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I had NO money when I first got started online. I was earning about \$37,000 a year as a purchasing manager in a factory. Even with the husband's job, between our house payment, our car payment, and credit card bills, we were barely scraping by.

And actually, that was the whole purpose of starting an online business, to create some much needed cash flow. We didn't have a bunch of money laying around to put into starting a business. I had to get scrappy and make it happen.

That's what bootstrapping is all about, and in this episode of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, I'll share my story, as well as some tips for how you can start your business even when money is already tight.

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Hey, it's Cindy, and thank you for sharing a few minutes of your day with me. You'll find the show notes, the transcript, and all of the resources mentioned on today's show at [TinyCourseEmpire.com/69](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/69).

While you're there, do me a favor and hit that subscribe button, and if you like what you hear, be sure to leave a rating and review in your podcast app of choice. That helps other small business owners like yourself find us.

Today we're talking about bootstrapping, so let's begin with a definition. According to Shopify, bootstrapping is the process of using only existing resources such as your personal savings, your personal computing equipment, your garage space, whatever, to start and grow a small company.

That's exactly what I did. My husband and I have a word for this, we call it grocery money. When we talk about spending money on something, we want to do something fun maybe, or you know, maybe we want to buy something for the house. If it is under a certain amount of money, we call it grocery money.

We want to spend \$50 to go out to dinner. That's grocery money. We want to, you know, maybe buy a new television set that's more expensive, that's not grocery money. So when I bootstrapped my business, I was spending that grocery money, it was small amounts of money over time that I could easily work into the budget.

I built my website with grocery money, for example. I started my email list with grocery money. I bought my first info product, which was an ebook about affiliate marketing with grocery money. That's how I bootstrapped my business.

But before I could do that, I needed to know how much I really needed to invest. You know, using grocery money, as we call it around here, can get you started, but you have to be realistic about how much money it's really going to take.

Is it a dinner out or is it a new computer? Those are two very different things.

You really need to only invest in two things for your business. You need a website and you need an email list provider. Everything else you can basically get for free, or you can just use the resources that you already have, like your laptop computer.

For your website, you'll need a hosting platform that's going to cost you, at a minimum around \$5 per month. Don't worry about getting the fastest and the best website provider just yet when you're just getting started. Cheap is good. Go for the cheap.

Where you do want to invest though is in your email platform.

Yes, there are really low cost options out there. I mean, you can even run your entire email list from inside a WordPress website basically for free. But quality and deliverability matter when it comes to email. So I recommend you invest in a top performing platform. You will be really glad you. I use and recommend both Active Campaign and Convert Kit, and you can get started on both of those for a very low monthly investment.

As your list grows, you can easily upgrade to accommodate more subscribers. Of course, you also need a way to get paid, but if you have a PayPal account, then you've got this covered. You don't need to invest in a shopping cart or a membership or a course platform just yet. Those can all wait until you're ready to use them..

That's the beauty of an online business. It's probably the lowest cost startup there is, and you can really funnel just a little bit of cash from your family budget, from your grocery money to get started.

But bootstrapping is about more than just investing personal money. It also means investing your personal time and your personal brain power.

You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves and get to work. You have to be willing to learn new things. If you're always saying, I'm just not techy, then bootstrapping an online business is going to be hard for you. There are a lot of things that you can do by yourself if you're willing to spend the time learning them, and if you don't give in to that frustration.

You can figure this out, I promise. You just have to take it one step at a time and not try to do all of the things at once.

I taught myself, for example, how to use WordPress by reading blog posts about it. This was before YouTube even existed, and by just digging in and doing it.

Today, there are millions of videos you can watch all about WordPress. So if you want to build a website, get to it. Sign up for a hosting account, download WordPress and start learning it. I promise it's not as hard as you think it is.

I also taught myself how to use complex systems like Infusionsoft, which is now called Keep. But back in the day, it was Infusionsoft and I taught myself that by just poking around inside and trying different things.

I taught myself how to use video editors, document designers, Photoshop, and a whole lot of other tools simply by using them. That is what bootstrapping is all about.

My dad called this Trait Sticktuitiveness. Psychologist, Angela Duckworth calls it grit. She wrote a whole book about it. But whatever you call it, you'll have an easier time starting an online business if you have it, because that is the very definition of bootstrapping as far as I'm concerned.

It is a willingness to get in, get your hands dirty, and get the job done, and not give into that frustration or that overwhelm just to commit to finishing your projects and getting them done.

Now, with all of that said, there may still be times when you really need to invest a bigger chunk of money, when you can't just power your way through. You may need to purchase a page builder for your sales pages. You may need to buy a premium website theme. You may need to invest in a shopping cart. You may need to invest in training resources.

You may want to invest in coaching.

Two ways that you can raise cash when you need it. The best way is freelancing. That is and always will be the fastest path to cash in the online world. I started my online career as a writer and honestly, I wasn't even a very good writer, but I did manage to land a few clients who sent me consistent work, and that is how I bootstrapped my business.

If you can string words together in an engaging way, writing might be a really good place for you to start. There's also copy editing and proofreading if you're a perfectionist at heart, and if you love good grammar.

Freelance designers are always in demand. You can design websites or graphics or documents. There's all kinds of work for freelance designers out there, and technical work is highly paid too.

That's where my freelancing career eventually took me, and I was earning well over six figures as a marketing and technology va when I finally decided to release all of my clients and work only for myself.

If you need to raise funds to start your own thing online, ask yourself what skills you have that someone else needs, then get to work finding those people and pitching your services to them.

You can use platforms like Fiverr or Upwork to find your people, or you can advertise on Facebook, maybe get into Facebook groups and talk about what you do. You can get into niche forums where your potential clients are hanging out, advertise there, talk about what you do offer to help people out.

That's how I found a lot of my early clients, was through forums where other online business owners were hanging out and I wasn't blatantly pitching people either. I've told people this before, this is my number one tip for freelancers out there looking for work, is just to go into forums, go into Facebook groups and be helpful. Answer questions, offer support.

You're not actually behind the scenes, DMing them saying, Hey, hire me, hire me, hire me. That's not how it works, but if you are helpful, people will find you and people will come to you and say, can you help me? How can I pay you?

Freelancing, like I said, is and always will be the fastest path to cash. If you need to bootstrap your business, I highly recommend you look at freelancing.

Another option is just to sell things you own. We all have things sitting around the house that we don't need, but that just hang around. You know, maybe you've got toys that your kids don't play with anymore, or clothes or jewelry that you don't wear, or furniture that you don't use or any number of other things that have value and that you don't need or want anymore.

List them on Facebook marketplace, put them on, offer up, put them on Craigslist, sell them on eBay. There's all kinds of ways to bring that money in that you need to purchase the page builders to purchase the website theme to purchase the shopping cart, and then you're not eating into your family budget to make your online business happen.

One of the most important things to invest in when you're just getting started is good training. You can learn a lot from free resources. I certainly did. I told you I learned how to use WordPress just by reading blog posts.

But sometimes what you really need is a handholding step-by-step process, and for that, you just cannot beat a course created by someone who has been there and done that, and who has the results to prove it. That's what I offer to my six Figure Systems program members, and I want [to invite you to join us](#) for a seven day trial for just \$7.

You'll have instant access to all of my courses, all of my toolkits, all of the workshops, and all of the q and a replays. And maybe more importantly, you'll have access to

me personally on our live calls plus in our private community. If you have questions, I have the answers for you. All you have to do is go to [TinyCourseEmpire.com/join](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/join) to get started today, and I will see you on the inside.

Now, I told you the story of how I bootstrapped my own business back in the day, but even though I'm thrilled with the success that we have, there are still some things I would've done really differently had I known better.

One of my early business mentors, Lynn Terry, of ClickNewz.com, told me at a conference once that she has a rule for everything she buys, and I think this is just such an amazing piece of advice.

She told me that she makes every purchase pay for itself before she buys the next thing. So whatever it is she's buying, whether it is a course or a tool or a page builder, or a shopping cart, or a forum software, anything it is that she's buying, she makes it pay for itself before she goes to buy the next thing.

I wish I'd known and taken that advice when I was just getting started. I told you that I bought an info product about affiliate marketing. This was back before courses were a thing, so it was an e-book and it was expensive for me at the time. I think I paid about \$50 for it, which if you think about it for a downloadable pdf, 50 bucks is kind of pricey, and it certainly was very pricey back in probably 2006 when I bought it.

The real problem though was I didn't put it to use until years later. The same thing is true for my email list platform. It was one of the first things that I invested in and I paid for that account month after month after month without even using it. I probably had less than a hundred people on my email list for years and every month, month after month, I paid AWeber, \$19, \$19, \$19 every single month for years, and I never emailed those people who were on my list.

So if I could go back in time and change one thing about those early days of my business, that would be it. I would have implemented the tools and the training I had before I moved on to the next thing. I want you to think about that if you are bootstrapping your business right now.

Do you really need that shiny new membership platform or that fancy new shopping cart, or do you just need to put what you already have to work for you? What do you already have in your toolkit that you are not implementing or that you are not using, that you could make use of that could make all the difference for you, that could help you bring in that revenue that you can then reinvest in your business to grow it even faster.

I'd love to hear from you about that. Click over to [TinyCourseEmpire.com/69](https://TinyCourseEmpire.com/69), and tell me if you had to bootstrap your business and how you did it. If you're just getting started, what were your key takeaways from this episode about being scrappy with your new business? Leave me a comment on the site.

I'll read and respond to every single one, and I'd really like to know what's happening in your business. While you're there, I have an online business roadmap you can download for free.

It lays out all of the steps you need to take to launch your new business, whether you're a course creator, a digital product seller, a freelancer, or a content marketer. And finally, if you enjoyed this episode, I'd love it if you could share it with a friend who can also use it. That's it for me. Have a terrific day, everyone, and I will talk to you all again next week.

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