

FEATURES

Get paid for your sidelines



NATALYA SHELBURNE

'Artist-developer'
Shelburne came to the party from a different angle: front-end development was the sideline to her career in fine art. She taught design and fine art for six years and dabbled in coding until she realised she wanted to make it a more significant part of her job.

w: artist-developer.com

Photo by Luke Tong

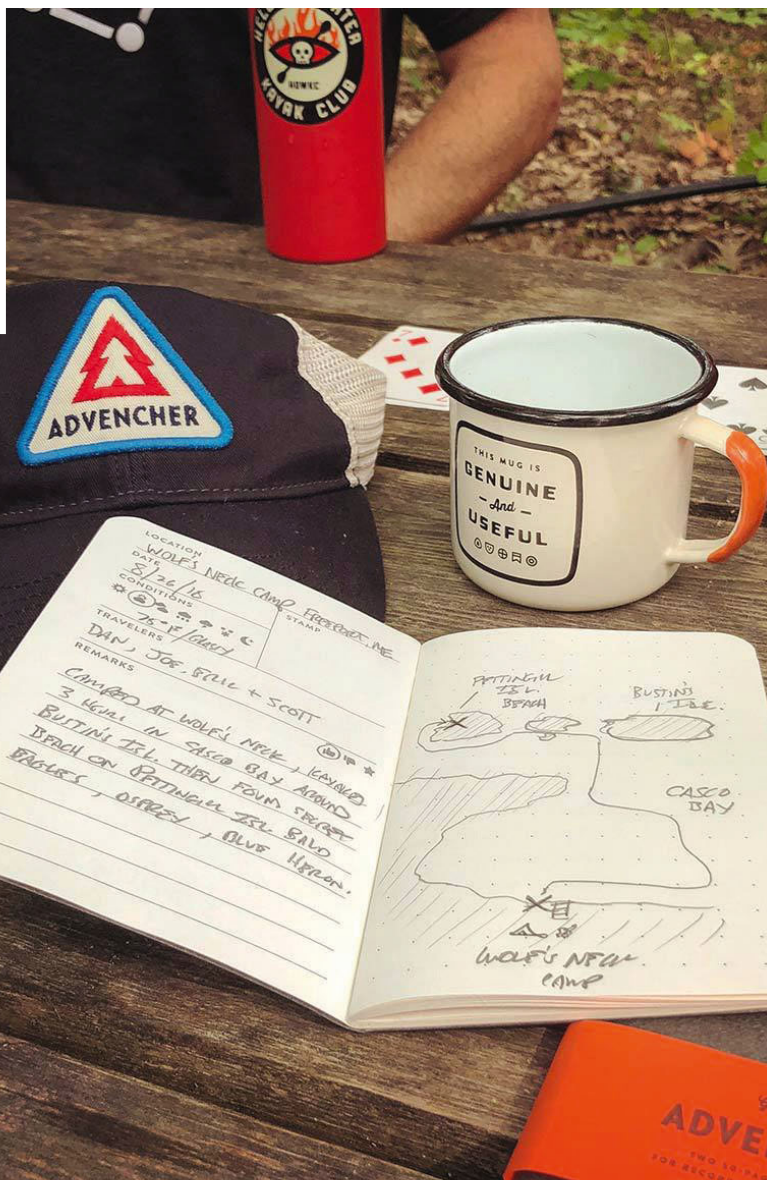
GET PAID FOR YOUR



DAN CEDERHOLM

Designer Cederholm buddied up with Rich Thornett to launch Dribbble as a side project in 2008. He's currently scaling up a new sideline, Advencher Supply Co – a lifestyle brand that sells apparel, patches, pins, notebooks and other goods with a tongue-in-cheek outdoors theme.

w: simplebits.com



SARA SOUEIDAN

Soueidan is a highly regarded freelance front-end UI developer specialising in responsive web design, modern CSS, progressive enhancement and accessibility. She regularly speaks at web events and runs coding workshops alongside her client projects.

w: sarasoueidan.com

Get paid for your sidelines

ELLIOT JAY STOCKS

Designer and creative director Stocks has launched two magazines – typography title *8 Faces*, which ran for eight issues between 2010 and 2014, and lifestyle magazine *Lagom*, which he and his wife Samantha have been producing since 2014. He also makes music.

w: elliotjaystocks.com



Photo by Norman Posselt

SIDELINES

How do you turn your passion project into a significant part of your job?
Ruth Hamilton asks four web pros that used their side hustle to boost their career



AUTHOR

RUTH HAMILTON

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Many web designers and developers have a passion project or two that they run alongside their main day job. It's so common that there's even a regular feature dedicated to amazing side projects in this very magazine.

A sideline can give you a chance to explore passions outside of your work, flex different muscles and expand your professional horizons. But it's also something you need to invest time and energy into. The real trick is being able to turn this side project into something that supports and enhances your career – and provides a second income stream that makes all those hours working 'overtime' a little bit more worthwhile.

► For this article, we spoke to four successful web professionals who have done just that. Read on for their advice on how to turn a passion project into a valuable part of your day job.

New outlets for natural talents

One thing all our interviewees have in common is that their sidelines, diverse though they may be, all grew from a genuine passion. In many cases, they also refused to let a lack of experience in the field they were exploring hold them back from pursuing it further.

A designer by profession, Dan Cederholm launched Advencher as a way of satisfying another personal interest. “I wanted an outlet to design physical products and marry my adventure and design interests,” he says. “It’s a labour of love for sure.”

Cederholm already has a super-successful side project under his belt – he’s one of the founders of Dribbble – but aside from its similarly spellcheck-bothering name and the fact that both brands started out with a T-shirt, the two ventures have little in common. Cederholm isn’t fazed by the lack of transferable knowledge though. “It’s about learning new things... what makes a good enamel pin? How are patches and mugs sourced? How do you run a successful online shop?” he says. “These are all things I didn’t or don’t know about yet. But it’s fun to learn.”

In fact, venturing into the unknown is what attracts Cederholm to his side projects in the first place. “It’s the learning new things that’s the fun part. The building. The creating. It’s what drives me,” he explains. “It’s okay to not know what you’re doing and coming to terms with that can free you up to make the leap onto something new.”

Elliot Jay Stocks faced a similar learning curve when he launched *8 Faces* magazine in 2010. At the time, he had barely any experience in print design. However, like Cederholm, Stocks sees this as a perk of side projects, rather than a hindrance. “You can explore things you can’t in your day job,” he says. “There are many hats you have to wear with projects like this and those disciplines are often

“It’s okay to not know what you’re doing and coming to terms with that can free you up to make the leap onto something new”

quite different from your day job’s skill set and responsibilities. Perhaps the most important benefit is the freedom a side project can afford you, where you’re calling all the shots.”

Front-end developer Sara Soueidan has a natural affinity for teaching that goes right back to the days when she herself was a student. “I started ‘teaching’ when I was in school really,” she says. “My classmates and I would gather during the breaks and I would go over anything they didn’t quite comprehend during class and help them figure it out.”



Top By combining his passion for adventure and design, Cederholm has created a fulfilling sideline to his ‘proper’ job

Above Despite having no knowledge of how to produce items such as pins, Cederholm’s love of them pushed him to make his Advencher Supply Co a reality

Above right Despite working on it mainly for his own satisfaction, Stocks was pleasantly shocked at how *8 Faces* grew into a business “almost accidentally”

Right Discovering how to source items such as patches has been part of the learning journey for Cederholm and his Advencher side project



benefit both tracks of her career. “I’ve been coming up with ideas and solving complex problems for years – now I focus on doing that with code,” she explains.

What’s the takeaway in all of this? Firstly, it’s worth choosing your sideline based on personal interest, rather than potential professional gain. And second, while a project might seem as though it is worlds away from your day job, there’s almost always an element or skill that will apply to both.

In fact, Stocks advises against launching a side project that has a directly intended correlation with your career. “If a side project enhances your career in some way – as it inevitably will – that’s great but I don’t think it should be the aim,” he says. “Your side project should be about scratching an itch or achieving something you otherwise wouldn’t be able to. Most importantly, it should be fun. And sometimes things that are too closely tied to a work-related goal stop being fun quite early on.”

Putting in the legwork

Following your passion is one thing but making it a viable part of your job tends to require a little more discipline and effort. Of course, if you’re lucky, you might find instant success. When Stocks launched *8 Faces* in 2010, the niche subject matter found an enthusiastic audience almost immediately. “*8 Faces* was the first passion project that – almost accidentally – grew into a business,” he explains. “It was a project created more for my own satisfaction – and of my own frustrations – than anything else. Then the first issue sold out in a couple of hours and I realised it was a real thing and that I’d then need to create a second issue.”

However, the vast majority of side projects require a little more effort, as Stocks discovered when he launched lifestyle title *Lagom*. “With *Lagom*, the intention was always to make it more of a significant business but ultimately it’s been sustained by the fact that my wife and I both do client work for the majority of our work,” he admits.

For Shelburne, pursuing a major new career line meant starting small, then



In 2013, working as a freelance front-end developer, she decided to combine this talent into her day job, by writing articles and tutorials for her then-new blog. A series on CSS Shapes (which almost no one else was writing about back then) led to her first talk, at CSSConf Miami, the following year. Now speaking and teaching is a major sideline running parallel to Soueidan’s day job.

Natalya Shelburne started coding as a hobby aged 15 but was discouraged from pursuing it as a career. Later, she took on a web-design project as part of her job as an art director at a nonprofit. “From the first day of the project, I was hooked,” she says. “I have been learning about web design and front end ever since.” While fine art and coding might seem very different, Shelburne has found skills that



► taking a calculated leap of faith. She maintained the website for the nonprofit for over a year before going all-in, taking three months out to teach herself everything she could about web design.

“The moment you realise that this sideline is more fun than your day job, take it seriously and make a plan,” says Shelburne. “For me, some of the planning included saving up money, working on side projects at night and building a network of people I could learn from.”

When scaling up a sideline, Shelburne also recommends immersing yourself in the community of people related to your passion. “Find your people. Find a community, a meetup or just a group of people going through the same steps,” she says. “The amount of support I received from the wonderful folks of Women Who Code Austin and from attending my first developer conference (CSS Dev Conf 2014) was incredible. It absolutely changed the trajectory of my career.”

Money matters

For a side project to become a viable career move, it obviously needs to make you some money. Following its launch in 2008, Cederholm and business partner Rich Thornett grew Dribbble slowly and carefully. The pair both kept their day jobs until they were absolutely sure it made financial sense to put all their eggs in the Dribbble basket, with Thornett working from Cederholm’s office a few days a week while telecommuting to his day job. “We started Dribbble as a fun experiment, as our skill sets meshed really well. Over the years the site grew, the community grew and we learned everything along the way,” explains Cederholm. “Once we had revenue from advertising, job listings and premium subscriptions, we were able to quit our day jobs and focus on Dribbble full-time.”

For Soueidan, finding the right combination of client work and speaking opportunities is key to making her sideline work in her favour. Growing your sideline, she concedes, is much easier if your ‘day job’ is freelance and you have control over your working hours and how you distribute your time. “Being able to work on the go means I can easily start



new projects even if I have confirmed speaking engagements coming up,” says Soueidan. “My clients usually know me well enough to expect me to be moving a little every now and then and are kind enough to accept a few ‘slow’ work days while I speak or workshop. I like to make it up by working the weekend following a conference, even if my client doesn’t expect me to.”

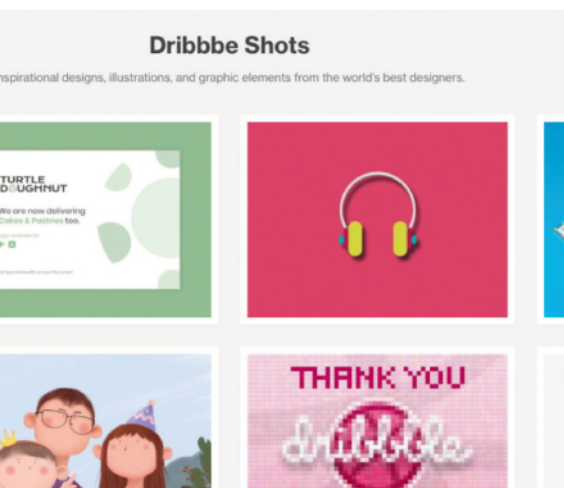
“**[8 Faces] was a project created more for my own satisfaction. Then the first issue sold out in a couple of hours and I realised it was a real thing**”

While passion projects can have value to your overall career that goes beyond earnings, it’s always vital to stay aware of exactly where your income is coming from. “[At events] I learn new things to apply in my work and that makes for great speaking and workshop material. I can usually get work done during my travels,” explains Soueidan. “But client work takes priority over speaking, so if I have to decline a speaking invitation in favour of spending more time focusing on client work, I will.”

There’s also the question of unpaid gigs. While it’s not practical to work for free all the time, there are situations where you may want to flex your altruistic muscles. “It’s a personal choice but I like to do a mix of both,” says Soueidan. “I love supporting community events. I also expect compensation for the work I put in creating and delivering my talks.” Her advice is to seek out events that pay a speaker fee and, when you’re making an exception for a community event, ensure that your travel and accommodation are at least covered, so you don’t end up out of pocket.

Unexpected perks

So making your side hustle successful is going to require time and energy – and it’s not necessarily going to be successful. So is it worth the investment? The



Top left and right Stocks launched *Lagom*, a lifestyle title, after the success of *8 Faces*

Left Advencher isn't Cederholm's first sideline rodeo – he is also co-founder of the Dribbble site

answer, according to the people we spoke to, is yes. All our interviewees agreed that their passion projects have positively impacted their 'regular' job (as well as their personal lives) in unexpected ways.

Sometimes, these benefits come directly, in the form of new clients or job offers. "*8 Faces* gave me a ton of experience both with print design and the subject of typography and that directly led to me becoming the creative director at Typekit – that's what they told me after I was hired," says Stocks.

And while Soueidan says her speaking gigs haven't earned her "a single client," she's well aware of the connections she's forged and reputation she's

grown through her presence at these events. "Speaking at conferences means attending conferences, which in turn opens many opportunities for networking, making friends and new potential work relationships," she says.

It's unlikely your side hustle is going to win you a job offer but don't undervalue the 'soft' skills you'll pick up, often without realising it at the time. For example, launching two magazines has taught Stocks plenty about organising

things with a lot of unwieldy moving parts, which he has found helpful in recent leadership roles.

Cederholm also points out the dangers of not dabbling in side projects. "Working on one product or freelancing many can get you stuck in your skill development," he says. "Side projects can help you keep sharp and current. They can keep your passions moving when day-to-day becomes stale. And also they might just lead to something bigger." ■

5 steps to successful side projects

What can we learn from our interviewees' experiences? Here are five essential things to consider when launching your own passion project.

1

Tap into natural passions

Side projects give you space to explore interests that aren't satisfied by your day job. So figure out what you're passionate about and build a sideline around that. If your project isn't motivated by genuine interest, chances are your enthusiasm is going to wane pretty quickly.

2

Start small

It's sensible to build up your sideline slowly. Not only does that reduce the risk of negatively impacting your finances or day job, it also gives you a chance to gauge whether the project you've picked really has legs.

3

Embrace the unknown

It may seem scary but don't be afraid of doing something totally different. Side projects are the perfect place for you to flex new muscles and learn new skills. Natural enthusiasm for the subject matter and a willingness to put in some legwork will get you a long way.

4

Use what you've got

Be reassured that it's unlikely you'll ever really be starting from scratch. While your dream side project may seem completely unrelated to your current job on the surface, there will almost always be a crossover in skills that will benefit you in your new venture.

5

Don't forget about money

If you're going to grow your sideline into a bigger part of your career, make sure you're practical about the financial side of things. You may love it more than your day job but be realistic about where your pay cheque comes from each month.