing the ideas that I have there. It could be across a bunch of different topics because in my line of work, I've had the opportunity to study a lot of things and when you study a lot of things, it gives you a lot of material for synthesis and fitting those ideas together to share different lessons.

**[0:08:08.7] DT:** Just to put things in perspective, for everyone listening now, the moleskin.com, you had something — how many articles did you have on it?

**[0:08:15.2] KR:** Close to a hundred.

**[0:08:16.4] DT:** So this is not like a minor site. You had tons of content, and I remember when we started working together at the beginning of the Side Project Accelerator, you were talking about maybe rebranding or maybe starting something new. But this is not — you were not someone who was just starting with blogging by any means. You have tons of articles, you have your speaking presentations, you have podcasts and you decided to do this major rebranding and changed it to Kenziecreative.com. Can you talk about that? What led that decision?

**[0:08:43.9] KR:** Part of it was sort of having evergreen posts, right? So I went back and I looked at them and there was posts on every topic from “here's the eight reasons why you need to start a website” to “here's how you brand your website”. So the topics were sort of all over the place because I wrote about, at the time, what I felt like writing about. It may fit in with what I was doing, so those post about building websites and branding yourself fit with the marketing agency that I was working with at the time but a lot of the other stuff, I felt like didn't work going forward.

I was okay with cutting that, in fact, some of them I may sort of re-swiveled them into a different topic but for the most part, what I wanted to do was focus on the things that I was most passionate about or the things that I felt were most useful, sort of long term. It took me a couple of days to go through and figure out which articles I wanted to move over and that started with some of the most popular ones.

So I'll tell you, for example, one of my most popular post ever, and I want to say it got close to 150,000 page views, was about Firefox plug-ins. But this post was 10 years old and it was completely out of date and not relevant and so I was okay losing that, even though that post had gotten so much traffic in the past.

**[0:10:03.9] DT:** Okay, you made the decision to kind of make this massive rebranding of your blog and move everything over? How much work was that?

**[0:10:10.6] KR:** For me, not a ton. Since I've been working with WordPress for so long. Most of the work was on the new site and getting it ready. I will admit, I edited every single post as I moved it over because you know you read something and you wrote it a couple of years ago or maybe even a couple of months ago and you look at it and you're like, "What was I thinking when I wrote this?" So there was a lot of editing work, but that part didn't take long. I think the biggest part was getting the new site ready, making sure I went to all of the places where that site was referenced and making that change.

**[0:10:46.6] DT:** So you've done this kind of rebranding and kind of to put this, to frame this a little bit. You decided to do this rebranding, I guess at the beginning of the Side Project Accelerator, right?

**[0:10:54.9] KR:** Yup, so in addition to trying to get going with that, I was also bringing down an old site, bringing up a new one, porting over all these posts, so that first couple of weeks was a lot of work.

**[0:11:03.8] DT:** Yeah, that's exactly what I wanted to get, the Side Project Accelerator, every week, there's a new lesson, there's something new that you have to create. So you took on, you're one of the most active participants in the program and doing, not only all the lessons and helping other people with their lessons but also doing this major rebranding. How did you find the time to do all of this?

**[0:11:21.8] KR:** You know, it's really interesting. I'm working on a new blogpost on goal setting and one of the things that I have gotten much better at over the years is sort of pinpointing which things to do myself, which things to ignore, and which things to delegate or automate

because you can't do everything. When I started working on the new site, one of the things I had to figure out was am I going to design this myself? And I think this is one of the things that a lot of designers struggle with as they want to expand beyond just being designers.

If you're going to, I think if you're going to do a blog, one that you have to figure out what the purpose of that blog is and how much time you spend doing the work yourself versus outsourcing it or maybe purchasing it. So for this particular blog, I found a theme that was highly customizable and since I knew that I wanted to have sort of a minimal blog anyway, I felt okay with not doing all of the production work myself. So it would have meant getting into Sketch, designing the website and then converting it to WordPress and creating a theme for it, testing it and then still writing blogpost.

And so, given the time period we've had to sort of get ready and start producing content, I felt like it was a better idea to use a theme versus doing it custom. I think that it's so funny because if you've been working with entrepreneurs for a long time or you've been working with people who are freelancers, one of the main things that a lot of people struggle with is doing the businesses not the same as working in the business. So if you are starting a company and you're a designer, you have to, what I call make yourself obsolete as a designer as quickly as possible because if you don't, it's much harder to work on the business and do the things that is required to create a successful business.

**[0:13:17.2] DT:** Definitely. So how exactly have you made yourself, like you said, obsolete as far as design, besides you took a theme that was already used? Any other tips for taking yourself out of the equation and getting work done in other ways?

**[0:13:30.2] KR:** I guess the one thing I would tell you is in my most recent startup, which was a mobile software company. One of the things that me and the other cofounders decided really early on was we went out to hire a really, really good team and let the team do the work. Because what you'll see a lot of times is people will start a startup and if it came from development or they came from design, they have a pretty strong idea about how they want things to go.

They spent so much time focused on building the thing that no one is focused on building the business. In fact I have a friend who had a pretty successful marketing company here in Houston and one of the last times I met with him, he told me how much time he was spending as a CEO on one of the products. I thought to myself, “Well why are you spending so much time on the product when you have 30 employees who are capable? And if they’re not, that means you made bad hires.”

I think one of the things you have to figure out early on, if you’re a startup, figure out how do I hire the right people and then train them or mentor them so that they can succeed and help me grow the company and if you’re a freelancer, you have to sort of decide, am I building a company or am I a consultant? It’s okay if you’re a consultant. The moment you decide to hire other people, you have to start working on removing yourself from the work equation, otherwise, the business is constrained by you and how much you are willing to grow.

**[0:14:55.9] DT:** That’s awesome. I want to follow up with that but just before I do that, I want us to take a quick break and give a shout out to our sponsors for this episode.

### **[SPONSOR BREAK]**

**[0:15:03.9] DT:** This week’s episode is brought to you by Top Level Design. I’m particularly excited about getting this sponsor on board because Top Level Design is in charge of the new .design domain names. These are springing up like crazy and they look great. You must have seen Facebook.design and Airbnb.design already. As soon as we saw that this was happening, I said to Sagi, “We have to get involved in this.” You can buy your own .design domain name and because they only launched a few months ago, you can still grab a lot of great domains that aren’t available as .com.

If you’re looking for where to park your portfolio, think about how much better it looks as yourname.design, instead of some convoluted .com domain name that no one can remember. If you visit the show notes for this episode at [hackingui.com](http://hackingui.com). You’ll see a special link to any .design domain for only \$5. Stay tuned because later in the episode, we’re going to let you know about how you can get that for free.

Now let's get back to the show.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:15:52.7] DT:** I think this totally applies even more so to side projects because you don't have the time that you would have in a startup where you're doing it full time or something like that. This also just reminded me, we had a lot of conversations about this, about kind of pursuing freedom and pursuing ways to find more time. I know you have a family, I think three kids, right?

**[0:16:12.4] KR:** Yep.

**[0:16:12.9] DT:** Three kids and we were talking about how you were trying to work on your side project to find more timer for them and I think what you just said about finding ways to get the work done or outsourcing it or teaching other people how to do it really applies to that, right?

**[0:16:26.4] KR:** Yep, you know, I would say, sort of my current mindset or philosophy on side project, it comes from two sources. One, the first time I read *The Four Hour Work Week* and it dawned on me, hey, the only way that startups and big companies and making a ton of money from a giant product release isn't necessarily, they aren't the only ways that you can make the money you need to survive. There's lots of other ways to do that.

I think then one day I was sitting here and of all the weird places to get this, it was from Chris Rock. He was doing an interview and he was talking about what it meant to be a millionaire or how rich people tend to think about money and they don't think of it in terms of being able to buy things, they think of it as time and options. They have enough money to give them the time to do the things they want to do and they have enough money to have options, right?

So if you want to not work for six months and you want to travel with your children or your family, you can do that because you have money coming in from other sources and I think that to me was really the catalyst for me to do the Side Project Accelerator. Because what I realize is I'd always, I've had a pretty good career and I've always had a pretty good salary but that didn't necessarily give me freedom. Because I always had to go to work, I always had to be responsible for something and so if you've always got those extra responsibilities, it doesn't

really matter how much money you're making because you don't really have the freedom that you want.

**[0:17:57.9] DT:** 100%, I agree with you and I think Sagi and I are exactly on the same page. We also left our jobs in leadership roles at a scaling startup, making good salaries, for pursuing that freedom.

**[0:18:10.5] SS:** Yeah, that's one of the things that kind of like are leading us right now in everything that we do and everything that we also, have you seen like preached a lot in Side Project Accelerator. Kelsey, can you give us a bit of — can you go into to a little detail about why you joined the Side Project Accelerator? I mean obviously you are already a blogger with more than a hundred articles, a community behind it, you are teacher, you have a great career and what made you join specifically in Side Project Accelerator?

**[0:18:40.8] KR:** So I think I might have shown this to David when he was in Houston. I wasn't starting from scratch, but what I realized, and I'm trying to remember where I first heard about this, it must have been through the newsletter. But I was sitting here one day and I said, "You know what? I have a ton of ideas for products, a ton of ideas for blog posts. I need to put myself on a schedule to get some of this stuff done," and you know how that works, right?

You say you're going to put yourself on a schedule and you never get the chance to focus on it and the crazy thing is, I write nearly every day in my journal, so it wasn't like I wasn't used to writing, it was taking that writing and getting it prepared to share with other people, that was the part that I wasn't doing consistently. So what I realized was the times when I am most focused and ready to prepare content like that revolves around speaking. So anytime I'm speaking, it could be anywhere from two to six weeks that I spend before the presentation getting ready. I always produce a ton of content around that time but it's usually written in my journal.

So right about the time that you guys were doing that, I was sort of contemplating, what do I really want to spend my time doing when I'm not working that benefits me and my family and that sort of advances the mission that I said I have, which is helping people use their creativity to make better things happen in the world? That's really sort of what was the catalyst for me is I'd sort of already realized I needed to rebrand my blog, I'd sort of already realized that I wanted

to focus my content and efforts in certain areas that I felt like would benefit people outside of just being a developer or a designer.

**[0:20:24.4] SS:** So eventually, what did you get out of it? I mean, did you find the routine that now works for you and did you get everything setup like you wanted to?

**[0:20:32.2] KR:** Yeah, pretty much. I think following sort of my philosophy on goal setting, I sort of went back and said, "Okay. I need small wins," and so being able to write a newsletter each week, that's a small win right? Instead of trying to write a book or hey I'm going to do an eBook. It's much easier, one to write a newsletter each week and then maybe go back and see if there's a pattern there of things that you can focus on. That was for me the biggest thing is putting myself on a schedule that I could stick to it consistently and being able to start asking people what types of content they were most interested in as well.

**[0:21:10.8] SS:** Yeah, I mean, one of the things that's most that we heard from you was that you get tons of replies from your newsletters, right? Each newsletter you sent, you ask questions and then you get replies back, can you tell us a bit about that?

**[0:21:25.0] KR:** I don't even always ask questions. It's usually something like, "Man, I was just thinking about this topic, thanks for sending this." Or, "Hey, I didn't get your newsletter yet, when are you sending it out?" Usually each week it's something either, "Thanks for doing this," or, "Hey, let's get together for lunch, I wanted to discuss something with you." I think that it may actually come from the fact that I spent a lot of time mentoring people and a lot of the things that I talk about are directly from either a mentoring session that I've had in the past or questions that people ask me a lot. So I think that may be why it resonates with certain people when they get it.

**[0:22:03.7] SS:** Yeah, I mean, it's not that easy. It sounds easy when you say it but as someone that we send newsletters every week, we've done it for the past three years and I mean, getting these kinds of replies every newsletter is really appreciated.

**[0:22:19.1] KR:** It helps you know your own target. If you didn't get them, you'd never really know, you'd have to ask people. But getting the replies at least let's you know you're on the right

target and I think for me, one of the things that I decided at the start of the accelerator was to focus on, you guys know Kevin Kelly's concept of a thousand true fans? So I've decided, you know, some people aren't going to like your content, some people will love it, some people will unsubscribe from the list, other people will stay no matter what you send them.

I had never really thought about this whole thing about a thousand true fans until I was listening to — what podcast was I listening to? I want to say it was James Altucher and he was interviewing Kevin Kelly about that and I thought about, I was like, “Man, if you have a thousand true fans, any company in the world, you really only have to make about \$125 per person annually on average to make that work,” and so it's so funny that companies spend so much time on marketing to people who they will never win over or people who will be expensive to maintain as customers because you have to keep convincing them versus focusing on the people who want and look for your content in the first place or your product.

**[0:23:38.8] SS:** Yeah, I mean the concept of 1,000 true fans is like we really connect to it and that's also something that we go by. So totally. I think that if there is a tip that you can give people about this is, like the 1,000 true fans is a sure good tip to just go by that.

**[0:23:58.8] DT:** And Kelsey, you had a pretty interesting way of building your list. Can you talk about that? How you got people on it in the first place?

**[0:24:04.9] KR:** Sure. It was a longer process than the Side Project Accelerator. I had been thinking about sending out a newsletter for a long time and I actually asked people directly. So I started on Facebook or I started via email and I just reached out to people directly and said, “I'm going to be writing a newsletter, it's going to cover design, thinking, creativity and how you can use those things in your personal and professional life.” Some people said “no”. For the most part, I think everyone said, “Yes, okay I'll try it.”

There was a few people who said yes and they unsubscribed later, that was okay because it helped me build a pretty good list to start with and I think it's important to start with what you know and who you know when you're building a list. I think this goes for anything. If you're starting a company, if you are running a newsletter, it's always easier to get feedback from people you know because they'll actually talk to you. Whereas a person you've never talked to

before who maybe stumbles across your list, they may not give you feedback that's readily give you feedback. So I was able to build a pretty good list that way and those people refer. They'll newsletter a lot more often than I think the people who may have never met me before.

**[0:25:21.1] DT:** It's really important. It ties back into everything you do with your mentoring people, you're helping people, you're so active in the community and these people really turn into the subscribers in your list, the people who are reading your stuff. But I think it's something that I really appreciate in you is that a lot of people start doing stuff online or start collecting emails to build their audience or their newsletter, right?

They start thinking, "I need massive numbers and I need kind of these imaginative people on the internet that don't really exist." You did a totally different way, you don't really even promote your list so heavily to people who don't know you like you said, it's really, it's like a personal list that it grew from being a personal list and it's really growing well now and people are engaging with it and it's really that it's people that you have a real connection with and people who feel like they have a real connection with you.

**[0:26:08.1] KR:** Right. Ultimately, I think that's the way you build, especially if you're doing anything that's content driven. I think it's okay for it to grow fast but I think you probably will have more success if the fast growth isn't the metric you're looking for. It could grow fast, but I think if you focus on finding people who really like your content and so for a long time, I thought, "Man, I'm not going to mark it to creatives or to designers or people like that because they're not the ones who need this content."

Well that's exactly wrong because they were the ones who were responding to it, and sometimes you may, I think again is a product lesson. You may think you have one audience and you determine, you figure out over time that that's not really your audience. I've seen a lot of startups struggle with that where they identify an audience early on, their marketing to that audience or they're targeting that audience but it's actually resonating with someone else and they don't pick up on it.

I think if you are really focusing on targeting the people who really have a need for what you're doing, you're much more likely to have long term success versus maybe the bump you can get from a growth hacking technique that doesn't resonate with people long term.

**[0:27:25.0] DT:** So you were just saying about what really sounded like audience driven product development?

**[0:27:29.4] KR:** Right.

**[0:27:30.1] DT:** Okay, so take us through — I think the newsletter is really special that you write because of the content that's actually inside it. You write a very long form article each week on a different topic and it seems like you really invest time in writing this.

**[0:27:42.2] KR:** Yeah, you know what's really funny is there's been a few of them I never intended them to be long but I think when you start thinking about it and editing, they sometimes turn out to be longer than you would expect. But for me, you know, I actually keep this thing I call a thought catalogue. There's guys like Robert Green and Ryan Holiday, they call these universal books where they keep catalogues of index cards from the things that they study or things that they're researching. I've done that for a long time, I guess probably three years now.

And that started for me because I used to write all my ideas in journals and what I found was writing them in journals made it hard for me to synthesize ideas when something popped into my head because I had no idea which journal it was in or what page it was on. I'd end up digging back through my journals and then one day I realized, that wasn't really the way that I organize things mentally. And so what I started doing was taking all of my ideas as I read books, wrote journals, worked on presentations and I would put them in this card catalog. Including, I'd spent about 10 minutes every day just doing brain storming or ideation and coming up with ideas, putting those in.

And so when it comes time for me to write that article, typically already have 20 or 30 ideas that I could write on, with some content already written because it's sort of the accumulative effect of keeping these cards and I've had people tell me Evernote is better for that and I will tell them, "I don't think Evernote's better." I use Evernote too but for this type of work, I think being able to

go back to the catalog and pull out a set of 20 cards and say, “Okay, here’s what I thought about this over the last three years,” and then synthesize that into a single article versus having to go back and find all those sources to, you know, “What was I thinking one night, two years ago when I was having a conversation with a friend of mine about this topic?” It is so easy for me to pull those out and think up a title and then start writing.

So my process is usually pull out those cards, jot down some initial notes so that I have an idea about what I’m going to write and then just start writing in Grammarly so that I can get the article assembled. Once I get it mostly assembled, I move it over to MailChimp and finish it there and that process could be anywhere from 45 minutes to that goal setting one I told you, that started out as an article, it’s going to be a blog post now. But there’s probably 25 hours that have gone into that one. But it just depends on the topic.

**[0:30:22.3] DT:** I think it’s so important what you said about having like a repeatable process for every step. Even starting out at generating ideas. It’s something I think a lot of people don’t realize is that you have to, like you said, you spend 10, 15 minutes every day brainstorming ideas and that’s actually time that you’ve built into your routine?

**[0:30:38.4] KR:** Yeah, here’s what I think the myth about coming up with ideas and I had a conversation with a friend of mine last week and she was talking about people thinking they’re going to have this Eureka moment, that is not real. There’s no such thing as a Eureka moment. The eureka moment is usually that point where ideas that you already had synthesize into something that’s clear enough for you to move forward with.

So I think if you never spend time coming up with ideas or you never spend time looking at diverse topics, it’s going to be harder to come up with ideas when you need them. So I always tell people, you got to spend time generating ideas when you don’t need them. Even if they’re bad ideas. Generate bad ideas, I do it all the time with blogposts. I’ve probably thrown away 200 blog post or newsletter ideas.

Because you write them down and then when you come back to them, you’re like, “That doesn’t make any sense, or that doesn’t fit this audience.” But it doesn’t mean you don’t do them. I think a lot of people, they want to have the home run idea when I think most home run ideas are

actually the result of a hundred bad ideas that eventually you figure out what's the right thing to do?

**[0:31:48.9] DT:** That's a really nice quote. Most home run ideas are at a result of a hundred bad ideas. I like that. I'm doing this 30 day writing challenge right now, every day writing a new article and I really — the process for creating ideas and coming up with ideas really resonates with me because every day having to think of something new, like you said, is just not as easy as you think. There is not this eureka moment at all and I really have to be prepared with an idea that can turn into a full article and everything that you said matches our audience, fits, I have examples to back it up, and there's some meat to this.

**[0:32:24.1] KR:** Yeah, the other thing that you're doing that I think a lot of people romanticize is if you are a great writer or you are a great artist or you are a great guitar player, people think that people are just born with those skills and I always tell people when they, like a lot of people look at my handwriting or they'll look at my sketches and they'll say, "Man, you're so talented, I wish I was creative like that." I'll always tell them, "Those things have nothing to do with creativity, it's the output that's creative."

So if you're writing every day, it may not sound glamorous like, "Oh, David's writing every day," but that act is actually making you a better writer. That's how people become great writers is they write, that's how people become great artist is they draw and I think, I spend a lot of time with different types of people and I always tell people, "Practice is what makes you great. It's not being born with this great talent that no one else has. It's not having an aptitude," although some people do have an aptitude. But I think what you end up finding is the people who have the aptitude just develop a passion faster because there's something that they're doing on a regular basis to help them get to that point.

**[0:33:30.8] DT:** Perfect. I like to follow up on that in one second but just before we do, I want to take a quick break to tell you about our sponsors.

[SPONSOR BREAK]

**[0:33:39.8] DT:** So as I said before, this week's episode before, this week's episode is brought to you by Top Level Design who are offering the new .design domain names. If you go to the show notes for this episode at [hackingui.com](http://hackingui.com), you'll see a link to purchase any .design domain name for only \$5 for the first year. But this week only, they've agreed to hook it up for Hacking UI listeners. On Thursday, that's October 27, we're going to send out our weekly newsletter and in each email, there will be a personalized link that lets you get that domain for free for the first year. No credit card required and absolutely no risk to you. It literally doesn't get any better than that.

If you're not already a newsletter subscriber, you can sign up on [hackingui.com/signup](http://hackingui.com/signup) and look out for the offer in our next newsletter. Again, if you miss this week's deal, you can still visit the show notes of this episode on [hackingui.com](http://hackingui.com) to get the domain for five dollars.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:34:27.2] DT:** Another sort of process that I know, we've heard a lot from you in the Side Project Accelerator that I want you to dive into is the way you consume content. You're an avid reader, to say the least. That's like the understatement of the century, right?

**[0:34:41.4] KR:** you know, I probably really should write a blog post because I have several different methods of consuming content. The first thing that I'm okay — first of all, I buy a lot of books, I think — man, I should probably get an affiliate link for this, but there's a company named [thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com) that I buy a lot of books from now. Basically, the books are used and a lot of them come from libraries or people that take really good care of their books because I think it's much easier to consume content written than it is on screen.

In fact it's not just me, I think there's even been research that shows, comprehension and reading ability is much higher when you're looking at it on paper versus screen. I'll use screen too but if it's new information I will get the book. So typically when I get a book, I read both jackets, I read the table of contents and I scan the entire book first before I go back and read it. I'm doing that so that I can sort of get a structure around what the book is going to be about and I actually tell people this, especial with nonfiction books, "Don't treat nonfiction books like a

movie.” It doesn’t have to be a surprise what’s in the book. What you should do is sort of create a framework around what you’re about to read so that it’s easier for you to absorb that stuff.

The other thing that I do as I’m going through a book, well first of all, I’ve taken plenty of speed reading classes so I think if you can find the information you need on reading faster like not subvocalizing and using your finger as a pointer, don’t read in bed, tips like that will help you read faster. So as I’m going through, I have a system I will underline, key concepts if there is a big paragraph that I think I need to come back to, I’ll draw a line next to that, or put a star.

When you’re reading faster, you learn how to skip parts that don’t contain valuable information. So getting good at figuring out, “do I need to read this next paragraph?” after you’ve read the first line, is a key part of that? Once I’ve gone through a book then I’ll go back, take my index card and write down all of the ideas, quotes, references and if I’m working on a presentation, that usually results in more information that I have to go look up.

The second thing that I do, especially with web content. If you’re a mac user and you haven’t started using this, you’re missing out. I use the speech, the text to speech function on the computer all the time. So instead of, if I’m at work and I’m working on something and an article pops in, I can listen to that article while I am working by, you know, you select the text and you just let it read it to you. So a lot of times, for me, it’s figuring out one, where am I right now and can I read this whole thing? Two, is this the best format to read it in?

So those are the top two things that I do. I also supplement reading with executive book summaries, and a lot of times, audio. If I’m in the car I’ll listen to audio. It may not be reading the number of books that I read, that I consume in a year, but I will find different ways to get that information, especially to fill time. Because there’s always time to fill when you’re traveling or on the go. A lot of times I’ll end up with the book, the audio book and the executive book summary. If it’s a topic that I want to make sure that I am well versed on

**[00:38:06.6] DT:** How many books do you read in a month, or a year?

**[00:38:08.7] KR:** In a month, probably on average three to five but it could be as high as 10 in some months depending on what I’m getting prepared for.

**[00:38:20.7] DT:** So we're looking at, you're probably on average about a book a week and not only are you reading a book a week, you have a very advanced, very in-depth strategy for how to absorb as much as you possibly can from the book. I think it's incredible.

**[00:38:34.1] KR:** You know, one of my friends and I were talking yesterday about — I'd said I was going to write a blog post about I'd said I was going to write a blog post about how people learn versus how we've been taught to learn. And a lot of things that you learn in school aren't necessarily the best ways to learn like there's been a lot of recent research that shows a lot of things are learned in school are just wrong for comprehending lots of information and we've been taught to absorb lots of information we actually don't need.

And so a lot of times, I think kids would be better off in school if we taught them how to learn before we start teaching them. I know for me, it wasn't really until maybe my sophomore to junior year in college that I actually figured out how to take good notes and so I used to had this super verbose notes and I'd go to class and in one class, I'd take five pages of notes. Well that's not actually useful if you don't know what to note. So I think things like math and science and understanding that they're abstract concept and so if you can build a metaphor or analogy around math, it makes it so much easier to understand these new mathematical concepts or engineering concepts.

And I know there's guys like Elon Musk who talk about this all the time like if you can build a mental model around the topic that you are trying to learn, it makes it much easier not only to learn that topic but to use it going forward and there's people like Elon Musk, Bill Gates, these guys talk about it all the time that you've got to learn how to lean before you can really make the most use of what you're absorbing on a daily basis.

**[00:40:13.2] DT:** And what do you get out of consuming so much content? Why is it so important for you to consume so much content like this?

**[00:40:19.5] KR:** There is a great book by this guy named Frans Johansson and it's called *The Medici Effect* and basically, he talks about the periods in time where diverse culture and diverse people and knowledge intersect in a small place or a city. And for me, I think, covering a variety

of topics, one, it just makes you a more diverse person but I think it also helps you make connections better. So if you have been a developer and a designer and you have really studied it, you understand that at the foundation, those two things really aren't all that different. It's just different types of problem solving.

And so I think that actually has been one of the reasons why I'm able to communicate with both designers and developers is because I understand the topics well enough to take something from one area and explain it to the other group. But I think for most people what they'll find is if you studied psychology and, for example, you are a UX designer, it's going to make you much better at designing products for people because you understand things like how people build habits. Or you understand things like how people make decisions. Or why people react to products in a certain way when they have a certain emotion, and so, understanding those things will help make you better at pretty much anything.

**[0:41:48.4] DT:** So another topic I want to ask you about I know you do a lot of is public speaking. Can you talk about where you're speaking today and what kind of speaking events you're doing?

**[0:41:58.5] KR:** So let me think it through. Okay, so in November I am speaking at a conference here in Houston called Inside Jobs and it's basically a conference that the AIGA Group here in Houston puts on for designers who work at what we call "in house". They're not an agency designer, they are maybe at a big company. At that one I'm going to be talking about what's probably *Rebirth of Slick Part II*. It's based on a presentation that I did like five years ago on how companies can build products that people loved.

So this one is primarily focused on going a step beyond that. So it's not just the company, but what is it that designers need to know in order to be a part of a good product team? What types of skill should they have? That presentation, I think is the second week? I have to look on my calendar. I'm also doing a presentation for the UXPA group here in Houston on creative leadership. And so lot of things people will ask me, "How do you lead creatives?" and I tell them, "I think you lead creatives the exact same way you lead other people, but I do think there are a set of skills that you need to develop as a leader and as a company that makes that process easier."

So those are the main two, and then I'm doing some workshops here in Houston and I think a couple of other places in the United States on becoming a learning company and how you can use learning to multiply the output you have as a company.

**[0:43:30.3] DT:** So how do you get all this speaking invitations?

**[0:43:32.4] KR:** What's really interesting is these came up just because people know me and they've seen me present before. Usually my speaking engagements come by request. But if you are interested in speaking and you're maybe a new blogger or you are interested in speaking, the first thing I would tell you is, it's the same as any other thing that you want to sell to someone. It's, think of the audience and think about what content they need. I think a lot of times what ends up happening when people have bad presentations is they tried to come up with something that was important to them first, and then they try to find an audience for it.

And a lot of times that misses the mark so if you know you want to talk to designers or you want to talk to developers, it's much easier to develop that content if you go out and look for what they're interested in and then figure out how you can share what you know about that. It's less time consuming and usually it's easier for you to get accepted onto conferences as a new speaker if your content is in alignment with what they want to do.

**[0:44:34.5] DT:** That makes a lot of sense, definitely. Can you also give some tips for preparing the presentations in the speaking itself for someone who is just starting out?

**[0:44:40.6] KR:** My process is pretty in-depth. Here's what I would say: start with your summary. Like get a title, start with your summary because that should be the foundation of what you're going to do. Then you come up with your takeaways and usually I say have three to five takeaways and then build your research on the topic around that. And you'll notice I'll say research because even if you know a topic really well. If you're going to speak on it, you need to research it and make sure you've sort of covered all the basis with sharing that information with the audience.

I always structure my presentations in story format. So there's a beginning, a middle and end. There's the introduction of some character or person as the hero of the story and usually it's the audience and you are casting the audience in a scenario where they can be a part of the presentation too. So a lot of times it's as simple as saying, giving a summary of the world that they live in and the things that they might be struggling with, and, "Here's how this world changes if you do this thing," and that's sort of the middle and it's the meat of the presentation and then the end is sort of the climax and then realizing okay, this is easier to do than I thought it would be.

Then the hard part is just filling in the examples. So you fill in with anecdotes, data and I always tell people, if you're doing a classically structured argument, you need not just the pathos but you need all of the parts of logos, pathos to convince them about the argument you're making. So not using Greek terms, you'd need an emotional appeal, you need a logical appeal and then you need to make it visual or you need to make it something that they can relate to and visualize. So for me, a lot of work — I would say most presentations for me could easily be a hundred hours of work and it's not just, I don't usually put the slice together until a couple of weeks before the presentation. But it could be three months of work to get the information together.

**[0:46:45.2] DT:** Wow. So it's not something that happens overnight? Pretty much the work is 7 was a serious investment.

**[0:46:51.3] KR:** Not if you're going to do a good job. I'm a big stickler for and I think maybe what people know me for most is the visual nature of my presentations and so I'm a big fan of make them highly visual, make them nice looking but it's like anything else. You can't build a great website if you don't have great content. I think I would tell people, "Don't worry about slides until you know the content is structured well, because that's actually what's going to drive audience engagement with your presentation."

**[0:47:16.8] DT:** Okay. Speaking of audience engagement. So you go through all this work, you build an awesome presentation, you've invested three months of time but at the end of the day, you want to keep this audience engaged even after the presentation and I remember you gave

me some interesting ideas for how to go about doing that. How to kind of take the audience with you to your next stuff, whether it's your newsletter or your blog. So how do you do that?

**[0:47:39.4] KR:** You know, this kind of date back to a debate I had with one of the partners or CEO in a company is I was going to give a presentation and he insisted that I put the company logo on every slide and I kept arguing, that isn't going to make people want to come and talk to us, it's the content. So it really kind of dates back to that of I had to prove to him that the way you get people engaged with the company is not by slapping your logo on everything or putting it on every slide and every company does this.

I think the way you do this is if it is not a sales presentation, if you're at a conference and it's supposed to be a thought leadership thing, you need to put some thought into what your thought leadership actually is and so if you are doing a presentation on storytelling, maybe you should have a guide that they can download or something that you can hand out that's useful for them if you really want to engage with them because they're not going to contact you just because your logo was there and they may not contact you even if they liked the presentation.

But If you give them some sort of, I know we call them content upgrades but some sort of content upgrade for your presentation, it makes it a lot easier to engage with people long term. So for me, it may be as simple as a checklist, it may be an infographic, it could be — a lot of times it's just, "Here's all the resources I use for this presentation. If you want to go read this books or articles, here's how you can find them."

**[0:49:11.1] DT:** Okay. So we're nearing the end here, it's already been about an hour, the last thing I wanted to kind of ask you about was how much time you spend on helping others? And you mentioned how you mentor before and how you teach and we noticed this in the Side Project Accelerator that every time someone had a problem, there was a 99% chance that you were in the Slack group helping them back and giving. It's something that we also preach a lot is being a giver and not a taker and I just want to ask you about that.

I remember there was a quote that you told me before about the legacy that you want to leave. I don't remember the exact wording, I don't want to screw it up. So what was that about the legacy that you want to leave?

**[0:49:52.7] KR:** So for me, and this is something that was sort of engrained in me as a child is, if you really want to make the most impact, it's more important to give back than to receive stuff. What you find about putting that in to practice is you almost always get back what you gave anyway. I think a lot of people go into situations thinking about, "How can I make money? What can I get out of this?" For me, I always felt like my legacy would be better if I could point to magnifying other people. Because if you magnify other people and you teach them how to do the other thing, it has a multiplying effect versus, you know, "I wrote a song or I built this website." But if I can teach 10 other people how to do what I do, it kind of goes back to that make yourself obsolete thing.

I think if you figure out a way to make yourself obsolete but magnifying the community, it always has a much more impactful effect. This is always controversial when I say this but if you look at Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, Bill Gates is doing a much better job of making a difference in the world because it goes beyond the technology. He and his wife are contributing to things that go so far beyond Microsoft, that it's hard to even quantify that and I think a lot of people will say, "Well, Steve Jobs died so he hasn't had the chance." But it was always a pattern with Bill Gates. I think if you look at where people can make the longest lasting legacy, it's about giving back to other people and helping grow the community around them because that actually has a lasting impact.

**[0:51:30.7] DT:** We really see that that's something that you believe in and you're doing in your work, in your life, I think that not only has a lasting impact, I think it also comes back to helping you in business and whether it's growing your audience but it ends up helping you but I think it's really hard for people to believe so strongly in it and find the time for it like you do.

**[0:51:50.4] KR:** yeah, I think if you don't really believe it, it's much harder. But I can tell you, for me anyway, it's rewarding and it's been rewarding just beyond what I wanted to do with it. I mean people typically will — if I ever need something, I'm okay with going to certain people and asking because I feel like I've already contributed in certain cases. So I don't even really have to ask a lot of times because if I need something and I say, "Hey, I need help with this," I usually get people that volunteer.

And I can tell you pretty much dating back to my first management job. I still have people that will call me and ask for advice or just call to say hello because I think once people realize that you genuinely want them to succeed and you're not just, they're not just a cog in your own success, it actually motivates them to work. Not just for themselves but for whatever effort that you are working on at that time.

**[0:52:50.1] DT:** That's a nice mantra. With that said Kelsey, it's been — we've already taken up an hour and two minutes of your time. I think we're going to wrap up here. Thank you very much. Can you let everyone know where they can find you on the Internet, you mentioned KenzieCreative.com and how else they can reach out to you?

**[0:53:07.1] KR:** Kenziecreative.com, on Twitter, it's @kenziecreative. If they want to follow me on Instagram, it's actually @KelseyRuger. Those are the three places where you typically are going to get the most for me. I mean, some people may find me on Facebook, I usually have a lot to say on Facebook too.

**[0:53:23.3] DT:** I highly recommend signing up for his newsletter. Kelsey, I'm looking forward to your newsletter in my inbox every week. Always something really interesting, really well thought out and just really appreciate that email. So I highly recommend that to everyone listening now.

**[0:53:36.0] KR:** Thank you.

**[0:53:37.6] DT:** So thanks a lot for your time Kelsey.

**[0:53:39.7] SS:** Thanks a lot Kelsey.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:53:51.7] SS:** All right, so that's a wrap. Thank you hackers for joining us today and we hope you enjoyed the show. You can find all the links and resources from this conversation on [hackingui.com/podcast](http://hackingui.com/podcast). Just before we go, we want to share with you something that you might find useful.

**[0:54:07.7] DT:** As you know, we are voracious readers and consume a ton of articles, books, podcasts, and videos about design development and side projects. We curate the hell out of everything and each week, we send a short round up email of our favorites. If that sounds like an email you'd enjoy getting, then we'd love to have you join our awesome community, which already has more than 20,000 happy members from all over the world. You can sign up on [hackingui.com](http://hackingui.com).

**[0:54:28.7] SS:** By the way, on [hackingui.com](http://hackingui.com), you'll also find some other cool stuff like the Side Project Accelerator, our eight week online program in which we teach everything that we learned in the three years working and scaling Hacking UI as a side project before we quit our day jobs.

**[0:54:41.7] DT:** And, you'll also find our resources page, which reached top of the week on Product Hunt Tech. And our events section, which is filled with conferences and meetups for designers and developers.

**[0:54:50.7] SS:** Hey D, don't forget the T's man. We've also got some cool T-shirts for designers.

**[0:54:53.7] DT:** Sagi, again with the T-shirts?

**[0:54:56.7] SS:** Hey, I designed those. But really, last thing, if you enjoyed this, we would really love to hear from you. Either by tweeting us [@HackingUI](https://twitter.com/HackingUI) or by reviewing the podcast on iTunes. Those reviews really go a long way and help us and even make our day.

**[0:55:10.4] DT:** All right, we'll see you next week hackers. And remember to keep hacking.

[END]