

EPISODE 103

[0:00:09.9] AT: Welcome to the Portfolio Life with Jeff Goins. I'm your host Andy Traub and this is the show that helps you to pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. "Passive income is so much work." Who says that? Who is honest enough and who has done the work to be able to talk about internet marketing with such authenticity and authority.

Paul Jarvis, that's who. In this interview, you'll find an honest voice about what it's like to be a creative working online. Working with digital products and living a portfolio life.

So here is Paul Jarvis and Jeff Goins.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:53.5] JG: So Paul, welcome to the show.

[0:00:56.9] PJ: Hey Jeff, how's it going?

[0:00:58.0] JG: Good. I do this fairly often and I still don't ever have any like — I feel like I should have a thing to say like, "Welcome to the" — I don't know? But I'm always like awkwardly going, "So hey, thanks for hanging out with me."

[0:01:10.7] PJ: I said, "Hello, hello, hello," once on my podcast and it resonated with listeners, so I'm kind of trapped in that now although I kind of don't mind saying it because it's kind of silly and it's kind of me but I guess that's my catch phrase.

[0:01:23.5] JG: Yeah, that's good. That's good. See, you're a better marketer than I am, you've got catch phrases.

[0:01:30.7] PJ: I branded "hello squared".

[0:01:32.5] JG: You've got a picture of a mouse on your website.

[0:01:35.9] PJ: I do, a rat.

[0:01:37.1] JG: What is the story with the rat?

[0:01:39.7] PJ: So I have pet rats and I love rats and I think they're awesome and I refer to my audience as my rat people because most people don't understand rats or think they're gross or vermin for that. Whereas there is little percentage of people in the world that have pet rats and understand that they're cuddly, lovable, social so I refer to my audience because they're misunderstood, underdog, creative kind of people. So I'm like, it's rat people."

I actually wrote an article about my pet rats so that was one of the most popular things I ever wrote. I thought, "Okay this is just going to be some super random personal thing that I'm going to write," but then it resonated with everybody and then that's the thing that everybody refers to now. So it kind of stuck, I guess.

[0:02:19.3] JG: Yeah. So your website which in my head I phonetically say it is Pjarvis

[0:02:29.2] PJ: Yes.

[0:02:29.7] JG: Pjrvs.com which is your name, Paul Jarvis without the vowels.

[0:02:38.2] PJ: Without the L just to make it super complicated.

[0:02:41.1] JG: Oh that's true, that's true.. Yeah, that's fun. So your website says, you have been making things for people who make things and you've been doing this for 20 years and yours is one of my favorite email newsletters, probably because it's good and you're not trying to sell me anything all the time and when you are, I'm like, "Yeah, of course." But yeah.

What I want to talk about and I think when I think about this topic, I think you're frankly the most qualified person I know to talk about this is this sort of interesting tension between business and creativity, art and money, which so many people I know, creatives I know struggle with and

you've been doing this for 20 years, you've been a creative and I think one of the reasons I like your newsletter is, I feel like you're one of the few people and I struggle with this all the time.

You're one of the few people I know who is making really interesting things and making a living doing that and you live in that tension whereas so many people I know either sell out, they go too far on the business side and it gets sleazy and slimy and you know what I'm talking about.

Or, they're just like the idealistic starving artist, I live in Nashville and we've got musicians around every corner who are a dime in a dozen who are like trying to live the dream. I ran into this guy at a coffee shop the other day and he dropped me off, he gave me his CD. I opened up my two year old Macbook Pro that doesn't have a CD drive and I go, "Dude, you're eight years too late."

[0:04:35.3] PJ: Yeah, I was a touring musician for a long time back when CD's were actually popular but yeah, even the last few albums we released and that was probably six-ish years ago, we still didn't even do a CD run because I don't have a CD drive on anything.

[0:04:51.4] JG: I remember when I was growing up and I went to visit my uncle who lived in Chicago and he was like a — I don't know if he was 30, maybe like 20's, bachelor and like he had a CD drive that could play six CD's and I was like, "This is what it means to be wealthy. This is what it means to have absolute freedom. Have more CD's than you could ever listen to at once."

Yeah, there's lots of people like that who are kind of living the dream and frankly I think are diluting themselves a little bit. I have a friend who used to work at a record label and he told me, the day that he knew he was going to quit because he had been, "I don't know if I want to stay here."

He'd been there for a few years and the day that he knew he had to get out of there was the day that they had this meeting and the CEO I think said, "Okay look. We only made 12% of our budget last year but people are still buying CD's, so we're just going to keep doing what we've been doing." And my friend was like, "That's the plan? We missed 88% of what we were planning

to do financially and we're going to keep doing what we've been doing and your justification is "people are still buying CD's". He's like, "I've got to get out of here."

[0:06:05.9] PJ: Digging a hole, it's like in the Simpsons, when they were all digging to find a treasure and then chief Quimby is like, "No guys, dig up stupid." What?

[0:06:18.2] JG: Yes, just like that. Do you feel that way? Do you feel like you live in that tension between creativity and business? You've been doing this for so long now and now you're teaching other people how to do it with your course, The Creative Class? Because I feel that tension, I just wonder what that feels like to you.

[0:06:36.8] PJ: Yeah, I feel it almost every day, I feel it every time I put something out into the world and I think the big thing for me with that, well there's lots of big things for me with that. But one of the big things for me with that is that I like doing things that scare me and releasing products or putting myself out there or being in front of an audience is to me scary, it's absolutely terrifying.

But I feel like that's where the most opportunity to grow is, it's also the most opportunity to fall flat on my face which can happen and does happen. But it's also the most opportunity to grow. I kind of separated inaction from fear because a lot of people get paralyzed by fear and that's understandable, that happens.

But I've kind of wrestled into my brain that if I'm scared, I can do things anyway. Because I'm pretty much scared of everything. So I can act, fear and action can exist in parallel. I can kind of do the things that scare me, like selling things or putting myself out there. That doesn't go away, I think for a lot of people and I've heard this a lot from people who are just starting out like, "Okay, I'm scared of this now but it will eventually get easier."

And I'm just like, "Ah, well I actually think it gets harder in some regards," because it's easier to dance when nobody's watching right? When more people are paying attention then you feel the weight. It's like when you write a successful book, you've done that, right? The next thing is hard because now there's people paying attention, now there's kind of a standard that's been set and

you don't want to be a one hit wonder if we're using the music analogy or one trick pony or that. What's the trick that one trick ponies even do? I don't actually know what trick ponies do.

[0:08:31.6] JG: If you have a trick pony, you're doing okay for yourself.

[0:08:37.1] PJ: That's also a sign of being tremendously wealthy; six disk CD changer and a trick pony.

[0:08:50.5] JG: I think they say neigh, I think that's the trick. I love that TED Talk by Elizabeth Gilbert, me and like five million other people apparently, but I love that talk where she talks about how she wrote *Eat, Pray, Love* and she had been doing writing full time for years and then she had this book that just kind of exploded and then the next thing to write was nearly impossible for her because she knew, just in terms of probability like, "I've peaked, I'm done, now it's just all downhill after this and everything I do will basically be a poor imitation of the success that I've had," and she said in that talk, "It's likely that — it's exceedingly likely that my best work is behind me," or my most popular work or something.

She's like, "Well, I guess I'm just going to have to get up and go to work anyway."

[0:09:37.4] PJ: Yeah, I've written about the same, "Have we reached peak Paul?" And possibly, that is like peak — except I'm recyclable I guess. But yeah, I struggle with the same things anyways as well but I feel like with that, I feel like a lot of that just like her I guess mentality around that is that I still do the work, it's kind of super old manner Steven Presfield-y.

You just got to do the work, and I feel like a lot of times people get in their heads that we have this thing now where our work has to be so fulfilling and soul filling or something that it's not good work unless it's so meaningful that it impacts the rest of our life where honestly, some days I just have to sit and answer emails all day, or I just have to talk on the phone all day.

It's not very glamorous even though I feel like I do all right for myself, I feel like I live the life that a lot of people think that they want to live as well but I think the illusion there is great because I think that I do pretty much the same as everybody else. It's just there's a couple more people

paying more attention but it's still the same stuff. I still sit on the internet all day typing, it comes down to that.

[0:10:58.6] JG: My least favorite question to answer is, "So what's your schedule like?" I'm like, "Oh god." It's boring, it looks boring, I get up, I make breakfast for my son, that's cool. Then I go and sit in front of my computer for two hours and check email or watch YouTube and then I eat lunch. Somewhere along the lines, I do something every once in a while that is okay and moves a needle but yeah, I do think that we have, I had this idea when I was working at a job.

I had this idea that if I got to do what I loved every day, it would be thrilling and everyday would be an adventure and I don't think that this is like the unsatisfying reality of you get your dream and it's not that great because it becomes work and people say that and I go, I don't know, I still really like what I do. I think it's just the reality of life. Life sometimes is just sort of normal, it's not bad, it's just like, it's not adventure after adventure.

[0:12:04.4] PJ: Yeah, you can love what you do and not love the trappings of it every single day because like I couldn't see myself doing anything else and I will work sometimes when I don't have to just because I love it but that doesn't mean I don't get stressed out, I'm not bored out of my mind coding sometimes.

It's just the things that need to be done and because I like to do everything, I'm a control freak and I am, like I do have a background in design and development and everything else. So when I'm building a product, I build everything and some of that stuff, I could hire a VA to edit the videos that I'm making right now because they are taking forever. Video editing is so tedious.

But I want to do it. I wasn't that good of a video editor and now that I've been doing it for probably about a week and a half, every single day, I feel like I'm getting kind of the hang of it. I don't need to learn that but I feel like I want to keep growing and I want to keep figuring new things out because I'm not happy unless I'm figuring things out, even if they are tedious in the trappings of them.

[0:13:07.4] JG: Yeah, that's the whole idea of flow, right? Flow is where your competency meets a worthy challenge and you have to have that challenge, you have to be learning new things

otherwise things do get boring and that's where you get depressed is when you're doing the same thing over and over every day and you hate it. It doesn't create that sort of excitement.

I believe that the reason I quit my job and I'm doing what I'm doing now is not because this was my life's purpose, this is the thing I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I believe some of that, there is this moment where I go, this is the work that I am called to do in the world but one of the big reasons why I even started writing and started doing other things while I was working at that job was because it wasn't challenging anymore.

It was really challenging and all the stuff I learned about marketing and blogging, I learned in the context of that job where I started out as a copywriter and became a marketing directory and I was like, I don't know how to be a marketer, I have a Spanish degree and I was reading Seth Godin every day and there was this challenge of "I've got to figure this out" and when I quit my job, the challenge was, "can I not only be a writer, can I run a business to fund that creative endeavor" and I knew nothing about that.

I loved the challenge of figuring it out as I went. I love that. I want to do things in a weird chronological order and go back to how you got started doing what you're doing now and I'm sure over the years there's been iterations and changes and evolutions. I want to talk about what you're doing now and maybe what's coming up. Let's talk about how you got started doing what you do in the first place. I'm just going off of the — when I think of you, I think "creative", I think "designer", also a great writer but you call yourself somebody who has been making things for people who make things for 20 years.

[0:14:57.7] PJ: That changes every week though. I change the title all the time.

[0:15:00.2] JG: Of course you do. How did you get started Paul? Let's start at the beginning, whatever that is for you.

[0:15:08.1] PJ: Yeah, it was actually kind of similar to you where you felt like you were learning this stuff but you weren't really learning enough of the stuff. So I was in school for computer science with a specialist in artificial intelligence which given the climate now but this is like 20 years ago.

Given the climate now, that would have been a really good degree to have but I felt like I wasn't learning enough programming when I was in school for computer science. I got a job offer so I quit and I still remember going in to see the dean of computer science at the University of Toronto and he was like, "So two things are going to happen young Paul. The first is that you're going to regret this decision and the second is that you're going to be back."

I was like, "Okay, fair enough, you're older than me by a lot so maybe that will happen." Obviously it didn't happen but that stands out in my mind as like, I made the decision that I wanted to be a better programmer so I quit school for programming. I was offered a job at the time anyways at an agency and then I started doing more graphic design work for them anyways.

But then I didn't work at that agency for very long because I felt like their values and their mission and the way that — I wanted to treat our clients better than the company was treating the clients and I eventually got to a point where I couldn't reconcile that, I was like okay, I have to leave. The CEO is also not a nice human being. I left and then I was going to go and this was like I guess late 90's-ish.

So the next day I was going to go to the library to figure out how to write a resume because I had been hired right at the school and didn't have a resume. I was going to go to a library, I'm sure the younger listeners, it's something where they store a lot of books that aren't on Kindles. My mom told me that you can take books out of the library on your iPad or Kindle or something now, which I don't even know about.

[0:16:59.0] JG: Yeah.

[0:16:59.4] PJ: It's cool.

[0:16:59.6] JG: Yeah, you could do audio books too, they've got apps and stuff that you can basically check out audio books or digital books through your iPhone or something from the library.

[0:17:09.4] PJ: The future is here. Anyways, I didn't end up getting to the library because the clients of the agency started to call me like in rapid succession and be like, "Okay Paul, we liked working with you and we like the way you handled our accounts, so tell us what agency you're going to and we'll take our business there." I think I got like three or four calls like that and then the light bulb went off in my head like, "Maybe I don't need to bring these clients and their money to somewhere else, maybe I can just work for myself?"

So I sort of became a freelance web designer by accident and that was probably about 19 years ago that I started doing that. Yeah, fast forward about until about five years ago, I was just doing web designers, just getting basically better at doing web design for clients and dealing with clients. So I spent like 14, 15 years just doing that, I always wanted to write and I just kind of was like, "Well you're not a writer, what are you going to do? You're not a writer, so don't."

I just talked myself out of it all the time and then I realized like well the only way to be a writer is to start writing. So, "Hey Paul, get on that." I started to write a book and I was just like, "Okay, maybe I can just — I don't need to be a writer to write a book, I can kind of just write a book and share it with my friends and stuff." That was a vegan cookbook which is super on brand for you, Paul.

But I was like, "Okay, maybe I can sell like" — I've been writing, because people have been asking me for recipes for going vegan or eating more plant based diet and stuff. I felt like I had written the book an email about 15, 20 times and I was like, "I'm lazy, maybe I can just write it once and they just start giving it to people or saying if they want to buy it, they can buy it."

Then I started to build an audience on Instagram when Instagram just started and I was posting food pictures and people were like, "When is the book coming out?" And I was like, "This is funny, there isn't a book but maybe there should be?" I wrote a vegan cookbook and that has done really well for me.

That was kind of the start of the writing and I was like, "Okay, the only way to be something is to start doing it, the only way to be a writer is to start writing, the only way to write for publications is to start writing really well for your own audience," and so I just started doing all the things and I was like, because a lot of people, "I could never," and I hate that statement because they're

like, “Well that’s okay for you Paul but I could never...”. But I was the, I could never until I started doing these things.

It’s such a mental block that people, especially creative people have, it’s like, “Well that’s good for so and so but I could never do that because I don’t know how to do it or I don’t do that.” That’s really just a crush holding you back and it was a crush that held me back for over a decade. I still kind of, once I kind of got past that and started to see the things, I started to share to find my voice as a writer which I’m still trying to figure out every single day. But I started sharing and then the right people started listening and they started sharing more and then more of the right people started listening and it just kind of snowballed into building I guess my brand.

[0:20:16.8] JG: Sounds like something you’re very comfortable with.

[0:20:20.8] PJ: Yeah, it’s funny because I’m comfortable with it and I’m super comfortable being who I am in public I guess on the Internet, which is weird but I still struggle with it like I still am scared, there’s still schedule my newsletters in MailChimp weeks in advance so I forget about them and then I don’t get super nervous just before the go out or I don’t like — in MailChimp, there’s that button with like the sweat dripping down the finger and the launch, it’s like, “I don’t want to press that.” So I could never send... I could never do “send now”.

I have to schedule everything I do because that gets me around like fear of hitting publish and then lots of people reading the thing that I just wrote for them. So I schedule it in advance, but I still struggle with all the same things but I just kind of do them and then I just let myself struggle with them while I’m taking action and then it does kind of diminish slightly.

[0:21:20.2] JG: Yeah, that’s a faulty design where they’re creating anxiety in their customers to use the very features that they want them to use which is to send email. I get that. I mean when I started publishing blog posts, same deal, sort of scheduling them a few days in advance, you’re like, “Oh, I had a thing come out today.” I wish I could do that with books, I should just try like eight books all at once and send them to publishers and just publish this whenever you want, don’t tell me about it.

[0:21:47.2] PJ: Exactly, and then if one does well, you’ve got a bunch in the queue anyways.

[0:21:52.5] JG: “I published a book today, that’s good.” You were designing websites for people, you’re basically — you were a free-lance web designer, are you still doing that for other people?

[0:22:03.9] PJ: Not really, kind of a little bit. I keep track of my income by source. Last year I kind of looked at it and I was like, “I kind of didn’t really do that much, web designer didn’t do that much revenue for me last year.” My products were selling, it was about 80/20 products to clients and the year before, it was reversed.

This year, I’m kind of working with — I have some clients that I’ve worked with for 10 years or more and that I would never, I would feel unhappy if their brands were handled by somebody else. So I still make time to do the work for some of the people that I’ve been working with for a long time but I don’t take on brand new clients or anything like that anymore.

[0:22:50.3] JG: From what I’ve seen, landing pages and sales pages that you’ve designed, I mean they’re my favorite, I think I told you that at one point, I think it might have been the creative class sales page, home page things. I said, “This is like the most beautiful sales page I’ve ever seen.” Yeah, so I love your design aesthetic if that’s what the kids call it? I’m hip, I know. I know things.

This is interesting I think because you have recently crossed the threshold from freelance creative, if I may call you that, to the thing that’s becoming more of a thing now. You have a skill, you’ve been doing it for a long time, 20 years, two decades and now you’re teaching it and people are paying you to know the things that you know and be able to do the things that you’ve been doing. What has that transition been like for you? So you came out with The Creative Class, was that two years ago now? How long ago was that?

[0:23:42.9] PJ: Yeah, October 2014.

[0:23:46.2] JG: What is that?

[0:23:47.2] PJ: It is a course to teach freelancers how to do business better. So people typically have great skills, that’s why they start freelancing because they’ve built their skills up as writers/

developers/designers. The business side of things typically aren't taught, I wish they actually were taught well, I had a bunch of people in the course who were like, "I don't understand why this isn't taught in school." I'm like, "I know, it should be but because it's not the course."

So just the marketing and sales for creative people to basically make a living off their creativity. Figuring out things like positioning and pricing and niching and defining an audience and figuring out how to provide value enough that people pay for this and want to pay for the services that you have, all that sort of stuff is covered in the course.

[0:24:36.8] JG: So what is the biggest challenge that you think a creative has in approaching, making a living for themselves, starting a business because that is a thing I think that we hear a lot now. You can make a million dollars off of Etsy if you are a blogger, you should be monetizing everything that you do. So I hear from a lot of people that there's this pressure to make an income and also a desire and a need to do it. What is the biggest problem facing people who have that aspiration in your experience?

[0:25:08.0] PJ: I think a lot of people don't talk about the fact that even passive income is so much work. Passive income is really just separating time. It's separating the time you work on something and when you get paid for it. That's all passive income is instead of freelancing, you do the work and get paid for it, you do a project, you get paid for the project. Passive and product income is, you do all of this work and then you launch it and then you hope it does well and so they're not tied together.

So it's actually been a struggle for me the last year because I spent so many years knowing exactly how to do what I do because I've done free-lance web design for so, so long. I call myself old man or other people call me old man internet. Moving into — and I'm really good at figuring out who is good to work with, who is not good to work with and sending 90% of people somewhere else if they wanted to hire me for web design when I did that pretty much exclusively.

Moving more into the products — so I have gotten really good at saying no and I think that's something a lot of people need to figure out because it's really important but moving more into the product realm. There's this horrible word called opportunity so people always have these

opportunities for other people and you can say yes to all of them but then you don't have time to do the thing that your audience values or make the thing that makes you money or that sort of thing. So I struggled with that the last year and I took on too many opportunities.

[0:26:39.3] JG: What's an example of an opportunity?

[0:26:42.5] PJ: So like a collaboration for a webinar and I do webinars and I think webinars are great, you do webinars too. I've watched some of your webinars, they're great. I don't — you and I don't need to do every webinar that comes our way because it's not a good use of our time.

[0:26:58.8] JG: That is hard, and because you're an expert and you're smart and well-spoken and help people understand things and you have an audience. So there's all kinds of reasons and motivations for somebody to say, "Hey Paul, come do this summit. Come speak at this free event that's going to get us a bunch of leads," or whatever.

[0:27:21.1] PJ: I have the top rated podcast in this category. A lot of people do really good things and have really big things. But still, it's really difficult to say no to those things but you kind of have to and I think that — and I pay attention a lot to Derek Sivers who I think is one of the smartest people in the world.

He's written a bunch of times about when he's in work mode, he's busy, he can't do anything else because he's working. A lot of times we get popular because we've done this work that resonates with others. But then we have to spend all of this time talking about and promoting this work and it takes us away from doing more work.

It's not necessarily that the promotion aspect is bad, but the balance sometimes shifts and the pendulum shifts too far to one's side. Then we don't have the time to make the new things or to work on the things that people liked us for in the first place. So last year I think I felt like I swung too far that way so this year, I actually, every year I have kind of like a reset because I'm not smart enough to do it on my own.

So I have like pretty much from your Thanksgiving because Canadian Thanksgiving is on October because we're weird, until the beginning of the year. I don't do any interviews, I don't use social media, I don't write for my newsletter, I just kind of take a break.

[0:28:44.5] JG: From Thanksgiving on?

[0:28:45.3] PJ: Yes. That's the time when a lot of people are like, that's when marketing ramps up for consumers.

[0:28:50.7] JG: That is true.

[0:28:52.2] PJ: And I'm like, "I'm just going to sit this one out." A couple of people thanked me for sitting it out but I take that time because I need it to reset and reflect and figure out if things are on course because a lot of times you don't really know what's working for you until you take a step back from it because we're all too far into the thing that we're doing to really be able — we got kind of blinders with it.

So I take a few months off every year from that to kind of see, "Okay, Paul, are you on the right track here? Is what you're doing working for you and working for generating a revenue to support my family and that sort of thing? So I kind of need that and if I was smart I'm sure I could do it in less time but I need that two month span to kind of figure things out.

And then moving forward, it's a lot easier to, "No, okay, this year I'm not going to do as many interviews or take on as many opportunities or that sort of thing because last year I knew I took on too much and it stretched me too thin and my work suffered." That's kind of the way that I deal with that because it's such a teeter totter of balance.

[0:30:05.4] JG: What are you doing during these two months because I think the first time we try to do this podcast episode was maybe right before that and it didn't work out because I don't do a good job of managing my schedule, I think is what it comes down to and so now we're reconnecting after that time. But are you like — what are you doing? Are you legitimately not working or are you like walking around in the woods, just like looking pensively into the sun line something. Seriously, what do you do?

[0:30:35.8] PJ: A lot of it is figuring out what I'm making next because I used to say, "Okay, when I have time, in six months or something and I write the next book or make the next course," and then that time would come and it would be like, I don't want to do that thing that I've been saying I wanted to do for six months.

I wait until basically day one and I'm like, "Okay, what do you want to do? What's next?" I start to work on that thing and then I start to plan it out and actually do the work. You can get so much done when you have, when my calendar just has nothing on it, I just feel like I wake up and like my arm's raised over my head, I'm like, "Hooray!"

You can build by clumping similar tasks, you can kind of build this momentum. So if I'm writing a book, writing a course. I can really get into it because there's no — I don't have half a day of calls or half a day of having to teach an online event or something like that. I really get into the work that I'm doing and then I just came out of it like a few days ago as well. So I feel like talking to other people still feels a little like, I feel rusty a bit right now.

[0:31:42.6] JG: You're doing good.

[0:31:45.6] PJ: Ah yes! So yeah, I work on the things that I need to work on that are easier to work on when there are no interruptions. Just for me personally, that's exactly what I need to get things done.

[0:31:57.6] JG: Yeah, I love that. What I hear you saying is I'm always telling myself, "when I have time to work on this." Oh yeah, I do that all the time and I was just thinking. I should do this, I should shut down after November because we tend to launch tribe writer's main course like right before the end of the year and I like just kind of chilling out December and that was kind of the goal this year but I still ended up doing stuff, just reacting to it.

I was like, "You know, I should have just pulled out, I should have just" — December is such a crappy month anyway I think for work because especially in America because maybe even worse in Canada but you have Thanksgiving and then you just get caught up in email and then

you have Christmas, and then you have New Year's. It's just all this starts and stops, just take the month off man, just check out of it.

[0:32:48.6] PJ: Yeah, I'm so consist. My newsletter is every Sunday no exceptions. I feel like it's not... I love being consistent and I love, that's what I'm the most proud of in my work is being consistent with that but I also like that there is a break. James Clear does this as well and he's like the master of habits.

So I'm like, "Well if James Clear takes a month or two break a year with his writing then I could do that. If it's okay with James, it's okay with me." Yeah, I like that. I feel the same, I feel like in the November December, everybody's attention is pulled in so many directions that I'd rather just sit it out and then come back fresh. It gives me and my audience time to miss each other and then we can hug and high five when I come back.

[0:33:32.6] JG: Yeah, no I love that. So what made you want to bridge the gap, make the transition between freelancer and online entrepreneur? People are — you're a hired educator. Now I don't know if that's how you think of yourself but you said 80% of your income in the past year came from the products that you're selling now. What made you want to make that shift in the first place?

[0:33:57.0] PJ: It's so funny because I come from a family of teachers. I was always like, "I'm never going to do that," and then last year I was like, I kind of am doing that but just in a different way. I think that what I kind of figured out is that I'd been doing, especially with freelancing in a creative field, I'd been doing that longer than everybody I know. I don't know anybody else who has been freelance longer than me.

I felt like, "Okay, I made a lot of mistakes, I've had so many years to screw up, more years than anybody else to screw up." I feel like, if I could teach people how to screw up faster or to screw up less in less time then I feel like maybe that would be helpful and valuable to them and a lot of times with the writing that I do, it's just that. I think that people see, people kind of need reinforcing on ideas that they already have.

My writing's not original, my writing's not anything new but a lot of times it reinforces ideas that people have that maybe not a lot of other people are writing about in the same kind of industry or sphere. So I feel like I'm just giving voice to things that people already feel or already think but just aren't — they're just not seeing that and maybe feeling like they're alone in that thought but they really aren't because everybody has that thought but just not everybody is necessarily talking about it or writing about it.

So I kind of felt like that was what I needed to do, and I always feel like I try a lot of stuff and sometimes I try to do things the way other people do it and then it blows up in my face and then I want to quit everything. But then if I do things the way that I want to do them, if I'm going to launch a course, it's going to be launched like Paul Jarvis style. I know if I do it that way, I can still learn from other people and read the articles or books or that sort of thing on how to do things and learn how to do things.

But then I need to take that, internalize it, put it through my brand and voice lens and then what comes out the other side is, "Okay, this is the way that Paul would do this thing," and then I feel like that's what works the best, that's what makes people want to keep coming back, I've been Creative Class for over a year and I'm still working on it all the time pretty much daily.

I'm still re-launching it all the time. I still actually really love it, I love the material, I love the students and I love coming up with new and exciting ways to kind of get it out there to new audiences. That's hard, like a lot of times, even when I was a musician, it's like as soon as the album was finished and mastered and cut, I hated the music right after and that's kind of like every musician is like that.

I need to kind of get past that, I need to launch something and then keep at launching that thing. It's a shame because so many people spend all of this time making something and then they'll send out like a tweet or a Facebook thing and I'm not on Facebook and I don't even know what the word is. Like a Facebook thingy or like a newsletter and that's it.

They spent all this time making something and it's like, "Well you just did like five minutes of work to promote it and then you get down on yourself that it didn't do as well as you hoped it

would. But you only spent like 10 minutes.” So I feel like I always need to put as much or more time into connecting the work that I do with people as I do making the work itself.

[0:37:18.4] JG: Do you think that every creative should have a business? Should run a business? What are your thoughts on this?

[0:37:26.5] PJ: I think every creative needs to do personal projects and that’s 100% I believe this. Because I don’t think, as creative, anybody’s going to push you as hard as you’re going to push yourself. So I think having a side project, even if it’s not something you’re going to necessarily monetize or anything like that. But I think freelancers, creatives, all that, everybody needs to have a side project where you’re the boss and you’re the one calling the shots because you’re going to push yourself to do new and interesting things.

Especially with freelancing, people hire you for your portfolio, your portfolio isn’t a body of your past work, it’s what you’re going to get hired to do more of. A lot of times people, even with myself, I get into doing the same kind of work for the same kind of people. Unless I have side projects or personal projects as well, I’m not going to learn. The capacity to grow as somebody as like new skills or that sort of thing or new understanding isn’t there because I’m just going to be doing more and more of the same type of work.

So I think that those need to be their weather, it’s like starting a business or being an entrepreneur, I think that’s kind of a good idea to try those things and I feel like I learned so much about the way my client’s businesses worked when I started running businesses similar to theirs because my work in the past was with web design clients who had online businesses where they were the brand and the company.

I felt like when I kind of moved into that space too, I was all of a sudden like 90% more valuable a web designer because I was in the same place, I struggled with the same things, I understood the same things. So I felt like that was so beneficial and then obviously I could charge more for that, which is an added bonus.

[0:39:13.4] JG: Have you found yourself falling into any traps with doing the course and kind of getting into the information product world? ‘Cause I found that I was like, “Oh, I’ll just take things

that I know and I put them on a course and I'll make money off of it and that's it, it will be easy, it will just print and it will be a machine that prints money." But the bigger it gets and you hinted at this a little bit, you have to work on it and develop it.

And at least for me, I look at it as the project that's never complete because students are giving you feedback and you've gotten a lot of people to go through the Creative Class and it's interesting right? It's like, "This is the thing that I wanted it to be," but then it's almost like software where people say, you should do this, what about this? I got stuck here and don't know about this and you have that feature creep. A lot of times I go, "Oh, no that's true, I need to explain that better," or whatever. Any of that, anything that you didn't expect or that has been hard that you weren't anticipating?

[0:40:14.2] PJ: Yeah, definitely because the Creative Class is an info product and it's just me, I don't have a team of people, there's not a bunch of people sitting in the other room typing or anything like that.

[0:40:23.5] JG: They're like dictating what you're saying.

[0:40:26.2] PJ: Exactly.

[0:40:26.8] JG: Gary Vanerchuk style and this is kind of get discriminated 18 places.

[0:40:30.4] PJ: There's lots of finger pointing as well. Yeah, with that, like I spent a lot of time with Creative Class especially, figuring out how to make sure that people didn't need to get in touch with me for any reason because the course was so clear. Or the welcome, the onboarding sequence was so clear and I just spent so much time working on that and so much team getting, "Okay, I let five people in on the course and see what happens and then another five."

I kind of dripped out launching it because I wanted to... it would be very hard for me to deal with 1,700 people in the class now. It would be hard to deal with 1,700 support emails. I don't have the capacity to do that and the course would fail if I had to do that. So a lot of it was figuring out

how to make the course as easy and flowing as possible so that people didn't have to ask me anything because they just got it, because it was so clear.

That doesn't stop. I don't want to stop making the course better because there's always the capacity for it to be better, and I do add new lessons sometimes. I do add new features a little bit but I really think about them, I really weigh it against, "Okay, is this something one person asked for or is it something 200 people asked for?" Yeah, I definitely spend time on that and it is difficult sometimes, it's also difficult sometimes. It's just like with writing books and I have probably on one of my books, I didn't have like 187 five star reviews and three one star reviews, the only ones I see are the one star reviews.

It's just like with the course, I have maybe done five, six, seven refunds out of 1,700, but I remember all of those people that asked for a refund. So that is difficult sometimes because one person can kind of take you down a peg and they shouldn't and I know logically in my brain, I know that they don't matter and trolls and critics don't matter and people that aren't my rat people aren't going to support my work anyways. But then there's still that feeling emotional part of my brain, it's like, "Awe." Luckily that doesn't happen too often, but it does happen.

[0:42:52.3] JG: Do you find that separating the business and the art of what you do is important or are they sort of melded together? How does that work for you? Are those different hats that you wear the same hat? I think that there are ideals that people like to talk about and I've heard all of them. Like, "Your business is your art or if you create stuff, you should have no problem selling it," and yet, there are people who really struggle with that and I've always found it to be kind of messy and I'm just wondering where you fit on that spectrum? Are these things that you separate or do they live together, how does that work?

[0:43:34.5] PJ: Yeah, I wish I could separate them but all of my work is some kind of reflection of me and sometimes it's good and accurate reflection of me, sometimes it is not. I can think of a couple of courses or a couple of things that I've launched that didn't do well. A few things, like the last book that I wrote before I kind of put a hold on writing books, I kind of tanked the launch of it because it didn't feel like right at the last second I felt like, "Okay, this book sucks, I can't do it." I did like the worst launch ever and I didn't know how to launch things. "I'm just going to take this."

I definitely still struggle with that because I felt like, “Okay maybe this isn’t the best reflection of me and I need that and my reputation is like all I actually have and all anybody really has,” because you can always make more money, it’s hard to build back. It’s easier to build back a bank account than it is to build back a reputation. I have done things like that and I have — it’s a constant struggle and sometimes I win and sometimes I lose and then I get back up and try again and hope I don’t get knocked down as many times as I’ve got — I would get up at least one more time that I’ve been knocked down.

[0:44:46.1] JG: One of the things we talk about on this show and you mentioned it earlier is this concept called “the portfolio life” and it’s this idea that you are not just one thing. You mentioned brand earlier and you said you’re confident in yourself but the tone of voice that you use when you said “brand”, didn’t sound to me to me like you love the idea that you’re a brand and maybe I was just reading into that a little bit.

You seem to me to be a very authentic person, you are what you are and trust is way more important than if you can get a little bit more trust and make a little bit less money, I know where you’re going to land on that spectrum. But you’re a guy who is intentionally building into his brand, “Hey, I’m vegan and I like rats and I am a designer and I teach things and I’m a creative who also does business in marketing.”

I see you embodying not just one skill but a bunch of different skills, portfolio which I love. Is that like a necessity do you think to survive as a creative? Is it something really important to you? Like should we just have one thing that we focus on? Obviously if we’re focusing on too many things, we’re not going to do excellent work but I found that for me there’s tension because I’m interested in lots of different things.

But like you, I can get distracted doing a bunch of interviews and going, “Oh yeah, I’m not creating anything. People want to talk to me and I’m not actually doing anything.” And the answer to the question, “How do you spend your day as well?” I spend my day on interviews like this apparently. Part is the job description and part of it I really like but what does that look like for you and is that just something that you have to do, do you like doing it? What is that portfolio like?

[0:46:31.7] PJ: Yeah, I definitely struggle with that as well. I do so many things, I have a bunch of courses, a couple of podcast, I do some client work, I made a couple of WordPress themes lately like I do a lot of different things and I feel like for me personally, business aside, that's how I like to function. I need to constantly be seeing something that I don't know how to do and then figuring it out. For a business, that's not always the best thing, It's hard to sell different things to your audience all the time.

But I also feel that a lot of times people create these avatars for their audience or for their customers that are really one dimensional, and I find that I know I'm not one dimensional and I know my audience isn't. So if they get — if they see that I've written a book on online marketing and then I have a course for freelancers, then I have a course for MailChimp. They all do so many different things too. So I don't feel like I could probably make more money just doing one thing, just focusing on one specific niche but like I have more fun doing a bunch of different things.

I'm the one who has to do the work, so I kind of want to have fun doing that. I don't know how to describe what I do. If people are like my trainer was like, "What do you do?" "I type words into the internet and money comes out." I don't know what I do, I tell most people that I'm a writer because most of what I do involved words. I don't really know how to — or a maker, I don't really know how to adequately describe what people like you and I do other than that.

[0:48:18.0] JG: Yeah, I don't. I don't explain. I just make something up. When people say "maker" I think I C3PO, "Thank the maker." I always thought it was weird that C3PO was religious. But then when you realize who h is maker is, he's basically thanking Darth Vader.

[0:48:33.7] PJ: Yeah, exactly.

[0:48:34.4] JG: So that's interesting.

[0:48:36.1] PJ: We just got really nerdy there.

[0:48:37.7] JG: We did and I didn't even for a second question whether or not you're going to fall on my logic there because I know. Okay, last question. What are you working on now?

[0:48:48.3] PJ: Right now? Well I'm sitting in my recording studio blanket fort, which I told you about just before we started recording and I'm doing voice overs for training for — so I'm making a course called Chimp Essentials, chimpessentials.com .

[0:49:02.7] JG: Monkey training?

[0:49:04.5] PJ: That would be cooler.

[0:49:05.7] JG: Rats, monkey's, I figure you live in a zoo or something.

[0:49:09.1] PJ: Yeah, rainforest. So it's training for how to use the advanced features of MailChimp because I'm a MailChimp and MailChimp basically drives the revenue of my business. Am I going to show people how to do all the nerdy bits without necessarily being there. I figured that was a good scan on some of the people ask me about all the time.

That's what I'm working on right now. It's really hot in my blanket fort because it's completely covered and so as I'm talking, there's a lot of hot air being released, it's getting — I'm in shorts and a t shirt right now and I need like a blanket fort vent or a fan or something.

[0:49:46.4] JG: This apparently is regular practice for you, I don't make blanket forts too often anymore but last night my son was like, "Can we make a fort?" He's almost four now and I was like sure, he has a new sleeping bag for Christmas, "What is this for?" My wife was like, "Well it's for camping out."

I was like, "Well yeah, let's go camp out in the yard," and my wife was like, "Well you got to do it inside first," so we slept in his play room. I spent like an hour building this fort and then we got in the bed and we had this little flashlight and we had a bunch of star wars guys and I was like, "Okay, this is still awesome."

[0:50:27.4] PJ: Yup.

[0:50:29.0] JG: I am envious. I am in an office and I might just put a blanket around my desk or something because it's still awesome. I thought, "Ah, it will be fine," but something about just putting a blanket over some chairs and just lying underneath it, you go, "Oh yeah, this is pretty cool." So that's your life.

[0:50:47.5] PJ: Exactly. I also living concept house, which is so echo-y and it's great for living and awful for audio recording.

[0:50:54.9] JG: What does that mean? Just big empty rooms?

[0:50:57.0] PJ: Yeah, exactly, concrete floors. It's the echo-yist of all echo-y.

[0:51:04.9] JG: Good, cool. Yeah, I think the best thing to do for that is to get in a closet or something.

[0:51:09.9] PJ: Yeah, exactly and that's what I used to do is just record. That's where the audio book that I recorded that was sitting on the floor in my closet. Very glamorous.

[0:51:21.1] JG: I used to be in a band too, and this is the opposite of a blanket fort, but our favorite place to just go jam would be in a bathroom because the acoustics were amazing in terms of just like your voice sounded great reverberating against the tile and stuff. So there's that, maybe you could play music. Do you still play music?

[0:51:45.0] PJ: A little, not very much though, I can't remember — I think the last show that we played was probably about two years ago, last album was two and a half years ago.

[0:51:52.0] JG: That's not bad. Cool, well, that was just random detour and that was a great place to wrap up, talking about inane things. Paul, thanks so much for your time, love what you're doing, highly recommend folks go check out pjrvs.com, am I pronouncing it correctly? How do you pronounce it?

[0:52:07.8] PJ: If you Google Paul Jarvis, I'm that first couple of pages and you'll see the newsletter.

[0:52:14.1] JG: Pjrvs.com. Love the newsletter, highly recommend the Creative Class, what is that? Creativeclass.io or something?

[0:52:24.1] PJ: That is correct, yes.

[0:52:25.4] JG: Mad props for remembering a .io suffix URL.

[0:52:28.3] PJ: I know. You're a pro.

[0:52:33.8] JG: You're a wonderful — I love that page is what it is. I go back to it all the time and I use my little font finder to say, "What are these little type kit fonts that he's using?" Well, I'm a fan, I hope other people become one as well, thanks again for your time Paul.

[0:52:47.5] PJ: Yeah, thanks Jeff.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:52:48.9] AT: Paul and Jeff covered a lot of territory in their conversation. So what are you going to implement from what they showed today? Let us know by leaving a comment on this episode at Goinswriter.com or you can send Jeff a message on Twitter @jeffgoins. If this episode was helpful to you, would you take a minute and send it to three other creative like you. Thanks.

I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thank you for spending some time with us today. Now, go build your portfolio.

[END]