

# Developer



# Solo Startup Founder

My indie hacker story.

JOM LAUNCH - KL, Malaysia 2022



@tdinh\_me



tonydingh.com



news.tonydingh.com

“Indie Hackers”



Tony Dinh

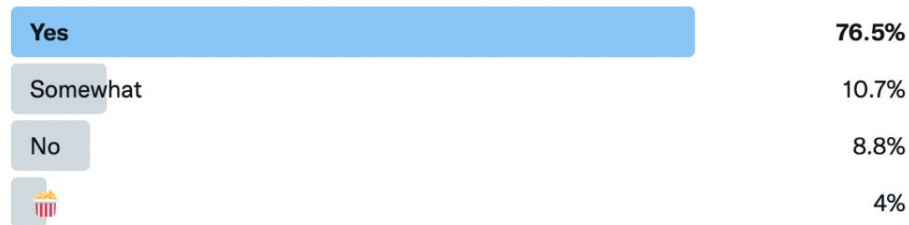
@tdinh\_me



I wonder how well-known is the term "Indie hacker" in my audience bubble 🤔

Do you know the "indie hacker" term?

(comment below 😊)



544 votes · Final results

7:58 PM · Jul 18, 2022 · Twitter Web App

## **indie • hacker**

*noun*

1. person building an online project that can generate revenue
2. person seeking financial independence, creative freedom, and the ability to work on their own schedule






# Tony Dinh

 29 years old

 From Vietnam

 Software Engineer

 Full-time Indie Hacker



# Tony Dinh

👤 29 years old

🇻🇳 From Vietnam

💻 Software Engineer

🔨 Full-time Indie Hacker

Startup Founder?



~1 year old startup

~1 year old startup

3 products

~1 year old startup

3 products

Monthly Revenue: \$18,000 - \$25,000

~1 year old startup

3 products

Monthly Revenue: \$18,000 - \$25,000

Number of employees: 1 (Me)

No more meetings

Work on products I love

Travel!

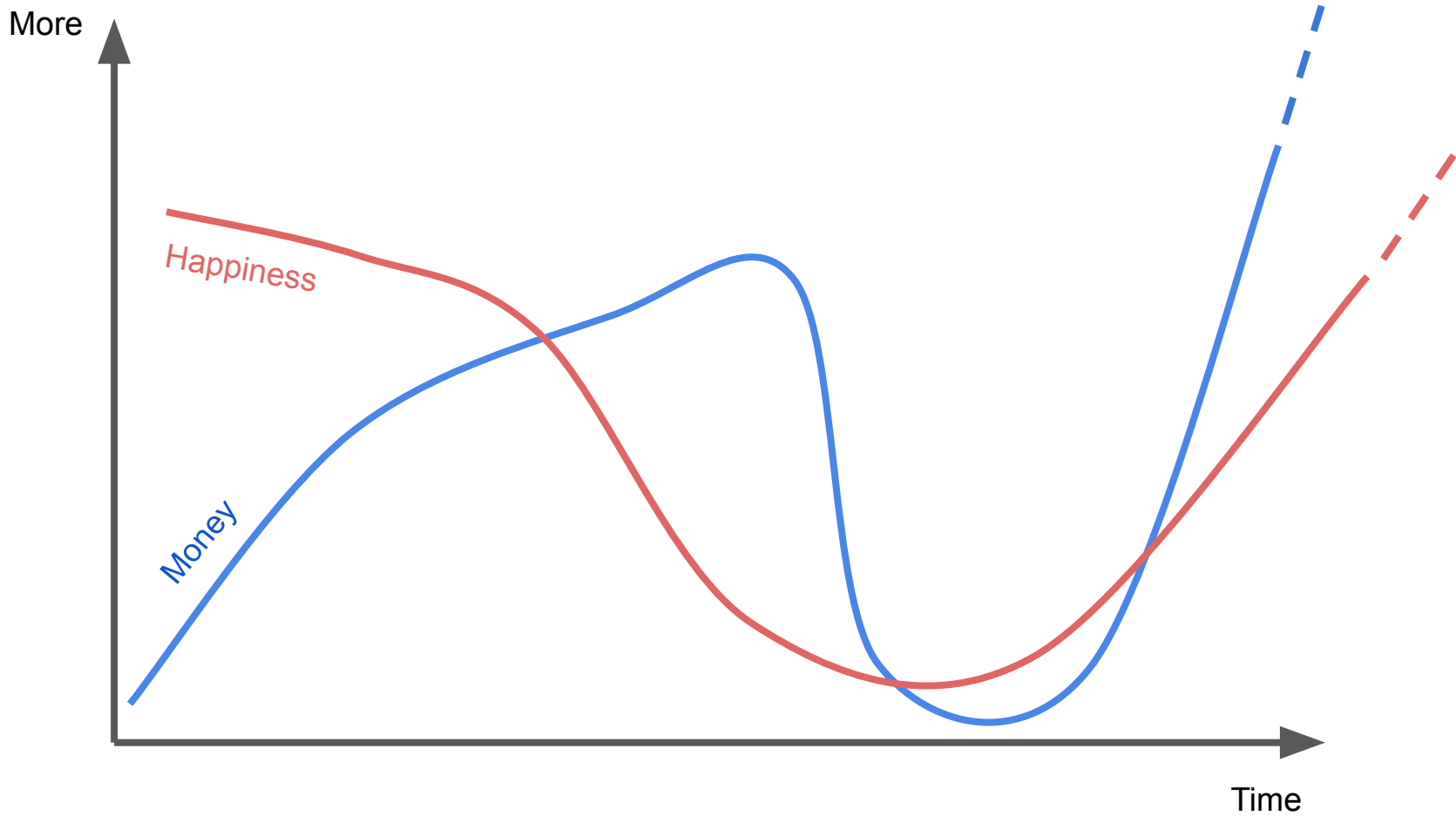


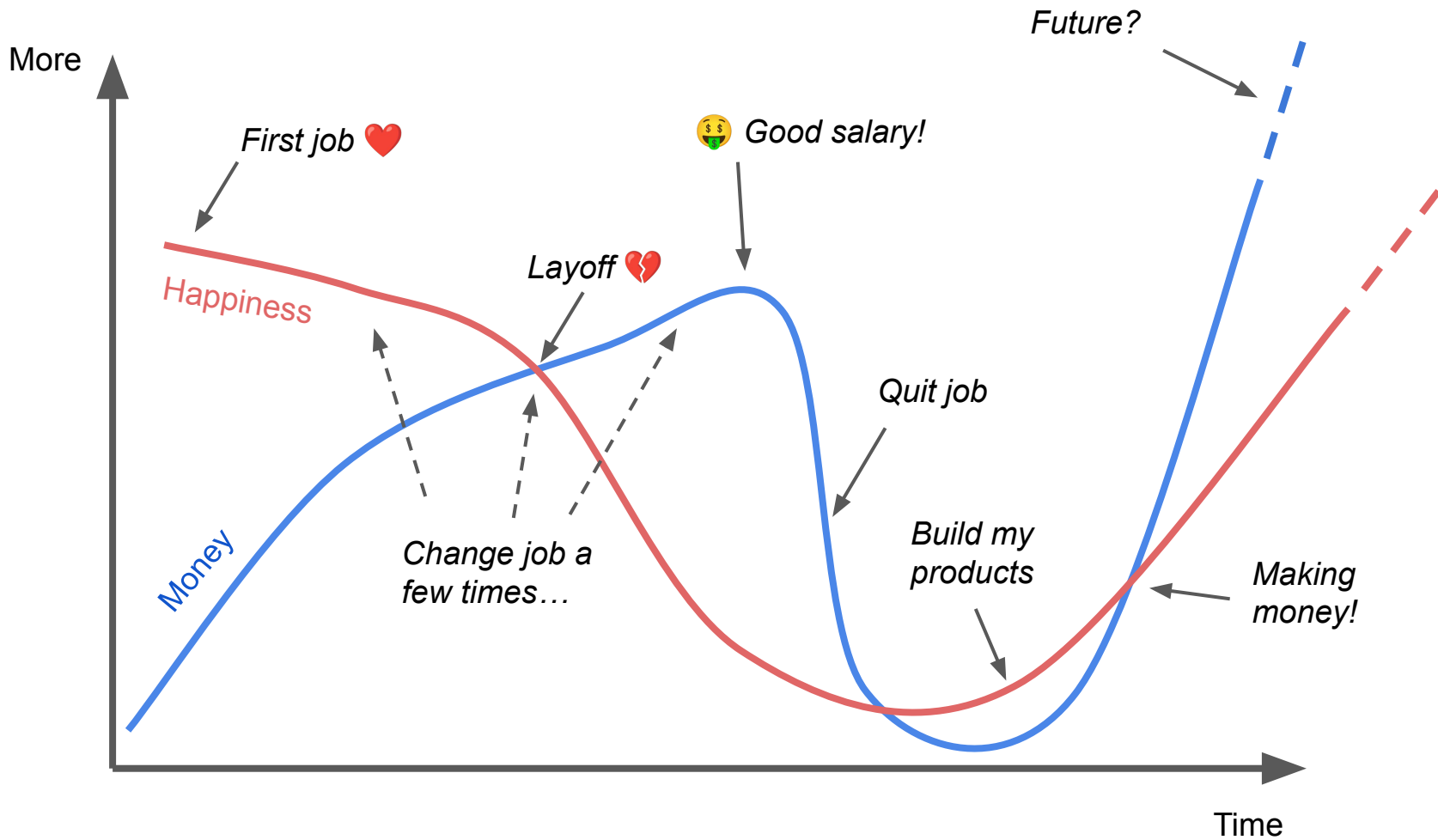
More



Time







- 1. Background**
- 2. Become indie**
- 3. Grow my products**
- 4. Scale?**
- 5. Key lessons & learnings**
- 6. Q&A**

Enter your email to receive monthly updates from me



news.tonydinh.com



@tdinh\_me



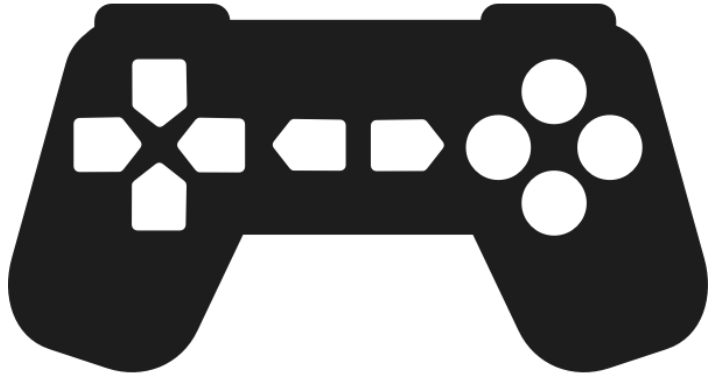
Everything else

tonydinh.com



I tweet everyday  
*(for the last 574 days)*

# Background



Free Pascal 3.2

File Edit Search Run Compile Debug Tools Options Window Help

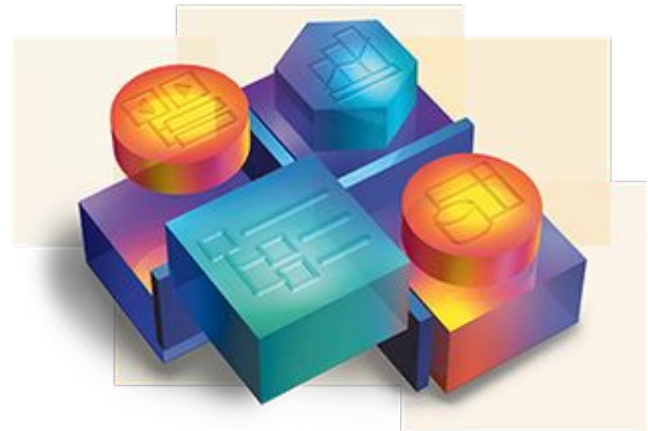
SOL4.PAS

```
var F,L:real;
    i,j,n:integer;
    x:array[1..10] of real;
    y:array[1..10] of real;

begin
  write('n=');readln(n);
  FOR i:=1 TO n DO
  begin
    write('x[',i,']=');readln(x[i]);
    write('y[',i,']=');readln(y[i]);
  end;
  begin
    write('x[',n+1,']=');readln(x[n+1]);
  end;
  y[n+1]:=0;
  F:=0;
  FOR j:=1 TO n DO begin
    L:=1;
    FOR i:=1 TO n DO
    begin
      IF i<>j THEN
      begin
        L:=L*(x[n+1]-x[i])/(x[j]-x[i]);
      end;
    end;
    y[n+1]:=y[n+1]+y[j]*L;end;
    writeln('y[',n+1,']= ',y[n+1]:1:0);
  FOR i:=1 TO n DO
  begin
    writeln('x[',i,']= ',x[i]:10:10, ' y[',i,']= ',y[i]:10:10);
  end;
  begin
    writeln('x[',n+1,']= ',x[n+1]:10:10, ' y[',n+1,']= ',y[n+1]:10:10);
  end;
  readln;
end.
```

37:23

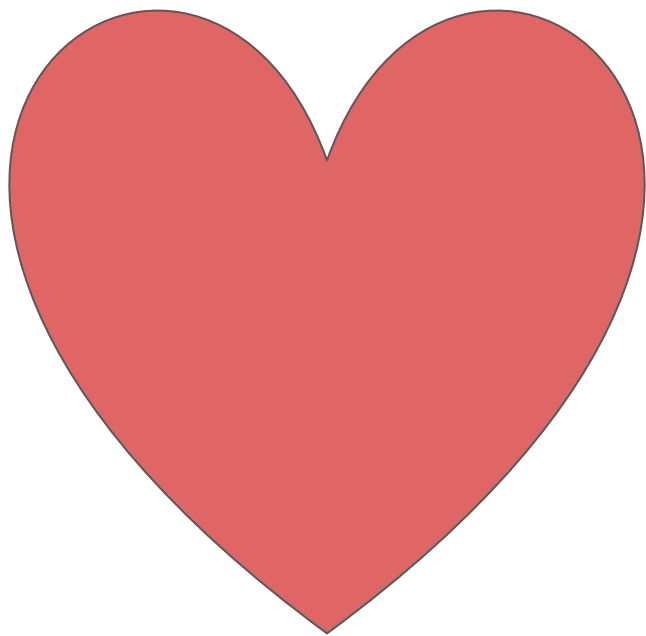
F1 Help F2 Save F3 Open Alt+F9 Compile F9 Make Alt+F10 Local menu

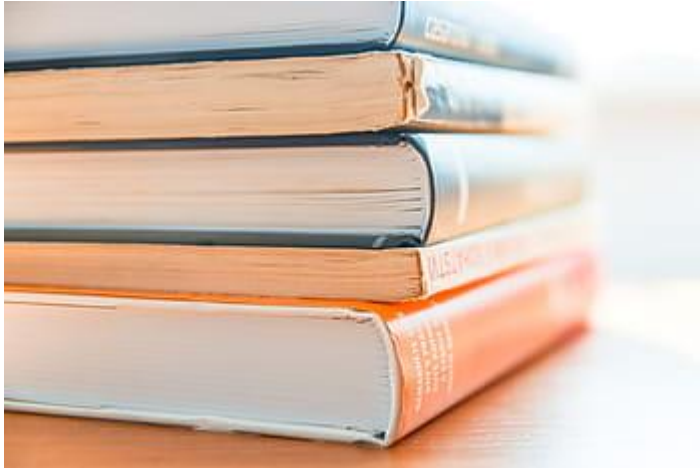


Microsoft  
**Visual Basic 6.0**







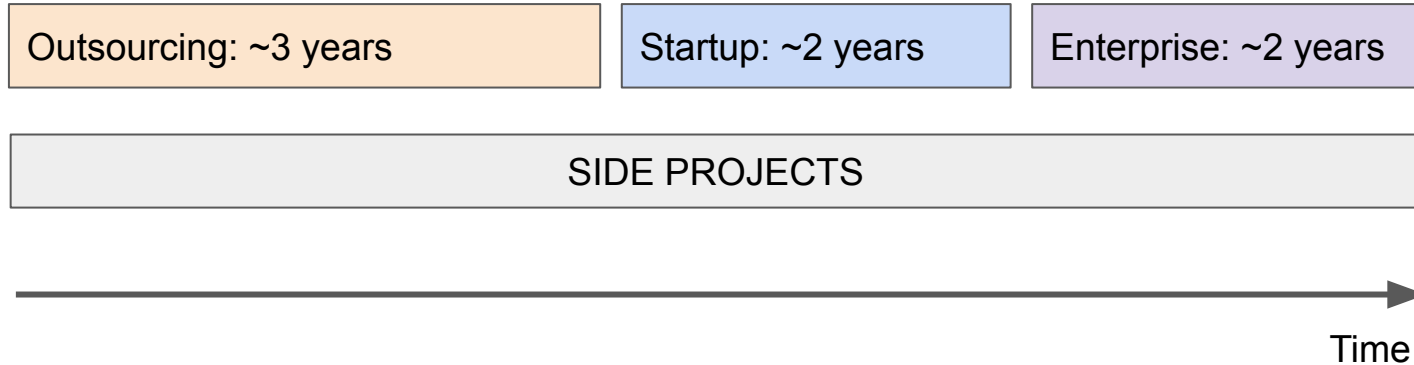


Studied Software Engineer in VN 



Worked as a freelancer on  
Wordpress, PHP, Android

# Worked as a software engineer for 7 years

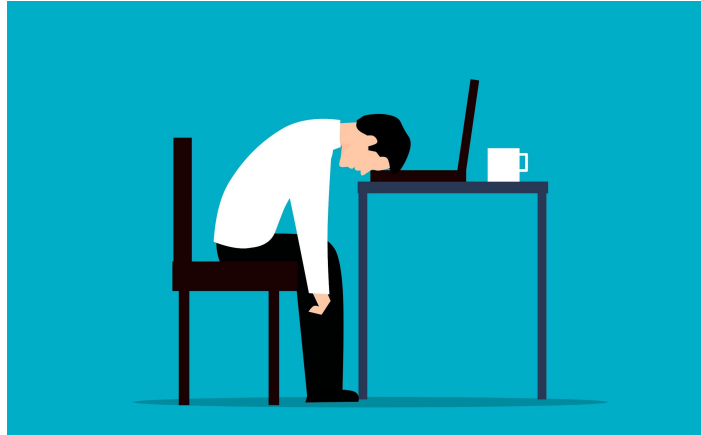


# The Switch

**\$0 → \$300 MRR & Quit job**

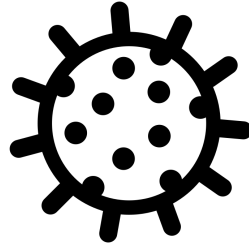
~1 year before I quit...

# The background



Be Independent

# The trigger

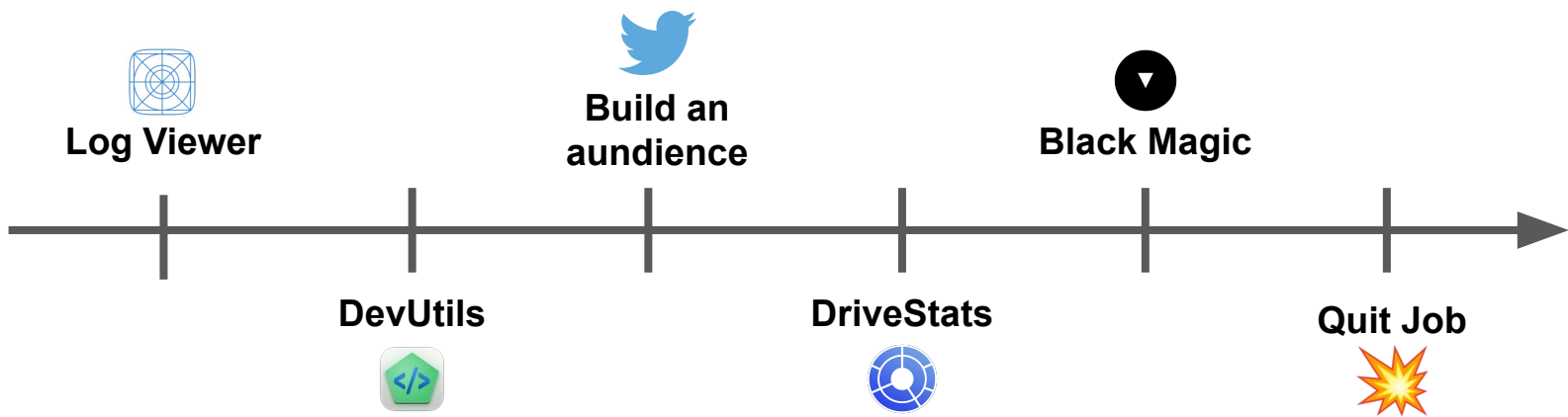


**COVID19**



# Side Projects





~1 year



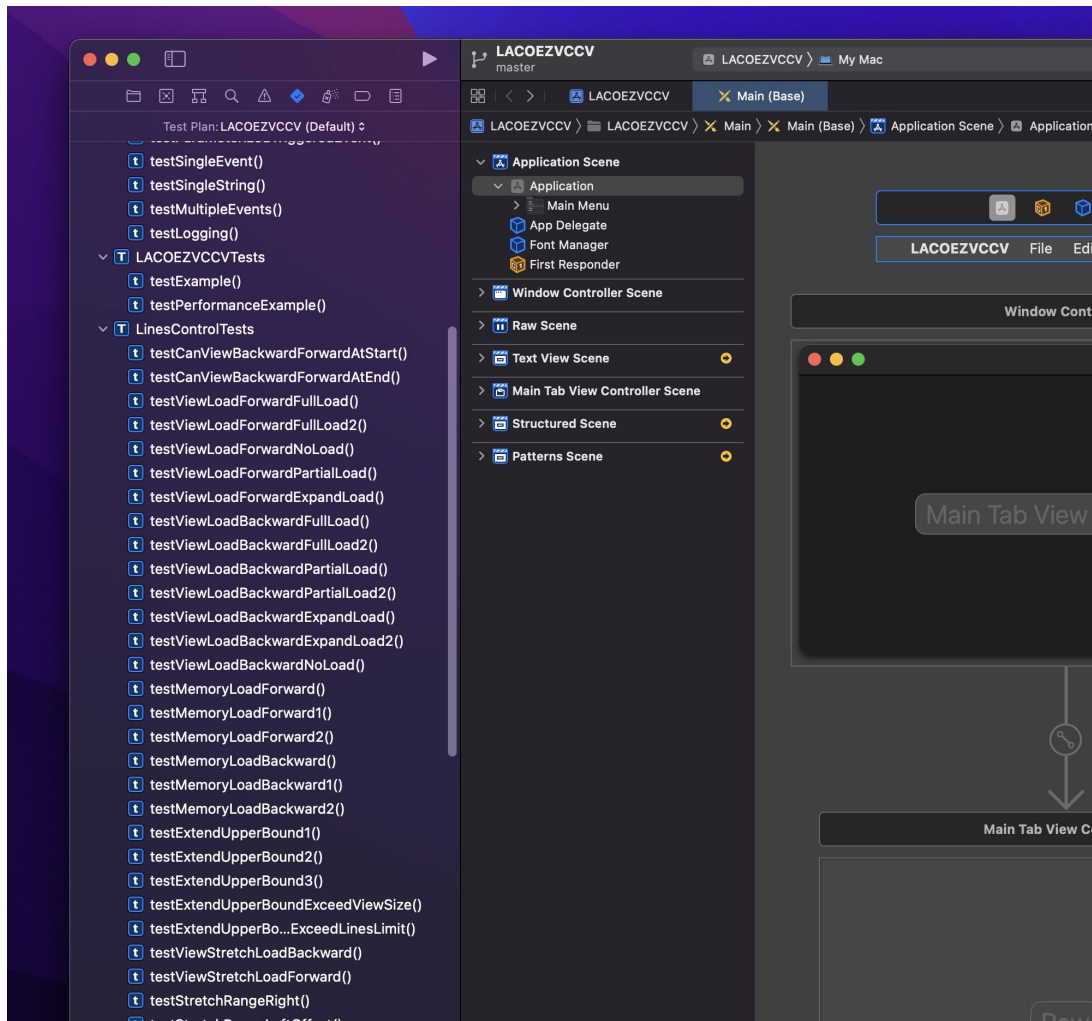
## Log Viewer

Learned Swift



Built a log viewer app

Worked on it ~6 months

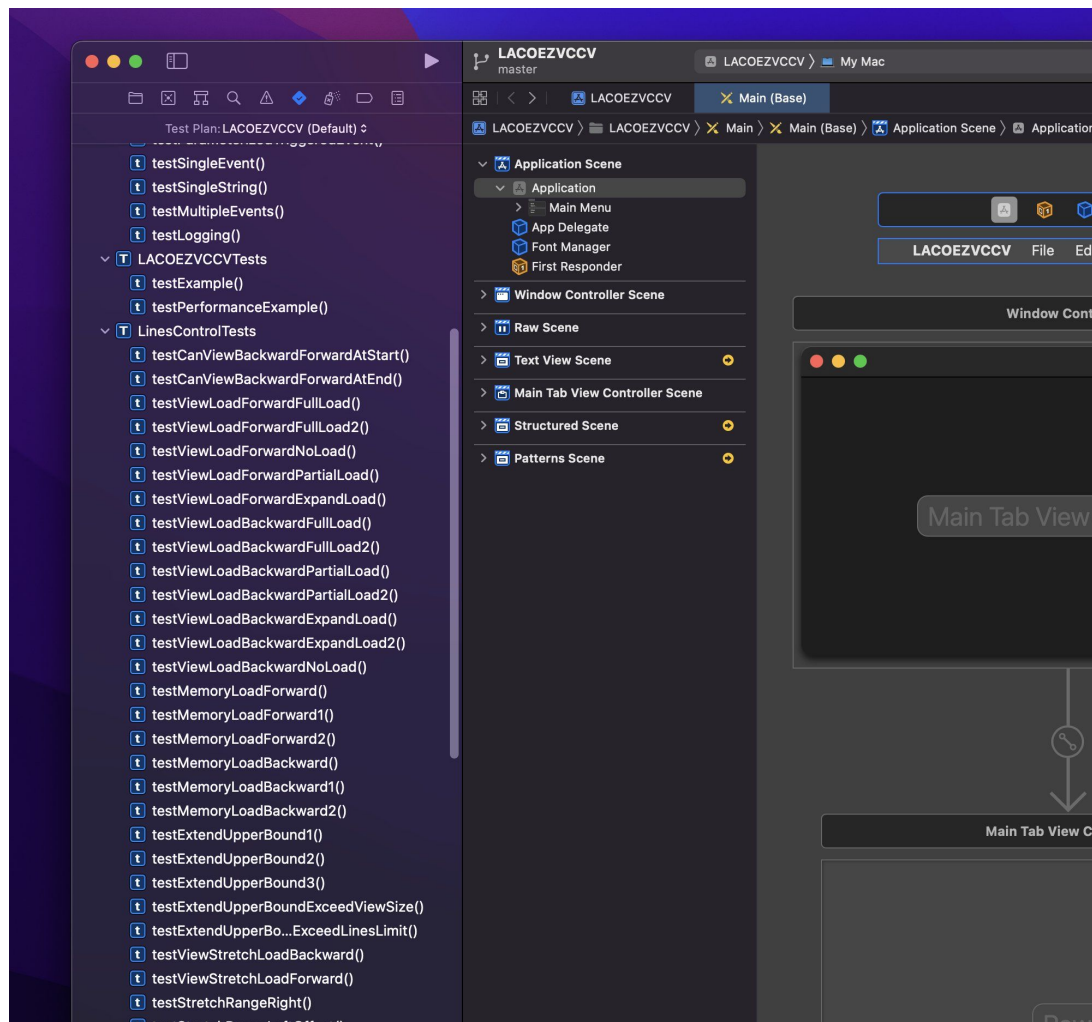


The app was way too complicated

Failed because of **over engineering**

- Beautiful UI
- Beautiful code base
- 90% unit test coverage
- Involve 3 different programming languages
- Complicated cross-platform architecture
- ...

Lost interest and never release it



(but I did learn Swift  , which I never regret)

Another attempt

- 🕒 Unix Time Converter
- % URL Encoder/Decoder
- {,} JSON Formatter/Validator
- 🔗 JWT Debugger
- 64 Base64 Encoder/Decoder
- & Query String Parser
- #; HTML Entity Encoder/Decoder
- \n Backslash Escaper/Unescaper
- UU ID UUID Generator/Decoder

[Send Feedback](#)

Developer Utilities for macOS 1.2.1 (25)  
<https://DevUtils.app>

### JSON Formatter/Validator

Input: Clipboard Sample Load file... Clear ⚙️

```
{"store":{"book":[{"category":"reference", "sold":false,"author":"Nigel Rees","title":"Sayings of the Century","price":8.95}, {"category":"fiction","author":"Evelyn Waugh","title":"Sword of Honour","price":12.99}, {"category":"fiction","author":"J. R. R. Tolkien","title":"The Lord of the Rings","act": null,"isbn":"0-395-19395-8","price":22.99}], "bicycle":{"color":"red","price":19.95}}}
```

Output: 2 spaces Copy

```
{
  "store": {
    "book": [
      {
        "category": "reference",
        "sold": false,
        "author": "Nigel Rees",
        "title": "Sayings of the Century",
        "price": 8.95
      },
    ],
  },
}
```

- 🕒 Unix Time Converter
- % URL Encoder/Decoder
- {,} JSON Formatter/Validator
- 🔗 JWT Debugger
- 64 Base64 Encoder/Decoder
- & Query String Parser
- #; HTML Entity Encoder/Decoder
- \n Backslash Escaper/Unescaper
- UU ID UUID Generator/Decoder

Input: Clipboard Sample

```
{"store":{"book":[{"category":"reference", "sold":false,"author":"Nigel Rees","title":"Sayings of the Century","price":8.95}, {"category":"fiction","author":"Evelyn Waugh","title":"Sword of Honour","price":12.99}, {"category":"fiction","author":"J. R. R. Tolkien","title":"The Lord of the Rings","act": null,"isbn":"0-395-19395-8","price":22.99}], "bicycle":{"color":"red","price":19.95}}}
```

Built the first version in about ~2 weeks

Used it by myself

Shared it with friends

There was positive feedback





\* Show HN: DevUtils.app – Developer Utilities for macOS

241 points by trungdq88 on Sept 27, 2020 | past | 105 comments

Sep 27, 2020



**DevUtils** ▾

Developer utilities for  
macOS



Visit ▾

▲ UPVOTED 255



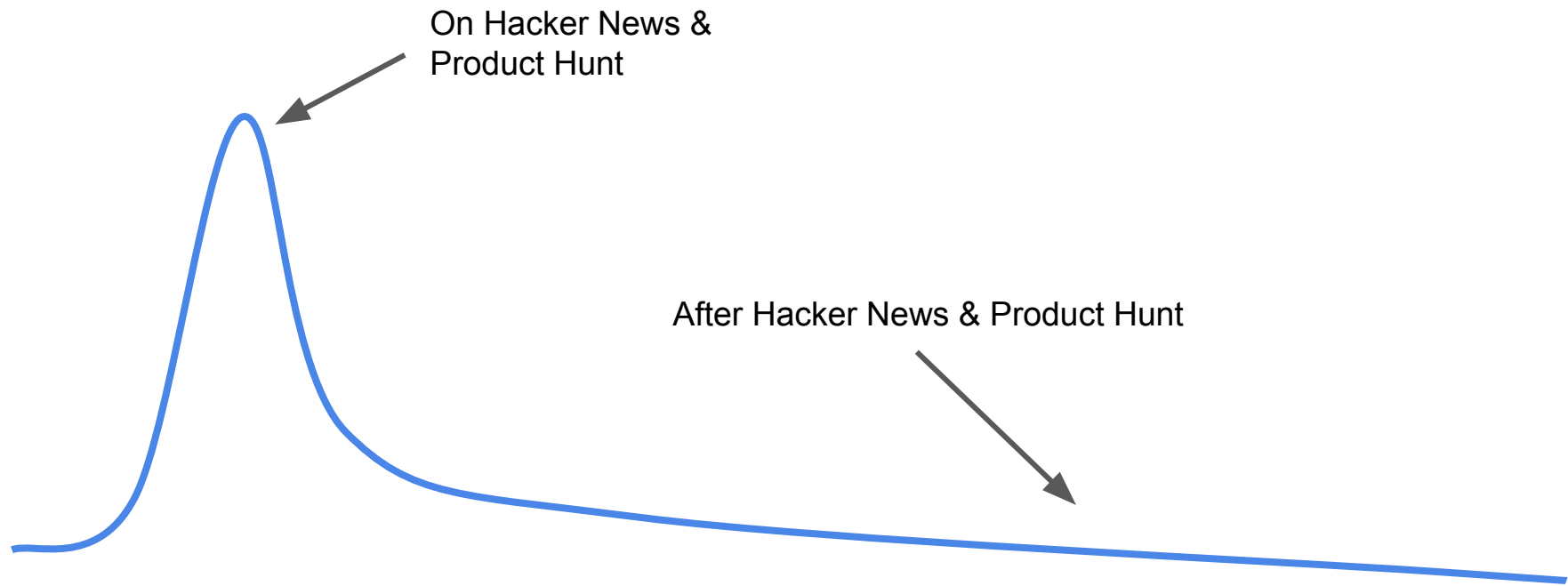
**Product Hunt**

 PAYMENT

**US\$9.00** USD

Succeeded ✓





Tried to get more traffic but failed



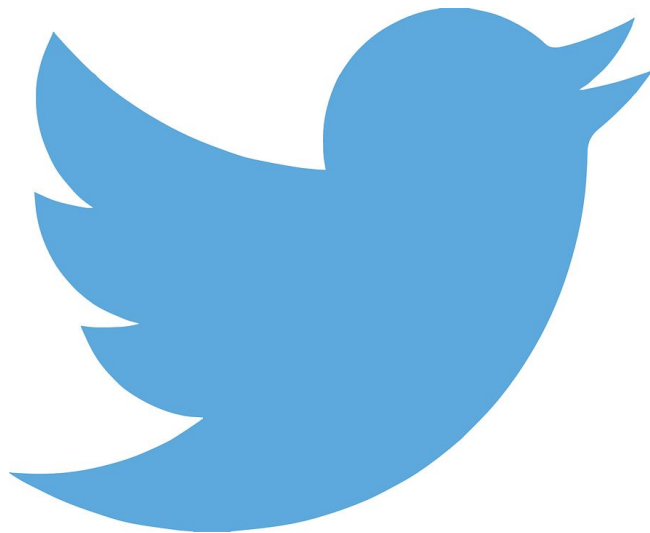
Got disappointed, paused for a little while



**Log Viewer**

**DevUtils**





A friend introduced me to Twitter



**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me



~100 followers



My life as a dev has greatly improved since I use DevUtils app, and it's on sale! 🥰



**DevUtils.app** @devutils\_app · Nov 25, 2020

DevUtils.app is on sale! 😊

Use BLACKFRIDAY\_DEVUTILS\_2020 for a 30% off! 🎉🎉🎉

Download now:

7:09 AM · Nov 27, 2020 · Twitter for Android

1 Like



~December 2020

Build an audience...



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me



Google is going to buy a Team License of  
[DevUtils.app!!](#) 🤔 🤖 🎉



[Redacted]

to support, Software ▾



Hi Team,

Hope you are safe and doing fine

I am from the Software Procurement Team of Google. Google is interested in using your product DevUtils.app.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thanks,

[Redacted]

*Services provided by HCL on behalf of Google*

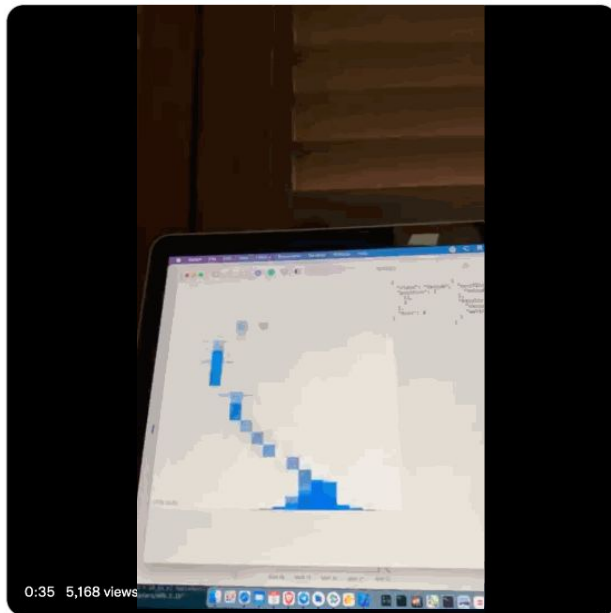
11:07 AM · Jan 29, 2021 · Twitter for Android

1 Retweet 1 Quote Tweet 16 Likes

**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me

...

Took me 10+ hours to make this water simulation with pressure. What can I do with it? 🤖💧



4:00 PM · Apr 5, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

10 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 185 Likes



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me



I'm starting to like this bird app



10:23 AM · Apr 7, 2021 · Twitter Web App

1 Like

Build in public

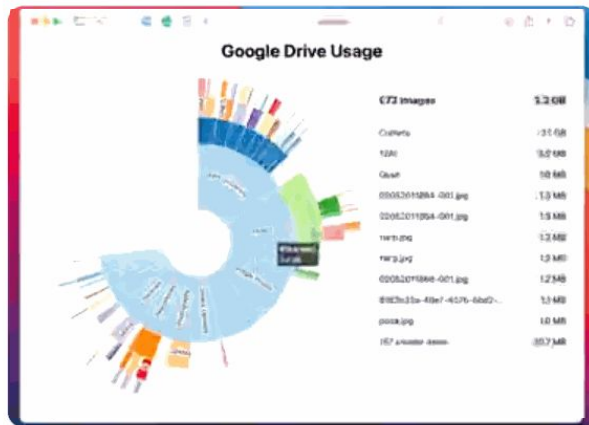


• • •

OBJ

 drivestats.io

#drivestatsio



6:06 PM · Apr 9, 2021 · Twitter Web App

**1** Retweet   **13** Likes

# DriveStats.io

- Google Drive storage analyzer
- Built in ~1 week
- Earned ~\$50 revenue (non recurring)
- Sold the whole product for \$1,800K



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me

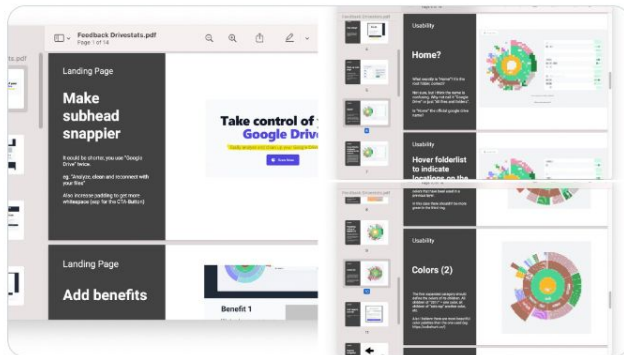
...

OH MY GOD 🤯

A beta user of [drivestats.io](https://drivestats.io) just sends me this desk with 14 pages of feedback items with detailed comments and screenshots. WOW 🤯

And the best part: all of the points are valid and so valuable!

Kon, if you see this, thank you very much!



6:44 PM · Apr 17, 2021 · Twitter Web App

2 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 76 Likes





Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me

...

IT'S HERE!

3 weeks ago, I started to build a tool to help you analyze your Google Drive storage and find out what's taking up most of your precious space.

👉 [DriveStats.io](https://drivestats.io) is now available for everyone to use!

Give it a try, feedback welcome! 🙏

RT appreciated! ❤️



[drivestats.io](https://drivestats.io)

DriveStats.io - Analyze your Google Drive storage usage

What is taken up your Google Drive? Find out and clean up now.

9:09 PM · Apr 20, 2021 · Twitter Web App

6 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 20 Likes



**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me



## FIRST PAYING CUSTOMER!

**US\$5.94**  
ORDER


TAX WITHHELD -US\$0.99

FEE -US\$0.80


ORDER NET US\$4.15


Wed 21st Apr 2021 20:19

EARNINGS USD **US\$4.15**

 **DriveStats.io Basic Plan**  
Wed 21st Apr 2021 20:19


**CUSTOMER**


Email 

Country  United Kingdom

**TRANSACTION**

Method PayPal

Identifier 

Checkout 

Source drivestats.io / drivestats.io

6:29 AM · Apr 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

**9** Retweets **2** Quote Tweets **221** Likes

From December 2020 → April 2021

100 → 400 followers 🎉



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me



400

internet friends, thank you all!

April has been a great month for me on Twitter! 📈

**28 day summary** with change over previous period

Tweets

544 ↑511.2%



Tweet impressions

215K ↑799.1%



Profile visits

16K ↑1,036.9%



Mentions

380 ↑406.7%



Followers

405 ↑244



7:48 AM · Apr 23, 2021 · Twitter Web App

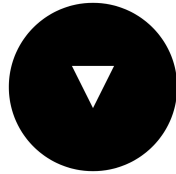
1 Retweet 1 Quote Tweet 12 Likes

From December 2020 → April 2021  
100 → 400 followers 🎉

# My Twitter:

- Memes & Jokes 🤡
- Threads 🧵
- Build products & share in public 🔧
- Do creative stuff on Twitter 💡

Do creative stuff on Twitter 💡



**Black Magic**



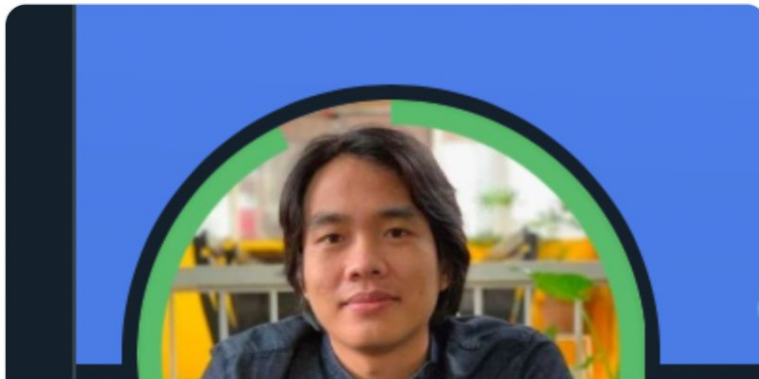
**Tony Dinh** 

@tdinh\_me

...

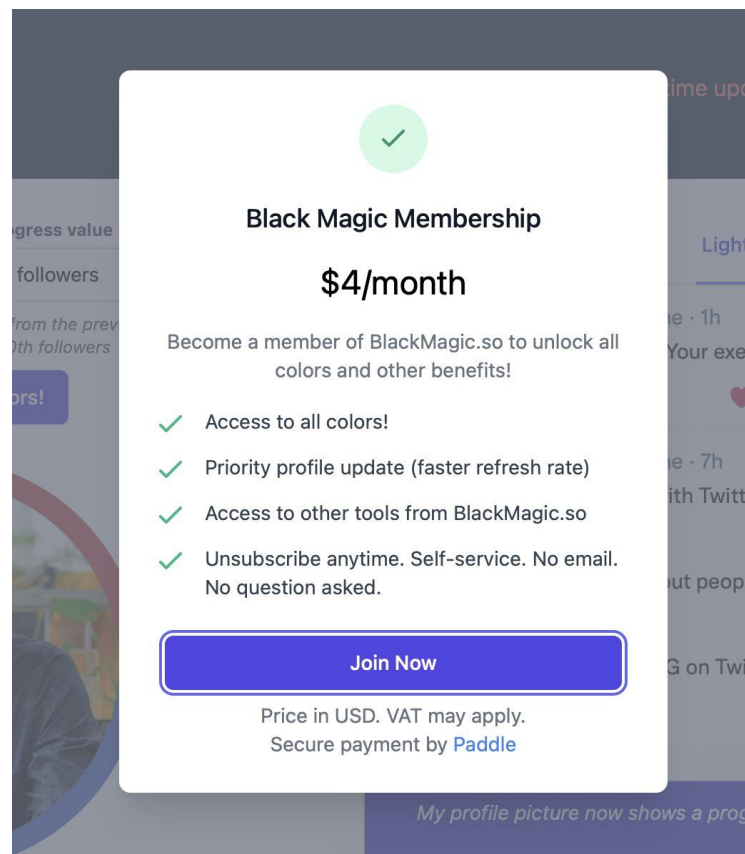
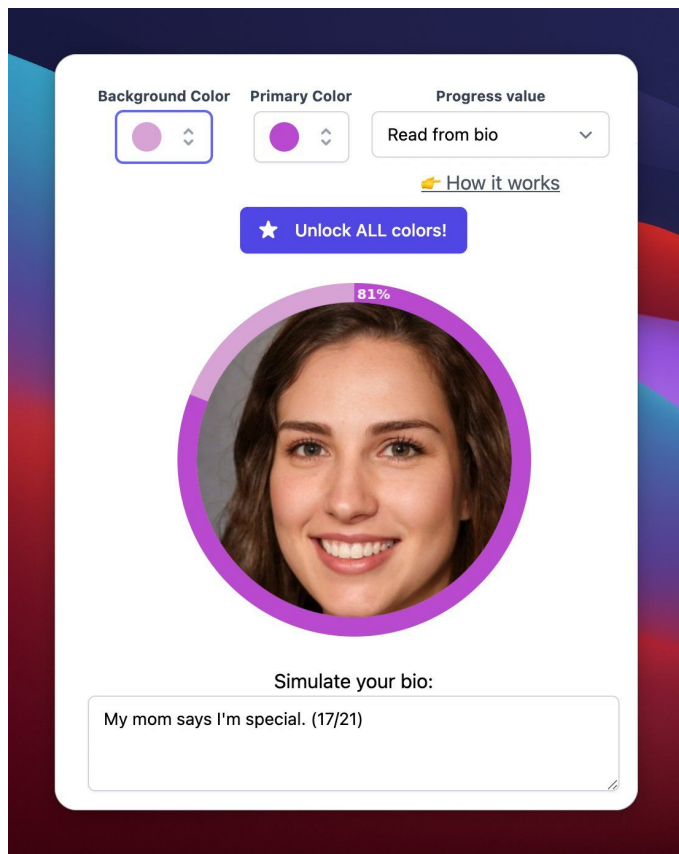
My profile "ring" now show the progress to 1k follower (~95% so far). Automatically updated.

How do you like it? Or is it too annoying on your timeline? 🤔



11:56 AM · May 11, 2021 · Twitter Web App

1 Quote Tweet [40 Likes](#)



**Script → Product: Twitter Black Magic**





**Log Viewer**



**Build an  
audience**



**Black Magic**

**DevUtils**



**DriveStats**





Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me

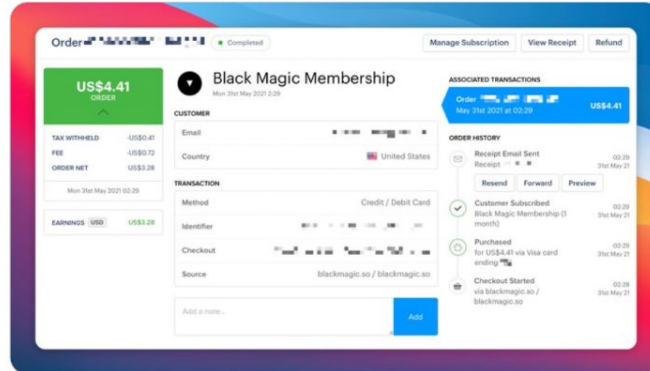


OMG OMG OMG

Black Magic has the FIRST PAYING MEMBER!!!

That's \$4 MRR, YESSSSS

Thank you so much, random Twitter user! Black Magic won't disappoint you!



11:45 AM · May 31, 2021 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 1 Quote Tweet 175 Likes

## May → July 2021

- Adding many more creative features to Black Magic
- Grow slowly, but with recurring revenue
- Actively building an audience



**Tony Dinh** 

@tdinh\_me



1,200 active users on [BlackMagic.so](https://BlackMagic.so) now! 🎉

13 paid members (\$52 MRR)

8:10 PM · Jul 12, 2021 · Twitter Web App

---

**3** Retweets   **83** Likes

# By August 2021...

~\$300 MRR (Monthly Recurring Revenue) from Black Magic

~\$200/mo from DevUtils (non recurring)

~8,000 followers

~1,500 active free Beta users

Great momentum, consistent traffic to both DevUtils & Black Magic.

Great confident

# Quit job

- Handed in my notice.
- Aimed to get to \$1K MRR within a year.
- Mentally prepared to not have income for 2 years.



**Tony Dinh** 

@tdinh\_me

...

Gonna pin this 

After 7 years working as a dev, I quit my job to pursue my dream: build software I love and make a living out of it.

I have:

- Ideas
- Backup plans
- No wife, no kid
- Saving for 2+ years
- And most of all: Faith in myself

Let's see if I can make it! 

4:50 PM · Aug 18, 2021 · Twitter Web App

---

84 Retweets   11 Quote Tweets   2,428 Likes

# Growth

**\$300 MRR → \$2K MRR → \$10K MRR**

DECEMBER 16, 2021   ❤️ 156   💬 63

👁️ 9212

## **\$322 → \$2K MRR in 60 days by building in public**

Two months ago, I received an offer to buy my SaaS (name: Black Magic) at \$40,000, all cash. Black Magic was about \$322 MRR at the time. That was > 10x ARR – a...





## My focus around this time:

- Building an audience
- Improving Black Magic + DevUtils
- Building products

October 2021

A big new thing: Magic Sidebar

Home

Explore

Notifications

Messages

Bookmarks

Lists

Profile

More

Tweet

Tony Dinh

@tdinh\_me

Indie Developer. Quit my job to build software I love in public:

@devutils\_app ( must see!), @blackmagic\_so.

Tweet about code, learnings, and meme

Follow my journey newsletter.tdinh.me Joined July 2011

609 Following 13.9K Followers

Newsletter

Tony Dinh's Newsletter

Monthly updates about my indie hacking journey, what I have built and learned.

695 Subscribers

Latest Scores

High Scores

Play snake on my banner!

Powered by BlackMagic.so

Latest players

Follow to join!

Edit profile

Your Profile

Tweets 61 7.02%

Impressions 702.4k 48.46%

Likes 4.1k 27.58%

Replies 549 52.39%

Retweets 311 27.46%

Profile clicks 9.2k 4.94%

Impressions

Consistency



**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me



A completely new Twitter Web experience! ✨

Coming out soon.....



10:17 PM · Oct 16, 2021 · Twitter Web App

44 Retweets   14 Quote Tweets   672 Likes



**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me

A completely new Twitter Web experience! ✨



**Marko ⚡ Denic**  
@denicmarko

Replying to @tdinh\_me

No way, man... This is beyond black magic.

12:09 AM · Oct 17, 2021 · Twitter for Android



**Dagobert Renouf**  
@dagorenouf

Replying to @tdinh\_me

So beautiful 🥰 crazy it's not the default twitter experience, makes so much sense

5:13 PM · Oct 17, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



**Saurav Purohit**  
@SauravPurohit4

Replying to @tdinh\_me

This is so cool Tony 🔥🔥

12:21 AM · Oct 17, 2021 · Twitter for Android



**Shaan**  
@shaanforlife

Replying to @tdinh\_me

Holy cow 🔥🔥🔥

10:24 PM · Oct 16, 2021 · Twitter for Android



Oct 16, 2021 · Twitter Web App

14 Quote Tweets 672 Likes

Release Private Invite-only Beta

Free to use while in Beta

Early Bird Discount

Build in public

Iterate everyday



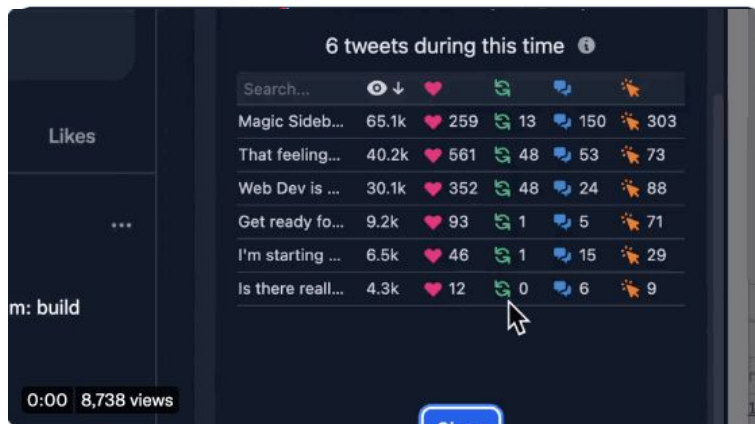


**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me

...

Magic Sidebar helps you understand what caused a big jump to your follower count or engagement rate! 📈

Reply "👋" below for an invite code! 😊



12:11 PM · Oct 26, 2021 · Twitter Web App

9 Retweets 9 Quote Tweets 217 Likes

## Beta Testing & Early Bird Sale



Launch



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me

...



Magic Sidebar is LAUNCHED!!! 🍌🍌🍌

It is no doubt THE BEST product I have ever created.

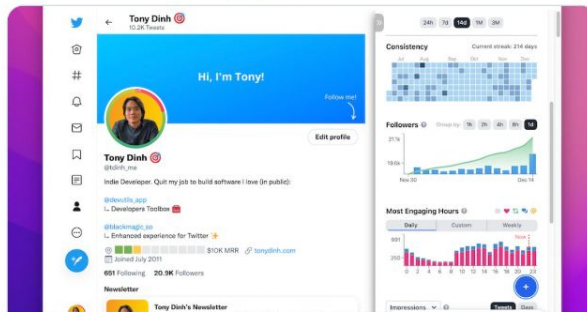


Magic Sidebar will change the way you use Twitter!

Please come join me on PH! 😊



RT appreciated! 🙏😍



producthunt.com

Black Magic - Product Information, Latest Updates, and Reviews 2022 | Produc...

Show a progress bar on your Twitter profile picture. Track your progress, make yourself accountable, or just have some fun! Show progress to: - The next 10, ...

3:03 PM · Dec 16, 2021 · Twitter Web App

140 Retweets   41 Quote Tweets   633 Likes



## Magic Sidebar by BlackMagic.so ▾

Powerful enhanced experience for  
Twitter



Visit ▾



UPVOTED 1,404



# Why it worked:

- Build a useful product
- Get free users
- Private invite-only free Beta + create hype
- Build features & share in public
- Talk to customers
- Prepare a launch well

# Unfair advantages:

When I started building the Magic Sidebar, I already have:

- 14K followers (~9 months to build)
- 7K free users (~6 months to build)
- Experience: frontend, backend, payment, UI/UX, etc.. (~7 years to build)



Build your own unfair advantages

"Black Magic has revealed insights I never knew about. The ability to see past interactions with individual profiles is the killer feature for me."



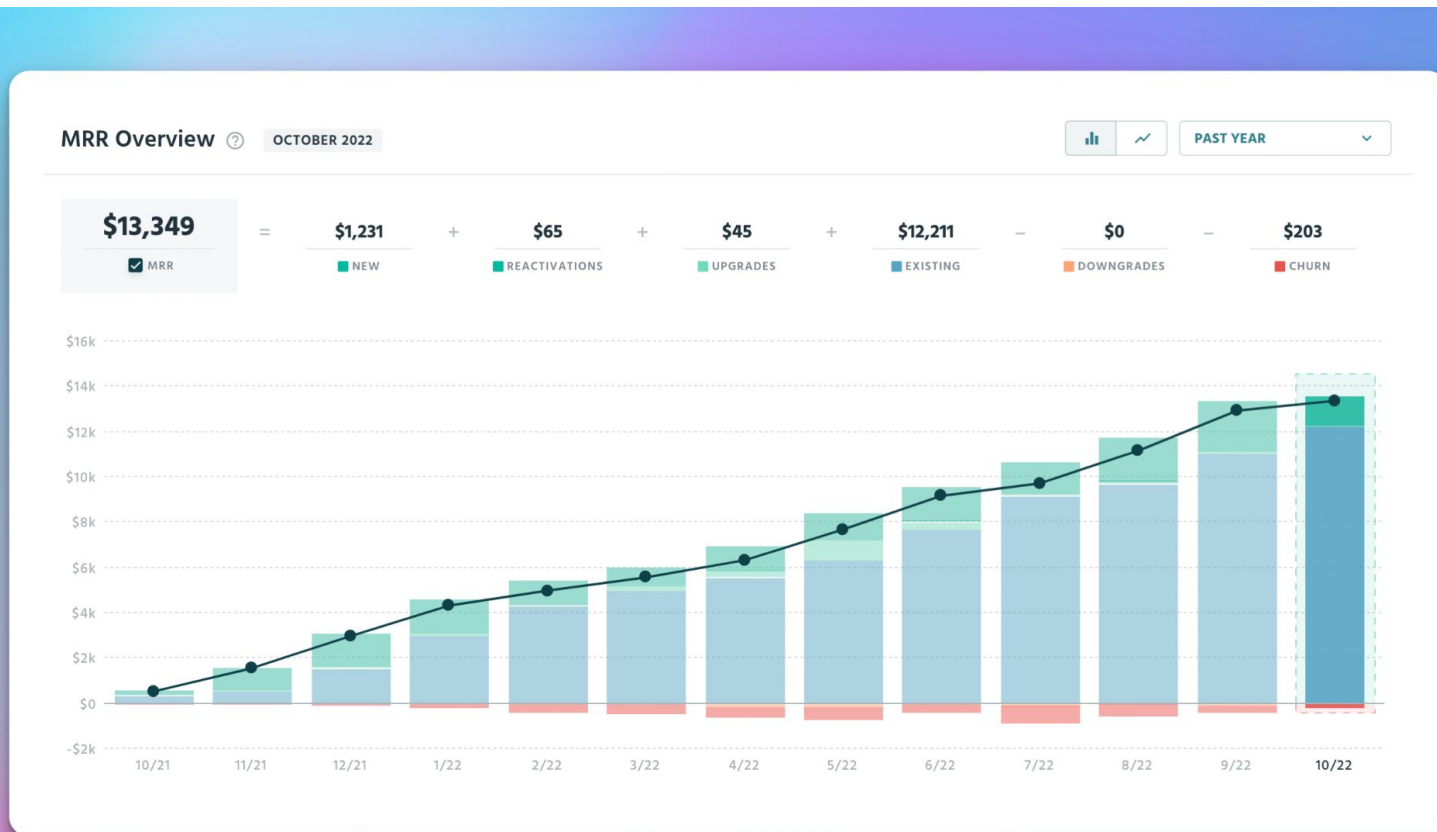
**Daniel Vassallo**

128.9K Followers



Entrepreneur

# Continuously grow with ever since!



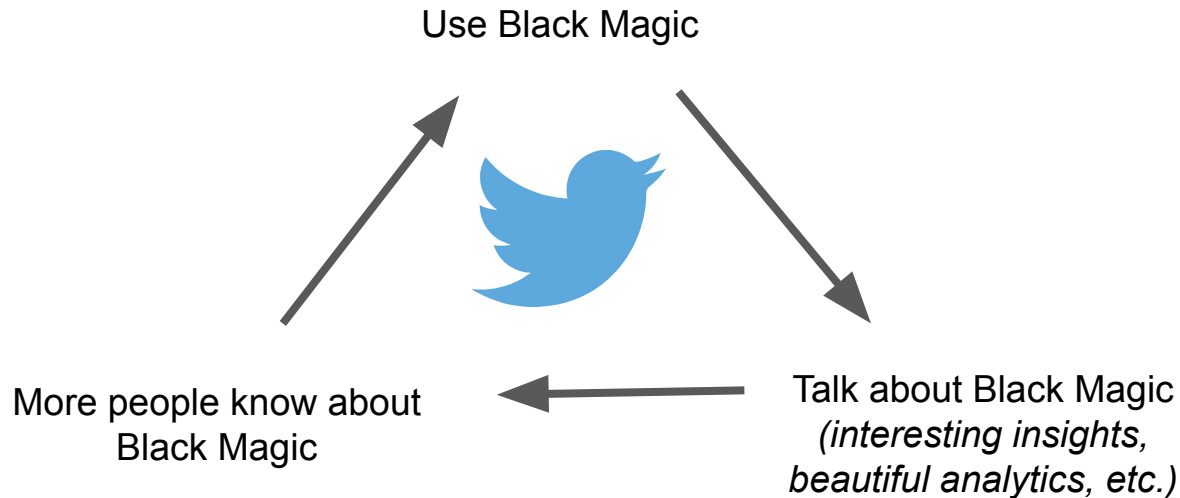
Do Marketing?

# Product-led growth

*Product-led growth (PLG) is a business methodology in which user acquisition, expansion, conversion, and retention are all driven primarily by the product itself.*

# Product-led growth

*Product-led growth (PLG) is a business methodology in which user acquisition, expansion, conversion, and retention are all driven primarily by the product itself.*





**ADHD Jesse**

@adhdjesse

...

Replying to @tdinh\_me

I'm having kind of a wild day on the bird app and it's nice having @blackmagic\_so to help me keep track of what's going on. 😂

Impressions

**2.7m** Top 1.22%

Engagement Rate

**1.84%** Top 57.32%

Profile Clicks

**8.8k** Top #3

Replies

**359** Top 2.57%

Likes

**32.2k** Top 3.93%

Retweets

**7.9k** Top 2.03%

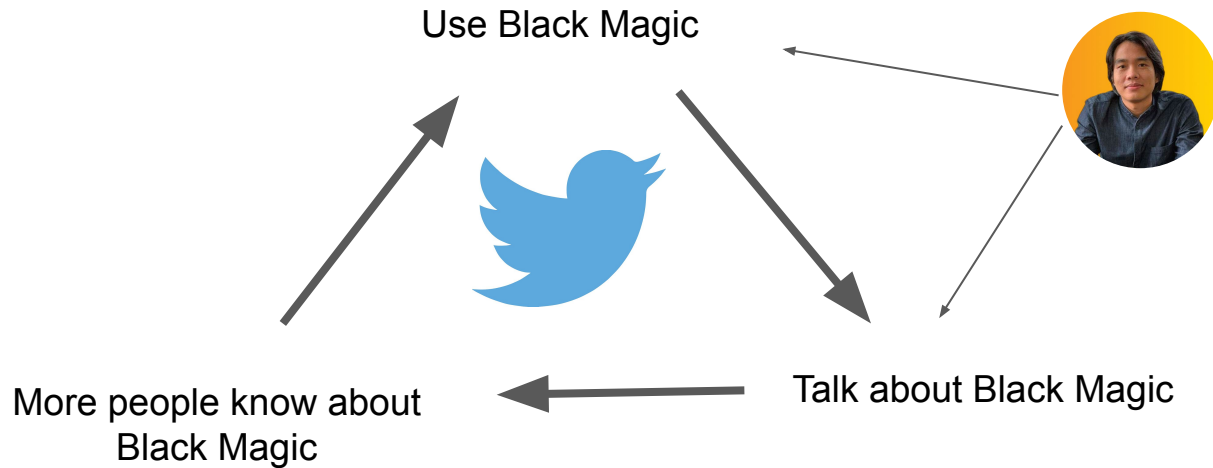
1:08 PM · Sep 29, 2022 · Twitter Web App

3 Retweets 10 Likes



# Product-led growth

*Product-led growth (PLG) is a business methodology in which user acquisition, expansion, conversion, and retention are all driven primarily by the product itself.*





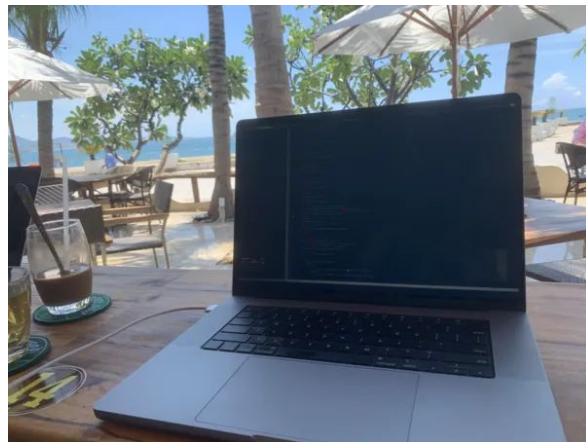
**By June 2022: \$8K MRR**



DevUtils



Black Magic



Live and work at the same time

I keep making more products

# What's different:

I have so many unfair advantages:

- Huge audience (easier to validate, get customers, spread the words, etc.)
- Huge customer base
- No expectation & less stress

# emoijai.com

A website to suggest emojis based on text

Spent 1 day to build

Failed (no sales, no one wants it)

Still good for engagements

**EmojiAI.com** 😊

It suggests emojis for you!

# Xnapper

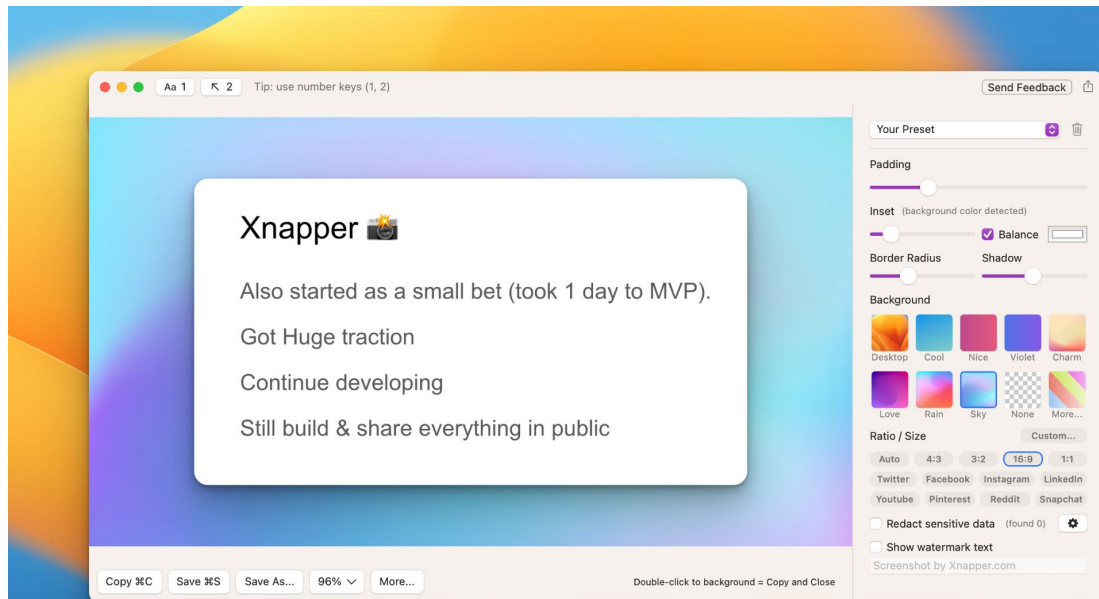
A screenshot app for macOS

Took 1 day to build the MVP

Got huge traction

Continue developing

Build in public





**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me

...

Xnapper made \$10K this month!

Not recurring revenue, of course. But that's ok 😊



6:52 PM · Aug 31, 2022 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 1 Quote Tweet 325 Likes





**Xnapper** ▾

Take beautiful screenshots instantly

Product of the month  
**2nd**

Product of the week  
**1st**

Product of the day  
**1st**

Visit ▾



UPVOTED 1,859

# Repeat the same strategy

- Build MVP fast
- Build in public
- Free beta + early bird discount
- Talk to customers
- Make the launch day special



Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me

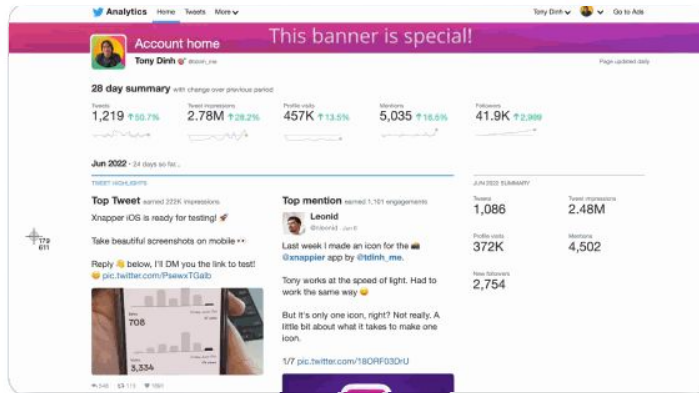
...

I'm obsessed with screenshot ratios.

So I'm experimenting with...

SMART RE-LAYOUT! 🧐

A screenshot tool that makes your screenshots beautiful automatically ✨



3:19 PM · Jun 25, 2022 · Twitter Web App

56 Retweets 14 Quote Tweets 1,044 Likes

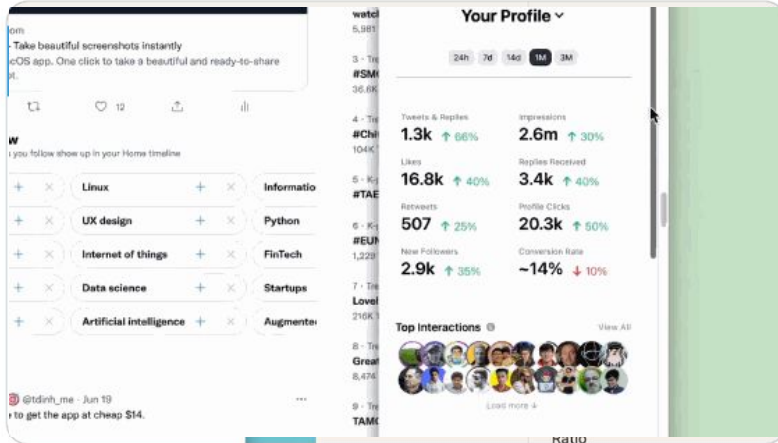


**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me

...

Xnapper can now "balance" your screenshot automatically 🤖👁️

Now you can take screenshots without sweating your fingers and still have a beautiful result to share! 💪



5:20 PM · Jun 21, 2022 · Twitter Web App

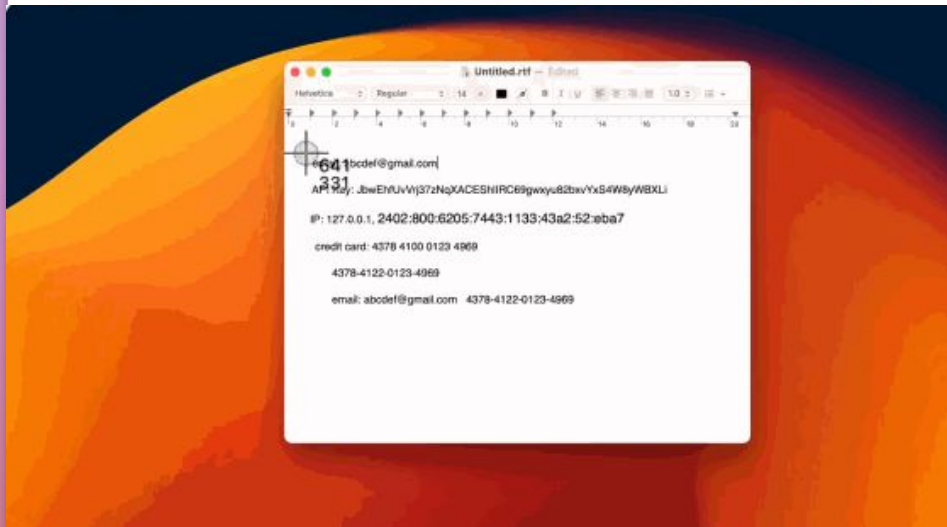
27 Retweets   10 Quote Tweets   722 Likes



**Tony Dinh**   
@tdinh\_me



A screenshot app, but very smart



1:12 PM · Oct 10, 2022 · Twitter Web App

**148** Retweets   **13** Quote Tweets   **1,932** Likes

askcommand.com

A macOS app to lookup frequently  
used commands

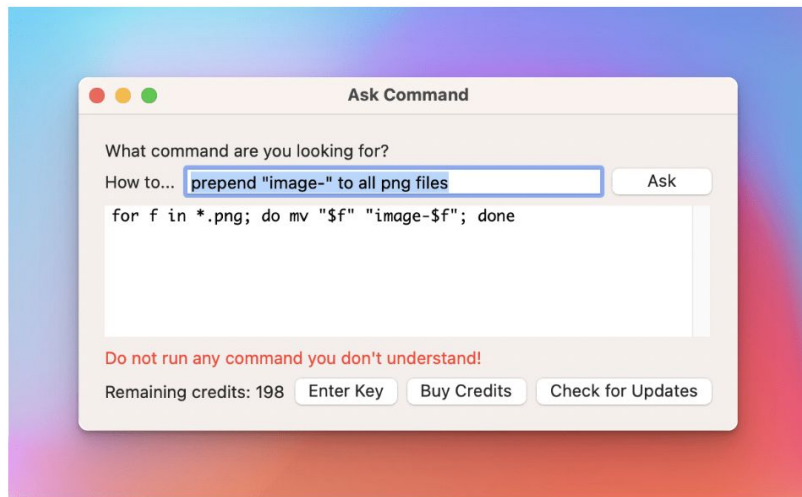
Built the first version in 2 days

Shared on Twitter



# Ask Command

A tiny app to remind you about those  
commands you always forget. Powered by AI.

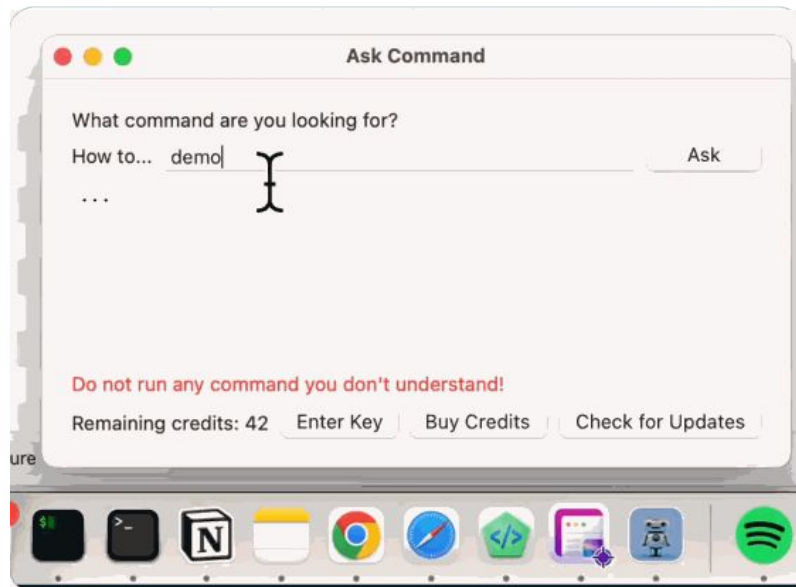




Tony Dinh  
@tdinh\_me



This app is going to save me so much time



12:11 PM · Sep 27, 2022 · Twitter Web App

475 Retweets 61 Quote Tweets 5,152 Likes



● Sales

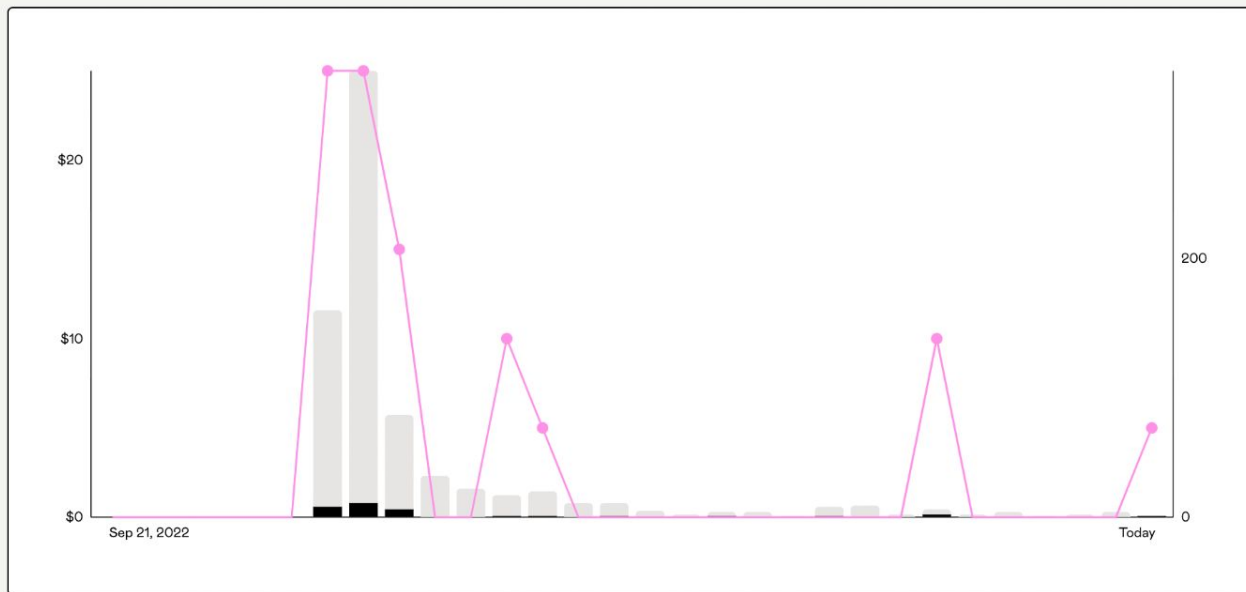
33

● Views

752

● Total

\$95





# To be continued!



# My Learnings

# Be a generalist

I don't restrict myself to any specific tech.

Took me ~1 year to learn Swift just so I can build macOS apps

80/20 rule.

Find problems that directly related to you and solve it

Give yourself an advantage

# Don't jump on building new ideas right away

The “wait test”

# Product-led growth & viral loop

Product markets itself, so you have more time to code.

# Build an audience

Optional.

It's an advantage you can build for yourself.

Compound effect.

# Ship early, ship small, ship frequently

- Focus on the core value
- First version should be very simple
- Involve your customers in the process
- Listen to feedback (but don't listen to everything people say)



# Be patient and good luck!

It's a long term game.

On average, it takes ~2 years to become ramen profitable.

Don't quit your job before you have calculated all the risks.

# It's possible!

It's possible to become a solo founder  
working on a small product  
in a small niche  
that brings enough revenue for you and your family  
to live an independent life and be free.



# Thank you!



@tdinh\_me



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