

PLEASE NOTE: This is a machine transcription. Some punctuation and spelling weirdness are to be expected.

The year was 2008. And I was just discovering that starting a business online was a thing. I didn't have a lot of money to invest. Well. Now, let me rephrase that I didn't have any money to invest. It was 2008. And I worked in an automotive industry, things were not looking good. So I did what all resourceful would be business owners do in that situation. I bootstrapped my startup with a combination of low cost and free tools, and some of those I'm still using today. On this episode of The Tiny Course Empire Podcast, I'm going to tell you about seven freemium tools that I use to run my business every single day. I'll tell you what they do, and why I chose them. And whether or not I think it's worth upgrading to the paid version to unlock even more features.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO START, GROW, AND SCALE YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS

50+ COURSES

500+ MEMBERS

LEARN MORE

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business. Even if you don't have a big team or a six-figure ads budget, we'll help you design smart systems, take consistent

action and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

Hey, guys, it's Cindy Bidar with the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, thank you for spending part of your day with me. If you're new here, please be sure to click that subscribe button so you don't miss any future episodes. Next week, we're going to talk about affiliate marketing and why I think it makes such a fantastic additional stream of income. Regardless of your business model, you're not going to want to miss that episode. But that is next week.

Today is all about those freemium tools that I use and love, and that you might want to check out for yourself. You will find show notes and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/44. Now let's dive in.

I want to start by getting clear on what a freemium tool even is, because maybe you haven't heard that term before, although you've probably used some of them freemium, and that's free-mium. So F-R-E-E-M-I-U-M is how that spelled. Freemium refers to a pricing model for applications or software, where there is both a free version and a paid version. Now, I'm not talking about free trials where you get access for 30 days or whatever. These are actual free forever tools that also have a paid version. So typically, the paid version has some extra perks, and we're going to talk about those, but the free version is fully functional. And in a lot of cases, you can use it literally forever without ever paying for it, which is pretty cool. Especially when you're bootstrapping your business and every penny matters.

The first freemium tool is one that I really I can't imagine living without, and that is the Google Suite of applications that I use every single day, I could probably do an entire episode just about Google and how I use all of their tools in my business. And just for the record, I want to make it clear that I'm using these through my free Gmail account. I'm not talking about Google's paid workspace or their Google Suite, or G Suite or whatever they're calling that today. I'm just using the free apps that come with my Gmail account. So let's talk about those a minute.

I'm using email. And I use email maybe differently than you use email. I use Gmail as my email client. So I don't use Outlook, or the email app on my phone or MacMail or anything like that to collect my email, I actually just log into the Gmail interface. And I actually have Gmail collecting my other emails and bringing it all into that Gmail inbox. So all of my email addresses and I have several all of my email

addresses no matter which one you email me at all land in my Gmail email address. So that's what I mean when I say I use it as my email client. It is the collection box for every single email that I receive, whether that's coming to my Gmail address, whether it's coming to my Cindy@CindyBidar address, or it's coming to my Cindy@DigitalBusinessManagers address or I have several others that I use for various things as well. They all land in my Gmail address, which makes it really easy for me to go through my email because everything is in one place. I don't have to log into different accounts in different places. The reason I want everything in one place as well, actually for my email is because I make use of Gmail's automations and filters and templates and different things. So let's talk about some of those that I'm using.

I mentioned automation, I use a couple of things in Gmail that really make it easy for me to keep my inbox down to a dull roar. As a business owner, you probably receive dozens or maybe even hundreds of emails every single day, I counted one time, I think I receive about 124 emails a day. Now, I make use of Gmail automation to handle that so I don't see a lot of those emails. So for example, I use filters, I have those set up to hide emails that I don't need to see. So examples of those emails might be PayPal payment notifications, every time somebody purchases, something from me PayPal sends me a notification. I need those emails, I may need to go back and refer to them in the future. So I don't want to turn them off. But I don't necessarily need them in my inbox so I have to deal with them all the time. So what I've done in Gmail is I've set up filters to take those emails, when they come in and automatically move them out of my inbox, they're still in my Gmail account, I can still search for them. And we'll talk more about that in a minute. But I don't necessarily see them, I don't have to deal with them.

I also use labels in my Gmail account, so that I can file things away in a folder like structure, so that I can find what I'm looking for. So examples of that might be, I have an accountability partner that I email with every morning and I move those emails into an accountability label. So I can refer back to it tomorrow, to see what I told her I was going to do and whether or not I actually did it. Then I combine filters and labels in my Gmail inbox to keep my inbox empty. So for example, those PayPal notifications that come in, get filed under a label called Pay Pal notifications. If I ever need to find them, I can click on that label in Gmail, and they're all right there. But they're not cluttering up my inbox. I use filters and labels in that way with all of my sale notifications, all of the notifications that come in from people for whom I am an affiliate. So when they send me an email saying they have something

coming up for sale that's automatically filtered into a folder. I use it for coaching clients, all of their emails are automatically filtered into folders. I use it for comments on my blog that I want to make sure I respond to those are filtered into a folder so that I make sure that I see them.

So this kind of automation in Gmail is just really powerful. For me, it really keeps me focused, when I'm in my email, I don't have to hunt through 124 emails that have come in throughout the day to find what I'm looking for. Because everything is exactly where it's supposed to be. And the emails that I don't need to see, I don't see, but they're still there if I need to find them.

And speaking of finding what you're looking for, the Gmail search function is absolutely fantastic, really cannot be beat. In fact, I know quite a few Gmail users who don't even bother with labels at all. And instead, they really just rely on that search function to find what they need.

Another function I use inside Gmail is templates, you have to turn this on in your settings. But once you do that, it allows you to create templates that you can then reuse for things that you tend to retype all of the time. So for example, if you are answering customer support issues from your email, you might be responding the same way to a similar question all of the time. How do I log into my account? How do I cancel my membership? How do I schedule a call with you, these might all be things that you type out repeatedly week after week, you could save those as templates in your Gmail account, and then just click a button. And there's the email and all you have to do is fill in a couple of details and hit send it saves a ton of time. So I make really good use of those templates in my Gmail account.

Another thing I do is I snooze emails. This is a relatively recent addition to Gmail and I was super excited to see this show up because it allows me to resurface an email at a later date when I need it or when I might need it. So an example of that is maybe someone sends me an email and says, Hey, we have this cool thing on sale and it's on sale through the end of the month and I want to think about it for a while. I can snooze that email for a few days and it will pop back into my inbox and then I can consider it again. And I don't have to worry about remembering it. I don't have to worry about searching for the email, I don't have to make a note in my calendar, I don't have to do any of that. I can just rely on Gmail to show me that email again in a few days when I told it to.

I also might use snoozing to save an article that I want to read but I don't have time to read it right now. And I don't want it cluttering up my inbox, where I'm going to be tempted to click on it, or where I am going to click on it all the time to see what it is, because that just wastes time. So instead, I hit the snooze button, I say, I know I'm going to have time to go through these articles maybe on the weekend. So I will snooze it until Saturday. And then they pop back up into my inbox when I have time.

I also use the snooze function to resurface emails for things that I need to do in a particular time period. An example of that is I've been getting emails from Google lately about upgrading to Google Analytics version four. I know it's something that I need to do. It also wasn't something that I needed to do right away. But I wanted to save those emails, I needed to have them handy. So I just snoozed them for a week, until I knew I would have time to deal with it. So that makes it really easy to keep my inbox clean. Like I said, I'm a proponent of Inbox Zero, I like to have as few emails in my inbox as possible, and snoozing is one thing that makes that possible.

Send Later is another thing that I use in email a lot. And what that allows me to do is to write an email today and schedule it to send out tomorrow or next week or whenever this is really useful. For example, if you have a client who likes to email you on the weekend, maybe you want to respond to that email right away, maybe you want to get it out of your inbox and off your mind. But you don't want them to think that you're working or available on the weekend. So you can write out your response and then schedule it to go out on Monday morning, just as if you had sent it on Monday morning. So that send later feature is really useful to me as well. Six Figure Systems Members, there is a training in your membership on how I have this all set up. If you go into the study vault and look for organizational mastery for online entrepreneurs, you will find that there. But anybody, whether you're a Six Figure Systems Member or not, if you are using Gmail, I would encourage you to check out some of these features because they really will save you time.

And that is not the only Google asset. That's not the only Google app that I use on a regular basis. I also use Google Docs all of the time. I use Google Docs for anything that I want to be able to share with other people. So for example, I write all of my affiliate swipe files in Google Docs. If you are an affiliate of mine, and I have sent you an email saying this is on sale, or I'm launching this new product, you will notice that when I link to swipe files, they are all in Google Docs. And that's because they're just so easy to share. Anybody with the link can read that document, they

can't edit it, but they can read it. So it's super easy to give people affiliate swipe files or other documentation that you need them to have.

I also use Google Docs for my standard operating procedures for the same way because I can share them with team members, I can either share just the read only version so they can read and do the tasks or I can share the editable version. So they can read them and do them and update them as needed. So those are two things that I use Google Docs for.

Along with Google Docs, I also use Google Sheets. And I use these for tracking things like my finances, business finances, my personal finances, other KPIs or key performance indicators for my business, I track in Google Sheets as well. And then I can share those with my husband, so he has access to them too.

And finally, I use Google Calendar. I use this for all of my appointments and time blocking. And I talked about that in Episode 37. If you want to see a screenshot of how I use time blocking in my Google Calendar, I'll link to that in the show notes. So those elements, those apps within my Google account are critical for me in my business. And again, I'm using just the free Gmail account for this. I'm not using their paid G Suite or Google workspace, I can't remember what they're calling it now. But I'm not paying for it. I'm just using the free version that I have with my Gmail account.

The next freemium tool that I use, I actually do pay for and I can't imagine not paying for this. I resisted it for a long time. And when I finally took the plunge and started paying for it, I thought, oh my goodness, I should have been doing this all along. And that's Canva. I use Canva every single day, I use it for document design, all of the worksheets and all of the checklists. And all of the downloadable checklists you see with this podcast are all created in Canva. I use Canva to create all of the slide decks for my courses, I use Canva for all of my website graphics, I use Canva for product mockups.

Canva even has a really simple video editor. I didn't know this until just a couple of weeks ago, that you can actually upload a video and do some simple edits right within your Canva account. I will link to a YouTube video that I found the or that someone shared with me actually, that shows how to do this. It's fascinating. If you are looking for an easy to use basic editor for your video, I want to encourage you to check that out. And I think it works in the Canva free account as well. Now, I said

that I pay for Canva. I do. And I believe it's \$120 a year and I find it to be just well worth the price. It gives me access to, according to their website, over 100 million stock photos. And you can just drag and drop them into your design.

Now there's a lot of places that you can get stock photos, there's a lot of paid resources and a lot of free resources. So before I paid for Canva, I would have to go and download images from Deposit Photo or I would spend a couple of hours on free photo sites looking for good images. And then I would upload them to Canva to use them in my documents or my slides. With a paid account, though with paid Canva account, all I have to do is click on the photos icon and I can search for what I want. And then just drag it into my design, it's super easy, and it's much faster than the other methods.

Now, even without a paid account, you can still use their photo library. But the selection is just much more limited. And all of their free images are kind of mixed in with the paid ones. So you have to do a bit of hunting to find things that you can use. With a paid plan, everything is included. So I find it just so much easier.

Another thing I really like about the paid plan is that I can add custom branding. So I have added all of my brand colors, and my brand fonts and my logos to Canva. And then they're just right there in my branding documents, right there in the sidebar of Canva with all of the photos and all of the text and all of the other elements. And I can just click on them and use them. And it's really easy, I never have to look up the hex code for the right shade of pink or upload my logo. Again, it's all right there in Canva. And it's so convenient to use.

You can also create templates in Canva. And I use that feature a lot. I actually purchased some templates from Creative Market that I then uploaded to Canva. Or they were actually already in Canva. I just added them to my account. And then when I am creating documents, like we talked about when I'm creating those checklists, when I'm creating those worksheets, or when I'm creating those slides, I can just click in the sidebar on the template and actually insert the page layout or the slide layout that I want to use. It's right there in my templates, and it's just so convenient. And so simple to use. It just, I don't know what I would do without a paid Canva account. I can't say enough good things about it.

Another freemium tool I use a lot is called AirTable. AirTable, if you have never heard of it it looks a lot like a spreadsheet. But it's actually a database. And I use AirTable to plan and track all of my email marketing campaigns.

So in my AirTable database, for example, I have a sheet for products that I promote. I have a sheet for business owners who created those products. I have another sheet for email campaigns. And I have a sheet for individual emails, each of those sheets is connected to one another. So at any time, I can look at AirTable, and I can see how well an individual email did how much money did I make how many people opened, how many people clicked, I can look at how much I earned from an entire email campaign. Maybe there were four or five emails that I all sent or that I sent all about the same subject and I can look and see how they performed as a group. Or I can look at the product table and I can see how much did I sell a specific product or even I can look at the table that has the business owners information. And I can see how much I've earned all year by promoting Karen Thackston's courses or Coach Glue's done for you products. So AirTable just makes it really easy. Easy for me to see all of that useful data in one place.

And then I can use that to make better business decisions. I love that AirTable gives you different views for your data as well. I mentioned that it looks like a spreadsheet. But you can also change the view to a Kanban board, which is more similar to Trello, or to a calendar, which is what I use to plan my emails. So when I'm in AirTable, I'm looking at a calendar view. And I can drag my emails around. I can say, well, I don't want to promote this on this day, I'm going to move that to another day and just drag it and all of the information about that email automatically updates. Now I use the free version of AirTable, upgrading would give me some perks such as more space for attachments, I don't currently use AirTable in a way that requires me to upload attachments. So that's not a reason for me to upgrade right now. An upgrade would also give me more space in each database. The free account is limited to 1200 records, which is plenty for my email marketing database right now. So I'm not worried about that either.

The paid version also gives you some additional views. So I mentioned that you can see a Kanban board in your AirTable, or you can change it to look like a calendar if you want. You can also if you upgrade to a paid version, see something called a Gantt chart, which I don't really understand, it has to do with Project management, not something I would ever use, obviously, if I don't understand it.

You can also look at timelines, I've not found a use case for any of that. So it's just not been something I need to think about to upgrade to a higher version of AirTable. But if you choose to do that plan, start at, I believe, \$10 per month per user.

The next tool that I use is going to be one that is familiar to a lot of you I know and I mentioned it a minute ago. So this is probably a good place to talk about it. And it's Trello. Now, I don't use Trello as much as I used to, but it is still an important part of my everyday workflow. Right now I am using Trello for things like outlining courses, I use it to track pieces of large projects that I want to make sure that I keep track of and have links for I use it as a calendar for my upcoming promotions and product releases. It's easier to kind of see all of that stuff in one place, then try to get into AirTable and dissect that and see what's going on. So Trello just gives me a really nice overview.

Where Trello really shines though, is as a Kanban board. Now, if you're not familiar with that term, a Kanban board is a project management tool that helps you visualize a workflow and keep track of where in the process any given task might be. It's made up of columns, and each column is representing a specific activity. Then you have project placeholders or in the case of Trello, these are called cards. So you have these cards that you move from column to column as you complete each step of the process or each activity.

So for example, you might have a Trello board for publishing your blog posts. And that board might have columns for ideas and research and writing and editing and formatting and published. So all of the steps in the process of getting a blog post published are represented by those columns, then every blog post will start out as a card in the idea column. So you get an idea for a blog post you want to write, you create a card, you store it in the idea column, and then you come along and you say I need to write a blog post for next week, what am I going to write about, you review what you've got in the idea column, and you say you pick one. And you say, Okay, I'm going to work on this. And then you move that card to the next column, which is research and you start researching it. Then when you're ready to write, you move it to the writing column, and so on.

The beauty of this system, and especially with Trello, is that you can throw anything at one of these cards, you can attach your Word file to it that you're writing in, you can add links from your research, you can add graphics that you want to use in the final post. And that way, everything is right there where you need it. And you can

tell at a glance, what step in the process that project is. You can look at your Trello board for your blog posts, and see that this blog post you're working on is being formatted or it's already been published or you're still researching it and it's Tuesday and you want to schedule it for Thursday so you better get on it. So you can tell that just by looking at your Trello board at a glance. So if you have not tried Trello I want to highly encourage you to do that. I use the free version of Trello. Trello does have a upgrade options available. If you're working with a team that might be something that you want to do, but I have not found any reason to upgrade from the free version at this point.

The next tool that I use every day is a note taking app I have used for years a tool called Evernote and I use it for capturing ideas for organizing receipts for creating project plans for storing articles that I want to read or reference later. Basically, anything you want to throw at Evernote, it can handle it is an everything bucket with a really powerful search function. So if you're prone to losing things, you might want to check it out. As of Version 10, which is relatively recent for Evernote, it also includes tasks and reminders. So if you need a simple task management system, Evernote might be a good option as well.

I use the paid Evernote plan Evernote has two paid plans one that is \$70 a year and one that is \$100 per year, they offer more storage space, they offer syncing across multiple devices. With the free plan, you can only sync with two devices. So you can have Evernote on your computer and Evernote on your phone for example. But you couldn't have it on a second computer or you couldn't have it on your iPad unless you upgrade to the paid version. The paid versions also include better search capabilities and offline access for your notebooks.

Now I will say in full disclosure, I am testing out a different system for my note taking app as we speak, I am using a free tool called Obsidian. Actually Obsidian is also a freemium tools they do have a paid tier, too. I'm testing out the free version of Obsidian and I'm really liking it. So I may be saying goodbye to Evernote here quite soon. Obsidian is a little bit nerdier. If you like to play with nerdy tools, you might want to look up Obsidian, they are at [Obsidian.com](https://obsidian.com).

The next tool that I use every single day is Toggle. And I talked about this back in Episode 21, which is all about time tracking and why I think it's good for your business. I use Toggle to track my time. And I like it because it integrates with my Google calendar. So I can look at my Toggle dashboard and see that right now I'm

supposed to be recording this podcast. And then I just click the little timer icon next to my calendar entry and it starts my clock, I don't have to tell it what I'm doing because it reads that information from my calendar. Then at the end of the day or the end of the week, or whenever I can look at my Toggle reports. And I can see if I've been spending my time wisely or not. I use the free version of Toggle. The upgrade gives you better reporting, project time estimates, team time tracking and some additional integrations. For my purposes and probably for yours. a paid account is just not necessary with Toggle.

Then my seventh tool that I cannot run my business without is Dropbox, I have used Dropbox for years and years and years. And I've had a paid plan for years. I use it basically as a replacement for my Documents folder on my computer, which I don't use it all. Dropbox lets me access anything I need from any device because it syncs with all of my computers. And I can access my files from a browser, too. I use Dropbox to share files with my team. So this podcast episode, for example, will go into a Dropbox folder that I will then send to Igor for editing, and then on to Gina for transcribing and finally to the husband for scheduling. So Dropbox makes that really easy to do.

I also use it on occasion to share a file with a customer or a JV partner. So for example, if they need a large file that I can easily send by email, maybe it's a video or a big zip file or something, I'll just drop it in Dropbox and then send them the link to that file. And they can download it, whether they have a Dropbox account or not. If you're a freelancer or a coach and you work with clients, Dropbox is so useful, you can set up a shared folder. And you can both be adding and editing things inside that folder, which makes it really easy to send files back and forth or share documents or whatever it is you need to do in your business or with your coaching client. Super useful, highly recommend Dropbox. And the price really can't be beat. We're on an annual plan with Dropbox and we pay \$10 a month for two terabytes of storage space.

Now, I should say you could also do something similar just with Google Drive, right? We talked about Google Docs and Google Sheets, but you can use Google Drive in much the same way that you can use Dropbox and a lot of that space is available for you for free if you just have a Gmail account

So those are my top seven freemium tools that I use to run my business every single day. I use Google, I use Canva. Again, Canva is probably my favorite. I can't

imagine running a business without it. AirTable makes tracking data so easy. Trello makes everything easier. I use it primarily, like I said, to outline courses, because I just love that I can drag those cards around and organize things in a way that makes sense to me. I use a note taking app, I highly recommend Evernote, if you do not have one. I use a time tracking app. Toggle is my timer of choice. And I want to encourage you if you have not tracked your time before to do that for at least a week, you might be surprised where your time goes. And finally, Dropbox lets me share anything with anyone who has an internet connection. Just so handy to have, I can't recommend it enough.

So what about you? I would love for you to head on over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/44, where you're going to find the show notes and all the resources we mentioned. And while you're there, leave me a comment. Tell me what freemium tools you're using to run your business, I would love to check them out. And finally, if you are enjoying the show, would you do me a favor and leave me a rating and review over at Apple Podcasts or wherever you're listening that helps others to find us. And if you have a friend or a colleague who can use this episode today, go ahead and send them the direct link. It's TinyCourseEmpire.com/44. I'd be so grateful if you did. Have a terrific day everyone and I will talk to you all again next week.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

**I'll teach you the simple
systems that lead to
BIG RESULTS
even if you're brand new
to online business.**

START TODAY

If you like what you hear on the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, you're going to love all of the courses and workshops and support you'll find inside Six-Figure Systems, that's my monthly program where we dig into online marketing for regular people like you and me. We don't do big launches, we don't have the big headaches and we don't have the big expenses that come with them. Instead we focus on creating repeatable, sustainable systems that continue to grow over time, and that don't suck up all of our energy or require a 10-person team to manage. You can come see what we're all about at SixFigureSystems.com, and I'll see you on the inside.