Pocket Project Workbook:
Websites

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Dedicated to the people who never seem
to run out of projects.

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Personal Note:

Thank you for reading this book. Truly I am humbled to think that you would have seen a book with my name and not have run in the opposite direction or tried to burn it where it sat.

You currently have your hands on the first edition of this book, which just so happens to also be my first [printed] book. There will be mistakes. Sentences could be shorter and clearer. I could have been more funny. If you feel truly insulted by my words or just think that I'm wrong, please send me an email and I'll be sure to review your revisions and consider them for the next edition.

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With the jokes out of the way, I hope that you find reading this book as enjoyable of an experience as I had researching and writing it.

And I said unto thee:

"May your projects be fruitful, your insights plentiful, and your day more enjoyable."

INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the project guidebook: a comprehensive resource designed to help new developers and designers, like you, transform their ideas into functional projects. This book is crafted for those who have dabbled in the realms of programming and design but feel somewhat lost when it comes to weaving these two fields together into a cohesive process. If you've ever felt overwhelmed by the thought of taking a concept from ideation through to execution, this guidebook is for you.

Our journey will take us through four parts, each designed to focus on a particular aspect of project creation. We begin with project strategy, where we delve into defining your ideas, understanding your users, and setting measurable goals. Next, we transition to project scoping—laying out tasks, brainstorming features, and prioritizing elements to form a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). In part three, we explore project structure, including setting standards, designing the information architecture, and creating content. Finally, we venture into the practical application of our plans in iterative cycles, where we discuss everything from sprint planning to creating wireframes and final features.

I originally created this guidebook as a reference for the process that I was using for creating little projects. It slowly grew into its own project, which prompted me to do some more research, and publish this guidebook. Building little projects has become a larger and larger part of my life. I started with building small timer applications, and have recently started tackling creating my take on a full-stack productivity web app. I've been working on projects like these for the past 4+ years now.

I deliberately designed this book to be a light, yet effective guide. Think of it as a skeleton, a structure, that you can fill with your projects and ideas. The aim is to share some concise tricks and steps along the journey of turning an idea into a functional project. I've tried my hardest to purge this book of 'filler' content. However, I have included some examples and notes from a project or two that I was working on while creating this guide book. Not all sections include these examples. I hope that this book contains the 20% of the words that you need in order to get 80% of the process.

I'm looking forward to continuing to develop this guide as I keep building my own projects. I think that this guidebook is far from over, and if I get my way, I will be updating this guidebook with new insights when I'm in a retirement home.

I hope that this guide offers you a new perspective, and a few new insights, into your own project creation process. I want these questions to make you think more critically about the design decisions that you make, and to help you find ways to explore ideas more efficiently.

Part I:
Project Strategy

In this first step, clarity is our goal. We'll start with a brief, focused pitch for your project. Then, we'll investigate your competition and understand potential users. Finally, using this knowledge, we'll set practical, attainable goals. These actions lay a solid foundation for your project, guiding your decisions in the stages to come. Let's get started!

ELEVATOR PITCH:

Kick off your project with a crisp, compelling summary. This isn't about selling, it's about bringing clarity to your project's essence. Your elevator pitch distills your project into a digestible, intriguing snippet for you and others to understand it quickly.

   This pitch is a dynamic tool. It gives initial direction but can evolve as your project does. If your project boasts multiple key benefits, choose the most universal for your pitch. It should be informative yet persuasive, sparking interest and understanding in its brevity.

For this step, imagine that you are explaining this project idea to a close friend. Write a short pitch for the project (2-3 sentences), and make sure to include the following:

1.) **Identify The Problem:** Clearly state the problem your project solves and why it's important to address it[2].

2.) **Present Your Solution:** Explain how your project solves the identified problem and what sets it apart from competitors[2].

3.) **Define Your Target Audience:** Describe who your project is designed for and how it meets their needs[1,2,3].

4.) **Share Key Benefits:** Highlight the most significant advantages your project offers to your target audience[2].

5.) **Importance:** Describe why this project is important to you, and how it impacts your life, or your values.

Example Personal Website Pitch:

My problem is that it is difficult to share my projects and ideas with my friends, family and potential clients. A personal website would allow me to be able to share new projects and blog posts with a single link. This could also be a great way to give potential clients and employers a look into my work ethic, personality and interests. Building this personal website project is important to me because I value keeping my friends and family up to date on my hobbies, projects and live events.

Example Personal Productivity Tool Pitch:

I like to use various tools, timers and applications to keep me organized with the time I spend on work, school and personal projects. The problem that I have is that there are too many different tools I am using, that could be simplified down to a single web application. This web app could help me track my time for freelance billing, Keep me accountable to take breaks and build in various techniques to help keep me focused throughout the day. This would be accomplished with a time tracking app that also allows me to track my time on specific tasks and with a built in pomodoro timer. This would be different from other time tracking tools because it would be focused around building a sustainable focus energy, rather than just billing time.

10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR PROJECT:

Now is the perfect time to reflect and ensure your project aligns with your motivations. If you're just building this project to solve a specific problem, research alternatives first. For projects you are taking on for fun, focus on what you love.

1.) **Project's goal:** What is it for - learning, profit, fun, problem-solving, or a mix? Determine what motivates you.

2.) **Passion:** Do the project's objectives align with your interests and excite you?

3.) **Skill Development:** Are you using this project to learn new skills, or to improve the ones that you already have?

4.) **Potential Impact:** Do you believe in the project's value for the target audience? (Especially if you are the target audience)

5.) **Career Alignment:** Does the project match your long-term career goals?

6.) **Project Scope:** Is the extent of the project clear or are you expecting significant changes during development?

7.) **Value & Fulfillment:** Do you see this project as a rewarding experience?

8.) **Motivation:** Can you see yourself staying engaged and motivated throughout the project?

9.) **Complexity:** Is the project manageable, or is it too complex for your current skillset? Your project should be challenging, yet feasible. If it's too complex, you may want to consider breaking it down or building up the skills to take it on later.

10.) **Enjoyment:** Will you have fun working on this project, or do you just want a custom solution to a problem?

Example Personal Website Motivation:

Before I continued planning to build my website from scratch, I did some research on alternatives I could use to solve the same problem. I found that I could use a site builder, like Wix, or Wordpress, to achieve similar results, or even create a blog like Wordpress.
    Even though these solutions could have solved my problem, I felt that the challenge of building the website from scratch would be more rewarding. I would also get a chance to practice building and designing websites from scratch. I also could see this as a cheaper alternative to a paid website plan. I think that I can keep the complexity low enough to make it possible for me to take it on.

Example Personal Productivity Tool Motivation:

I am currently using a combination of 5 websites to make my daily workflow. I use a time tracking website, a habit tracking website, a todo list website, a pomodoro website, and a task timer website. There are some websites like trello that would allow me to use

plugins to get the same functionality as 1 or 2 of my websites.

At the moment I think it may be too complex of a project to take on for me right now. It also seems like a time-consuming project, so I may want to simplify the scope before I start it. I will do more research and thinking before I start building a custom solution.

PROJECT GOALS:

Establishing goals guides the direction of your project. View it as setting a destination before embarking on a journey. These goals should be focused on what you want the project to achieve. Don't focus on how the project is going to reach this goal, focus on what you want the project to be able to do when you finish it. What does your project need to be able to do in order to consider it a success[1,2,3]?

1.) **Problem-solving:** What problems or challenges will this project address for users[2,3]?

2.) **Primary goals:** What are the main objectives you want to achieve with this project[1,2,3]?

3.) **Personal brand alignment:** How does this project align with your personal brand and style[1]?

4.) **Values & beliefs:** How does the project support your values and beliefs?

5.) **Long-term vision:** How does the project fit into your larger plan or vision?

6.) **User experience:** What kind of user experience do you aim to create with this project[1,2]?

Example Personal Website Goals:

In order for me to consider this personal website project a success it needs to be able to do the following:

- Any projects or blog posts can be shared with a single, reliable, link.
- There is a way for friends and family members to get updates easily about new projects and updates to the website.
- The website leads to more connections and conversations with friends, family members and potential clients.
- The website does a good job of reflecting my personality, and showcasing my work to new visitors, clients and employers.

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS:

If we want to create a unique project, we have to get an idea of what similar projects offer[2]. This can also be a great time to find inspiration for valuable features and ideas to incorporate into our project. While you should definitely look at similar projects and solutions, you may find a great deal of ideas from unrelated projects[1,2].

Pay attention to what people talk about when they review or critique a project. Find alternatives to the project you want to build, and look for reviews of those alternatives. You may find a treasure trove of best practices, and criticisms of what you are looking to create. You may also be able to identify some standards that will be helpful to follow when creating your project[2].

If you are creating this project as a custom solution to a problem you are facing, you may find that other people have run into similar problems. Do some research and see what others have done in order to solve similar or related problems.

1.) **Identify Competitors:** What are the competing organizations, projects, and services?

2.) **Users' Criticisms:** What are the common criticisms or complaints about your competitors' products? How can you prevent these issues in your project?

3.) **Successful Features:** What do successful competitors do? What features and strategies excel in this area? How can you integrate or enhance them?

Example Personal Website Competitor Analysis:

Competitors/Inspiration:
a) Derek Sivers' Website [https://sive.rs/]
b) Willem Pennings' Website [https://willempennings.nl/]
c) Bryan Braun's Website [https://www.bryanbraun.com/]
d) Alex Hyett's Website [https://www.alexhyett.com/]
e) Rodolpho Arruda's Website [https://rodolphoarruda.pro.br/about/]

Criticisms/Praise:
I couldn't find very many other visitors' criticisms or praise for these websites, so I will list my own thoughts. (Note: If you are the author of one of these websites, your a really inspiring individual and I hope you have a great day :))

Derek Sivers' Website:
I have a hard time giving too much criticism to this site, because the extremely minimalist design is part of the personality and charm. Anything that I may consider "missing" from the site, was probably not needed anyway. (Additionally, sites [c,e] cite *Sirvers'* Website as an inspiration)

+ Big fan of the message and personality that is very self evident when going through the site
+ Very clean and thoughtful "about me", includes a "Me in 10 seconds" and a "Me in 10 minutes"
+ Extremely detailed and organized
- Navigation is a little difficult, a sitemap or index would be helpful (However the amount of context dependent links seems to make up for it)

Features:
Below are a list of the features and design ideas that I thought were particularly interesting:

- About me in under a minute [a,c,d,e]
- Detailed about me [a,b,d,e]
- Contact me (form, or email) [a,b,c,d,e]
- Projects Page [a,b,c,e]
- A "Now" Page [a,e]
- Search [b,d,e]
- Blog/Article List [a,b,c,d,e]
- Site Index [e]
- Top Posts/Projects [a,b,c,e]
- Public Site Traffic Metric [e]
- Newsletter [c,d]
- Book Notes/Reviews [a,c,d,e]
- Current Tech/Tools [a,d,e]
- Light/Dark Mode [b,d]
- Social Media Links [b,c,d,e]
- "In the media" section [b]

Note: I should also mention that I had a bit of a bias when selecting and reviewing these websites. These websites were some of my favorites that I had found over the years, and all follow a similar pattern or schema. I would recommend also finding 1-2 sources of inspiration outside of your typical biased selections. I have a running list of about 20 sites I find interesting, which were not included in the list above.

UNDERSTAND YOUR USERS:

Unless you are building this project for *only* yourself, someone else is going to need to navigate and use your project. The better you understand who these users are, and what they are looking for out of your project, the better decisions you will make when designing and developing your project[1,2,3].

Creating a user persona helps keep these individuals in mind during your project's design and development[1]. Take time to understand your users: What challenges are they facing? What are their needs, preferences, and tech-savviness[1,2]?

Keep in mind, each user arrives at your project with a specific goal in mind[2,3]. So, your goal is to pinpoint your target user and discern their objectives when they visit your project.

1.) **Target Audience:** Who is your target audience? Consider their age range, gender, background, and interests[1,2,3].

2.) **Create Personas:** Develop detailed user personas, including age, job, favorite sites, technical profile, needs, and challenges[1,2].

3.) **Humanize Personas:** Bring your personas to life by assigning names and photos, helping you keep users in mind throughout the design and development process[1].

4.) **User's Challenges:** Identify the difficulties your users currently face and the challenges they encounter[1,2,3].

5.) **Existing Solutions:** How do your users currently address the problem your project aims to solve?

6.) **Familiar Websites:** What websites, applications, and devices are your users already comfortable with[1,2]?

7.) **Engaging Features:** Determine which features or functionalities will be valuable or engaging for your users[2].

8.) **User's Devices:** Identify the most popular browsers and devices among your users and ensure your product works well on them[2].

9.) **User Feedback:** Plan how to incorporate user feedback into your development cycle.

10.) **Overcoming Barriers:** Consider any potential obstacles that might prevent users from adopting your project and explore ways to address these challenges.
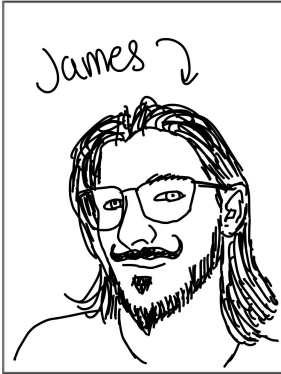
Example User Persona Template:

Name: James J. Julian

Age: 21

Job: College Student

User's Goal For Project:

James is visiting this website in order to learn more about their friends project.

Technical Profile: James is fairly skilled with technology. They are comfortable using new websites and applications

Favorite Sites/Applications:
- YouTube
- Spotify
- Discord
- Reddit
- Instagram

Browsers/Devices:
- iPhone 13
- Safari
- Google Chrome
- Windows Laptop
- iPad 10

User's Challenges:
- Needs to be mobile friendly
- Needs to be legible
- Clear, fast loading visuals
- Needs to get to the point
- Non-intrusive design

User's Current Alternatives:
- the Minimalists
- Mr Money Mustache
- Cool Math Games
- Hacker News
- Derek Sivers Blog