

# FIRE Starter: How Creating a Side Project Can Boost Your Marketability and Income

*Zach spent his first three posts providing us with nine actionable tips for savings, investing, and growing wealth in your 20s ([part I](#), [part II](#), and [part III](#)). The information in that series could change the rest of your life if you follow it.*

*Today Zach is sharing the benefit of side projects and how they can help you develop skillsets that you can eventually monetize. To me, a side project is synonymous with a side hustle – in my opinion, something everyone should have. Not every side hustle will be commercially successful but that doesn't make it a failure. I've personally had lots of side hustles that have paid off indirectly years later when I could tap those skills I had built on my own time. The value we can command from the market place is a function of our experiences, skills, insights, and knowledge we bring to the table. To increase your value you must constantly be looking for opportunities to grow both personally and professionally.*

*I hope you enjoy Zach's latest FIRE Starter post below.*

## **First, a Quick Reminder of Why I Started This Series**

*For the astute observer, you will notice that I have added three new series to the blog: [LateFIRE](#), [FIRE Starter](#), and [Chasing FIRE](#). Notice a theme? They all capitalize on the explosion – one might say the COMBUSTION – in the FIRE (financial independence retire early) movement. But let's set the record straight: on the GYFG blog, "FIRE" is defined in a slightly different way, meaning, as I see it, Financial Independence / Recreational Employment. That's because I am after **freedom**, not a typical retirement, and see myself working forever. But once I hit [my number](#), my employment will represent my recreational choice.*

*At 32, I find myself on the older end of the millenials' age range, which in 2018 is 22-37, [according to the Pew Research Center](#). Guys like Zach have got me thinking that there is a younger part of my generation that may not be able to relate to where I am in life personally. Thus the decision to bring on Zach as a regular GYFG*

*contributor, to reach those younger millenials. He will be writing about earning, investing, and saving money in your 20s. At 24, with a net worth in excess of \$100,000 and an income approaching six figures, he is more than qualified. Believe me when I say there is always someone younger and better than you out there, and Zach is putting my own 24-year-old self to shame. I share that only to say that I wish I had been reading people like Zach when I was in my early 20s.*

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I noticed an interesting trend during my sophomore year of college: as a statistics major, I kept running into people who had to take an introductory statistics course despite not being statistics majors themselves. It turned out that many students had to take one stats course to fulfill a math requirement to earn their degree, even if their major was unrelated to stats.

When I began to notice this trend, I came up with an idea: I would build a simple website with introductory stats tutorials and refer other students to the site whenever I would run into someone who was a non-stats major and was complaining about not understanding the concepts.

At the time, I had wanted to learn HTML, CSS, and JavaScript so building this website would give me the perfect opportunity to do so. Fast forward about three months and the site was complete. [Statology.org](https://statology.org) had been birthed into the world.

Once my junior year rolled around, I began to focus more on building my resume so that I could start applying for internships. I decided to place Statology on my resume under "Side Projects."

Fast forward a couple months. I finally landed an interview with a local insurance company. One of the first things the interviewer mentioned during our meeting was "We were intrigued by this educational website you built."

### **The Rarity of Side Projects**

At the time I couldn't believe my educational website had helped me get the attention of an employer, but now it makes sense to me: **very few college students actually take the initiative to work on a side project.** In fact, I personally didn't know anyone who worked on any type of project outside of classes.

This was when I realized that side projects are a great way to help you stand out from the

crowd and increase your overall marketability as an individual because they're so unpopular.

### **Side Projects Show Initiative**

One reason that a side project can be so valuable is because it speaks volumes about your work ethic.

By working on a side project and building something tangible, it proves that you're a person who takes initiative, who is curious about a topic and willing to take action based on that curiosity.

You can certainly *tell* an employer in an interview that you're a driven person who takes initiative, but *showing* them something you built is indisputable. It *proves* your drive.

I have also come to realize that the end result of the side project doesn't really matter. All that matters is the fact that you even *attempted* to build something.

When I first built Statology, it was clunky, information-dense, and unappealing. Yet, despite the ugly information-dense layout of the site, it was still something that I built all by myself. It proved I was willing to put in the work to build something.

In addition, I was able to share with my interviewers that I had created the site as a resource to help out other students, which was something I didn't *have* to do but voluntarily chose to anyway.

### **Use Side Projects to Your Advantage**

For college students in particular, side projects can be advantageous.

It can be hard to land your first real job after college when your work experience is limited to retail and babysitting. It can even be tough to earn an internship. But nobody on earth is stopping you from starting your own side-project. The internet has destroyed all barriers preventing the average person from starting a project and sharing it online.

Also, the benefits can't be overstated. When you work on your own side project, you'll inevitably learn skills which you can place on your resume, and where your finished project (no matter how good it is) counts as a type of work experience. Forget about depending on an employer to give you a chance to gain experience. Instead, create your own experience.

There's a huge pool of young people out there who have a degree and nothing else. If you

have some type of side project on your resume, you have a leg up on the competition. You'll stand out from the crowd.

*Anybody* can start a small business, build a site, and showcase their work online. But *few* people do. Working on a side project is the easiest way to resume hack and stand out from the crowd.

It personally helped me land my first corporate job.

If you're looking to stand out from the crowd, I encourage you to build something. Anything. A side project can help you get your foot in the door at a company. At the very least, it can help you learn new skills and gain experience.

### **How to Start Your Own Side Project**

If I've convinced you that side projects are worth the effort, then the next step is to decide what type of project you want to pursue and to start working on it immediately.

The way to determine what type of project to work on is to identify *how* you want the side project to help you. Do you want to use it to land a certain job or get the attention of a certain type of employer? Then build something related to that type of work.

For example, if you're interested in becoming a data analyst, then set up your own personal website, download some free datasets online, and analyze the datasets using some programming language. Make a post on your site about what data you analyzed and present the code you used to do so. If you make a few of these analyses, that's more than enough to help you stand out in a data analyst applicant pool.

If you're worried about not having the skills needed to conduct your own side project, I have some advice for you: build something using the skills you wish you had.

Yes, you read that correctly. I suggest building something using skills that you don't already possess.

It sounds odd, but it works and here's why:

When you have to build something, your learning is both **(1) need-based** and **(2) outcome-oriented**.

**(1) need-based:** you only learn skills that you will *need* to build that thing you're working

on.

**(2) outcome-oriented:** that thing you're building is tangible. It will be seen by you and possibly others.

This guarantees that you only learn the most relevant and necessary skills because you literally *need* to know them to build that thing. And because that thing you're building is tangible, you're more likely to remember *how* you built it and the struggles you faced when building it. This makes the skills you learned more likely to stick in your brain.

By contrast, when you just take a course or read a book, you have no clue which pieces of knowledge you'll ever actually use in the real-world and you probably never have to experience the pain and growth of building something.

So, pick a relevant side project that will help you get to where you want to go. Then, attempt to build your side project even if you don't already have the necessary skills to do so.

## **Get Started**

The one factor that prevents most people from starting a side project is the feeling that they're not quite "ready" or prepared to start.

But here's the truth: you'll never be completely ready. Life will never show up at your doorstep with a warm smile and say "*You are now ready.*" Our brains are the most sophisticated excuse-making machines ever to exist. We can come up with countless reasons all day for why we're not ready, not qualified, and not experienced enough. Don't wait until you are ready. Just start.

Once you get started, you can figure out the details along the way. You can use Google, YouTube, Stack Overflow, and a myriad of other resources to help you when you get stuck. But your side project will never get off the ground if you're constantly waiting for the perfect time to start.

So, get out there and start creating something. Your skill set will grow, your job prospects will expand, your marketability will rise, and your overall income will increase.

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## Gen Y Finance Guy

**Hey, I'm Dom** - the man behind the cartoon. You'll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I'm a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)