

The Lead Incubator

Convert Cold Prospects into Clients Who Know, Like and Trust You

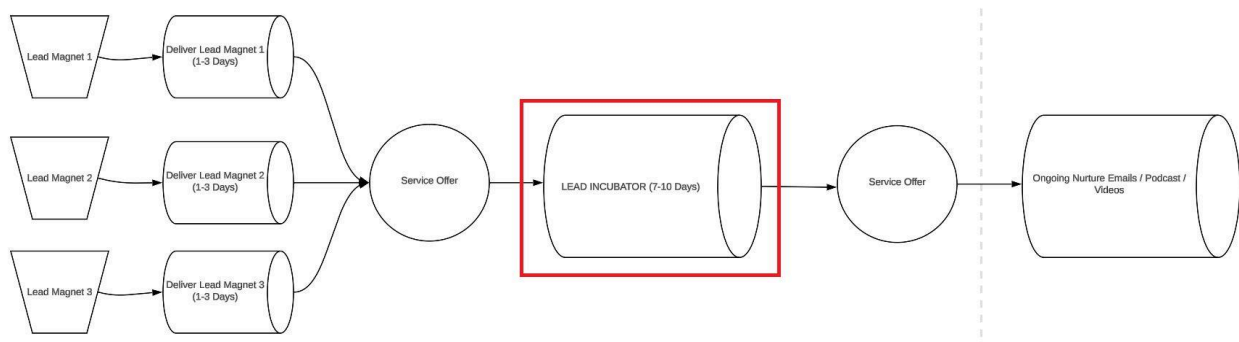
Introduction

The secret to LinkedIn Ads - or any social media marketing - is to follow up consistently with new leads by email.

The 'Lead Incubator' is an email marketing sequence that will help you convert new subscribers into qualified leads within 7 to 10 days.

This system is designed to be used alongside social media advertising. A new subscriber who responded to your social media ads usually won't be ready to book a sales call with you. The Lead Incubator sequence is an onboarding sequence designed to bridge this gap.

The Lead Incubator sits after people opt-in to your world, but before your ongoing marketing emails, podcasts or videos:



(Full-size [image](#))

Let me talk you through the diagram above because it is important to understand the full system.

On the far left of the diagram you may have multiple 'lead magnets'. These are usually forms on your website (or perhaps forms on social media) where people can opt-in to hear from you, usually in exchange for something of value.

After somebody opts in, you then want an email sequence that delivers the thing they opted in for. This should be a 1 to 3 day email sequence where you expand on the problem the lead magnet solves. At the end of this sequence you can introduce your service offer for people who are ready to buy.

After that, all contacts get added to your 'Lead Incubator' sequence, circled red. This series tells more of your story, showcases your genius, and allows people to get to know you.

The Lead Incubator acts as a filtering mechanism. Ideal clients who share your values will be drawn towards you. By the time they respond to your offer, they'll feel like they already know you. At the same time, problematic clients will be repelled by your stories. So it's an automatic sifting and sorting system!

At the end of the Lead Incubator, you can repeat your service offer. If people don't respond, you then add them to your ongoing marketing communications. This could be a regular email newsletter, podcast, or YouTube video series.

It is important to follow the steps sequentially. Don't add new subscribers to your ongoing broadcasts straight away. Deliver what they opted in for first. Then send the Lead Incubator, so they can get to know you. Then add them to your ongoing broadcasts.

The question at the heart of my work that underpins the Lead Incubator is this:

How can we build trust as quickly as possible, as authentically as possible, in a manner that convinces but doesn't broadcast neediness.

The 10 emails in the Lead Incubator span the three phases of a conventional story plot.

Emails 1 to 3 make up Act 1: **demonstrate your understanding of the problem.**

Emails 4 to 8 make up Act 2: **the story spine.**

Emails 9 & 10 make up Act 3: **the resolution.**

Every story has a beginning, middle and end, which is why the Lead Incubator is structured in this way. Five out of the ten emails sit in the middle, in the 'story spine'. This is where you showcase your growth as a service provider and pinpoint your true genius.

The Lead Incubator is formulaic, but not rigid. You may want less emails in the story spine, and more emails that demonstrate the problem - especially if the problem you solve is complex! The important thing is that you showcase the real you in a vulnerable, engaging way.

So for your reference as a table of contents:

[Act 1: Demonstrate Your Understanding of the Problem](#)

[**Email 1: Demonstrate the Problem**](#)

[**Email 2: Your Controlling Idea**](#)

[Email 3: The Wounding Event](#)

[Act 2: The Story Spine](#)

[**Email 4: The Inciting Incident**](#)

[**Email 5: The False Start**](#)

[**Email 6: The Key Insight**](#)

[Email 7: Grounding Principles](#)

[Email 8: Self-Awareness](#)

[Act 3: The Resolution](#)

[**Email 9: Demonstrate The Outcome**](#)

[**Email 10: Your Vision**](#)

[Bonus: Optimisation Checklist](#)

Note: you can start with either 7 or 10 emails...

I've bolded the 7 emails I believe are 'required' in the series. You may wish to start with the 7 emails in bold then add the others to add more depth.

For instance, the 'Wounding Event' explores the potential origins of your 'Controlling Idea'. 'Grounding Principles' and 'Self-Awareness' showcase more of the real you, rather than showing your journey (which is covered by emails 4 to 6).

Over the series, you'll show potential clients that you understand the problem at hand at least as well as they do. You'll demonstrate the key insight at the heart of your work that allows you to deliver results. Finally, you'll demonstrate the outcome you provide and communicate the WHY at the heart of your work.

The Lead Incubator is an authentic way to market yourself. We aren't relying on fake scarcity or other manipulative marketing tactics. You're showing the real you. Clients who resonate with the real you will be drawn towards you. Headache clients will unsubscribe. Plus by continually optimising the sequence you will improve your marketing return on investment across all channels.

The rest of this guide showcases my own 'Lead Incubator' sequence, which both tells my story and explains each of the 10 elements.

I invite you to implement your own version of this sequence as I have presented it here. I also invite you to play around with it. If you find a formula that works better, please then let me know.

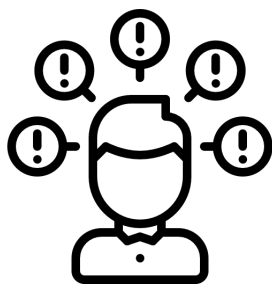
The first email in the sequence is designed to demonstrate your understanding of the problem your ideal client faces. Read on to learn more!

Rob

Act 1: Demonstrate Your Understanding of the Problem

In Act 1 you need to demonstrate to the reader that you understand the problem they face better than they do. You've taken the hard knocks, so they don't have to.

Email 1: Demonstrate the Problem



No potential client wakes up in the morning thinking about your business. They might however wake up thinking about the problem you can solve! So demonstrating your understanding of this problem is the starting point in your Lead Incubator 'onboarding' sequence...

My industry happens to be marketing, which contains a myriad of nasty problems. I began learning about them aged 15, working my first and only weekend job in a local garden centre...

I remember cleaning a moss-covered path on my first day, with a half-broken dustpan and brush, when I was approached by a customer.

“Excuse me mate,” he said, “what type of compost do I need for an Acer tree?”

Uh oh. The ground may as well have opened up and swallowed me whole.

With some trepidation, I pulled the walkie-talkie from my belt cord. I tried to remember: were you supposed to press the button and talk? Or were you supposed to press the button and wait? I opted for the latter.

“Hello Rob, was that you?” came the reply. Thank God.

After a while, I settled in at the garden centre. I became no longer afraid of the walkie-talkie. I even learned that Acer trees like acidic ericaceous compost. As do Rhododendrons. But not roses - better to use John Innes No. 3.

I learned that I could find answers by asking the right questions, without becoming an expert myself. Which really was the only option because I was only willing to learn so much about plants.

At Christmas, the place would go crazy selling Christmas trees. We'd sell perhaps a thousand trees over two weekends. There were four weekend staff working outside, including me. All lads. So of course we would 'compete' to see who could sell the most trees.

My own sales technique was fairly basic. I wouldn't bother with much small talk and lacked the flair of the other guys. I'd pull out two or three trees, and say something like “hmmm... *that's a nice shape...*”

One day I was pulling an especially fat Christmas tree through the netting machine. I hadn't seen that an elderly lady had wandered behind me - probably to ask about compost or roses or something. Suddenly the tree burst through the machine. I fell backward with a lunge and elbowed her in the head.

So I assaulted more customers than I should have done; and didn't sell all that many trees with my 'take it or leave it' sales technique.

Not that a Christmas tree is an especially complicated sale, but it's still an emotional purchase given that the entire family sits around it opening presents. The customer has to be reassured it's the right one of the few hundred in front of them.

So I decided early on that I wasn't much of a 'salesperson'. I didn't have the 'gift of the gab'. And I definitely wasn't comfortable 'winging' a sale on the fly.

A lot of the marketing I see online follows the same tactics employed by my tree-selling garden centre colleagues. Grab their attention! Don't let them go! Pursue the sale at any cost!

I'm more of the school of thought that it is better to get to the truth than the sale. If what you offer isn't right for the person you're speaking to, it's better to establish that truth and move on. This is the direct opposite of the way most marketing works.

—

Today's Lead Incubator email was **demonstrating the problem**. I've put this email first in the series for several reasons.

For high-value, high-trust sales, you need to demonstrate a deep understanding of the problem at hand. Your reader needs to feel like you understand the problem at hand better than they do.

Telling a story to illustrate the problem allows you to dig at the symptoms of the problem. Symptoms are manifestations of the problem that every potential client will recognise. For me, those symptoms were my abject failure in a conventional sales role. I tried to do what they told me, and it just didn't work.

The problem is also the logical place to start because it follows the conventional before to after, problem to solution narrative arc.

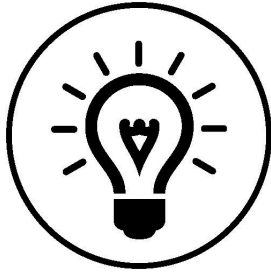
You might have multiple emails exploring different problems. You might also talk about these problems in your LinkedIn ads (i.e. before people opt-in).

Remember: demonstrating a deep understanding of the problem at hand will capture the attention of your ideal client. You must capture their attention before you move forward in the sequence.

Every problem has a scope or boundary, which I call your 'controlling idea'. We'll continue with this tomorrow.

Rob

Email 2: Your Controlling Idea



Is there a burning question at the heart of your work? Some deep fundamental problem that you uniquely are best placed to solve?

This question forms the boundary of your work, or 'controlling idea'. Let me tell you about mine...

In 2009 I spent six months travelling around South America. I spent a lot of time in hostels and cheap hotels. You would hear stories through the grapevine about travellers being robbed – held at gunpoint even.

The closest I came to being robbed was entirely of my own doing.

Towards the end of my trip, I was travelling by bus between the Colombian Caribbean cities of Cartagena and Santa Marta. From Santa Marta we were planning to do a three-day hike up to *La Ciudad Perdida* – The Lost City.

It was a stiflingly hot day in December. I relaxed on the bus as we travelled through beautiful countryside. After about two hours the bus ground to a halt in the city of Barranquilla, where a guard climbed aboard.

“Cambio! Cambio! Cambio!” he shouted quickly. *Change buses*. I gathered up my belongings in a panic and hurried off the bus.

As I stood at the roadside watching the bus drive away I instinctively patted my tummy where my money belt usually was. My hands touched skin, and nothing else. A cold feeling of dread swept over me.

I was due to fly home in a week. My money belt contained everything: my passport, bank cards; and a decent amount of money.

Our next bus was about to depart. “*Sube!*” urged the female conductor, urging us to get aboard. I explained as best I could, in broken Spanish, that I had left my passport on the previous bus.

‘Get on,’ she replied in Spanish. ‘We’ll make some calls.’

The journey to Santa Marta took two hours. I sat there mulling over my stupidity. Should I have got on the bus? Should I have left to track down the previous one?

“It’ll be okay,” encouraged Jenny, one of my companions.

“Yeah,” continued Allan, “if you need to get back to the embassy we’ll lend you the money.”

‘Great,’ I thought sulkily. *‘Just what I need. A twenty-hour bus ride back to Bogotá to beg for a passport at the embassy...’*

Despite the promises from the conductor, I couldn’t see a whole lot of calling going on. I sat there contemplating my forthcoming trip to Bogotá, watching beautiful countryside slip by like forbidden fruit. Every passing second meant travelling further away from my passport. I reflected moodily that I shouldn’t have got on.

The sun was setting over the horizon as we entered the suburbs of Santa Marta. More and more people got off the bus. South American buses stop anywhere for anyone, regardless of how much time has passed since the previous stop. Every minute someone would call out “A la esquina, por favor!” *At the corner please*. Even if there actually was no corner.

Finally, we pulled into the Santa Marta bus terminal and shuddered to a halt. The driver switched off the engine, and everyone else got off. “Come on guys,” I said resignedly, standing up to get off.

“*Espera...*” the bus conductor said to me, blocking my path. Wait. She disappeared off the bus for a moment.

Two long minutes later she reappeared... holding my money belt.

I stared at my belt in her hand, mouth agape. I gave her what I can only describe as a bear hug – something I don’t do lightly! She explained in Spanish that the original bus company had searched the bus, found my belt, and passed it to another Santa Marta-bound bus.

Some of the money was missing, which didn't matter. My passport was there, and my bank cards.

Despite all the stories you hear of tourists being robbed in South America, my own experiences were positive. I suspect looking back that being robbed and receiving unbelievable levels of trust were both never far away.

Trust happens to be the controlling idea that defines the boundary of my work. The question at the heart of everything I do is: **how can we use marketing authentically to build trust at scale with your ideal clients?**

Your work will have a controlling idea too. Usually, the controlling idea is linked to the question at the heart of your work: the immediate problem you are trying to solve in the world.

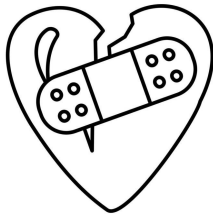
For me, the problem I'm solving is that most marketing is inauthentic and untrustworthy. It seeks to manipulate you to maximise short-term sales. I'm never going to fix that problem, but I can provide an alternative for people who want to communicate authentically.

Your task today is to think about your controlling idea. What would you say is the question at the heart of your work? How would you summarise that in a single word? Do you have a story that demonstrates that concept?

Feel free to email me with whatever you come up with and I will provide feedback.

Rob

Email 3: The Wounding Event



What would you say drives you to do what you do?

Quite often, the questions we pursue are cemented in early childhood. This will often be through one or more 'wounding events': things that made you feel ashamed, mortified or embarrassed.

The wounding event leads to the *lie*, which must be overcome through personal growth and transformation. Your work may be an expression of this transformation.

One of my 'wounding events' came when I was 13 in a school French class. My French teacher that year was 'Mrs A'. Mrs A was under five feet tall and possessed a fearsome voice to compensate.

French lessons would always start with us reading passages from the textbook. My seat was at the back of the class, directly under her gaze. Three times out of five she'd ask me to start reading first.

"Roberrrrr," she purred menacingly in French. "Please read from the top of page fifty-four..."

I opened up page fifty-four with butterflies in my stomach. The first sentence began 'Ce matin...'. I went to start reading, and couldn't talk.

"Ce-ce-ce-ce, Mmmmmmm," I stuttered.

A few boys laughed and looked round at me.

"Ce-ce, Mmmmm," I stopped.

Inside, my belly filled with hot burning shame. I glanced forward at Mrs A, whose face had dropped slightly. Eventually, she asked somebody else to read. As I listened to the other boys effortlessly reading the passage I stared vacantly at the words in front of me. What had just happened?

Straight after that lesson we had a break, or recess. A classmate came up to me. “That was pretty good,” he said, “pretending to stammer so you didn’t have to read...”

“Uhhh, yeah,” was all I managed to respond.

The thought of another five lessons that day with the same people felt daunting. I didn’t want to see anyone from class, and I definitely didn’t want to talk about it. I wanted to push the whole thing under a rug... but I couldn’t.

In one moment I had gone from a reasonably confident speaker to someone irrationally terrified at the thought of speaking to a group.

What did I do?

I did what any self-respecting 13-year-old would do. I hid it.

I stopped raising my hand in class. I avoided making eye contact with the teacher. On the inside I felt constantly anxious. What if it happened again?

About a year later I was nominated to participate in a school elocution competition. I must have slipped up and said something that sounded good. A few boys congratulated me on the nomination. In my head I was like, shit. *Shit shit SHIT.*

How did I get on at the competition? Simple – I didn’t show up. I hid out on the yard instead. I still maintain that not taking part was the right thing to do, but I went about it all wrong. I should’ve told someone I needed help.

After all, my sister stammered for years. My Grandad stammered. I’ve since found out my Mum and Uncle both stammered at school. I was surrounded by empathetic people who would have understood and been able to help.

Instead, I kept it to myself. I learned to deal with it by avoiding certain sounds I wasn’t confident saying.

When an emotional wound like this happens the effects can be very long lasting. Effectively the wound leads to a false belief, or lie.

The big irony is I’m very eloquent when I want to be. I’m apparently incapable of creating podcast episodes that last under 45 minutes. I’ve been on local radio ([MP3 is here](#)). I actively seek out crowds of people to speak to.

It took 13 years to correct that false belief. The turning point only came when I realised I liked how I sounded on audio. I finally learned to respect the sound of my voice again.

My work today is all about sharing your true, authentic voice. Do you think that's a coincidence??

It is fairly common that your emotional wound is intimately connected to the problem you are trying to solve in your work. Often, our oldest emotional wounds are the things that drive us. So to show your prospect how well you understand the problem at hand, it can be helpful to write about your emotional wounds. There will often be an overlap between yours and theirs.

When you're planning your Lead Incubator you have to decide whether you're ready to write about an emotional wound. (If not, you can skip this email, or come back to it when you're ready.)

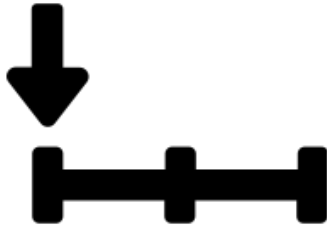
Not all of your stories are ready to be shared, and that's fine. But the more willing you are to share them, the more empathy you'll build with your audience.

Rob

Act 2: The Story Spine

The Story Spine sits in the middle of the story and contains a series of events that caused you to change and grow. This growth eventually paves the way for the resolution in the story.

Email 4: The Inciting Incident



Can you pinpoint a specific moment that lit a fire under your current business? That moment is the 'inciting incident'. Telling potential clients about your inciting incident is a great way to communicate your purpose at a deep emotional level.

So, let me tell you about mine...

My first venture as a self-employed consultant was selling SMS text messaging to local businesses. I had been dabbling with service ideas part-time while I also worked a job. I had a lot of plans and ideas, but no clients.

Then in early 2012, I found myself out of work with no savings to speak of. My employer gave me a month of paid 'garden leave', and bought me a laptop as a leaving present. Overnight my SMS side project went from being an edgy concept to something that urgently needed to generate income.

I prepared a 'sales pack' I could leave with shop owners. The pack contained a 2-page sales letter, a flyer of my own design, and some small guillotined paper SMS messages that fell on the floor when you turned the pack upside down. The messages said things like *"Your customers want to hear from you, and ALWAYS have their phones..."*

I would print out ten or fifteen packs, then walk around nearby towns asking shop owners whether they wanted to talk to me about SMS text messaging.

The answer to which, was **no**.

One day I walked into a hair salon and spoke to a middle-aged man with bright blonde hair. I asked if he'd be interested in creating an SMS customer list.

"My accountant already deals with my taxes, thank you," he replied.

"No, not *taxes*," I replied. "*Text messaging*, like on your phone..."

"Oh," he said. "I don't think I need that. But can you get me ranked on Google? You know... in the Google rankings?"

I replied confidently that I thought I could and set up a meeting for the following week.

One week later I was back in Emile's hair salon, dressed incongruously in a suit. We sat on a bench with my laptop perched uncomfortably on my knee. A few metres away a customer was having her hair blow-dried. I talked Emile through the website design, and he nodded.

"How much is this going to cost?" he asked, abruptly. I hesitated for a second.

"Well, it will be seven hours at £40 an hour. So £300 plus hosting and domain charges."

"What?" he replied incredulously. "I've had website quotes for £100 in the past. I'm not happy to pay more than £100..."

I thought about that for a moment. Doing this amount of work for £300 was ridiculous, let alone £100. But frankly, I didn't have any better offers on the table.

"Okay, I'll do it."

We shook hands, and that was the last time I saw Emile.

Not long afterward my relationship with Emile went suspiciously quiet. I eventually got an email from him saying he just didn't think he needed the website. Still, it set important wheels in motion because I had stumbled across something I could sell: getting found on Google.

More next time...

—

Email 3 in the Lead Incubator is about the '**inciting incident**': the 5-second moment that put you on your current trajectory. I still work in paid advertising today, and my interaction with Emile initially set me on that path.

The story above is also a further demonstration of the problems associated with prospecting. I believed at the time that I needed to get out there, knock on doors and make things happen. I'm proud of myself for taking that step, but it wasn't the right approach for a high-value service provider. Prospecting broadcasts neediness.

So think about what your 'Inciting Incident' might be. Email me and let me know what comes up for you.

We'll look tomorrow at the 'false start', which usually follows the inciting incident.

Rob

Email 5: The False Start



We were talking yesterday about your 'inciting incident'. Often following the inciting incident there will be a 'false start'.

In any worthwhile business endeavour there will be one or two 'false starts': times you thought you had made it only for the universe to kick you in the teeth. To paraphrase the founders of Airbnb, "*We actually launched 6 times... just nobody noticed the first 5!*"

After the hair salon incident I desperately needed clients with real businesses. A friend recommended I try local networking. After a little research online I found the "High Wycombe Business Network". I sent an enquiry to see what they would like to hear about.

"Getting ranked on Google," was the familiar reply.

I hurriedly designed new business cards and booked to go along as 'Rob Drummond: PPC Consultant'. The Network was a two-hour breakfast meeting between 7-9 AM, every Thursday. I went along and spoke about my non-existent Google AdWords services.

Everyone at the meeting seemed so assured, like they had been in business forever. The financial advisors huddled in a corner to speak in their special finance language.

On the inside, I was in turmoil. “*WHAT IF THEY FIND OUT I’M A FRAUD?*” a voice screamed in my head.

As the weeks slipped by, I became more assured. Speaking to people every week forced me to think about who I was trying to work with and how I structured my projects. One week a guy with an office supplies business approached me after the meeting.

“I’m spending money with Google,” he said, “and I’ve tried calling them. And I think it made things worse. Can you help?”

I stretched nonchalantly to hide my inner nerves, and said ‘sure...’

Client No. 1 was on board!

As time went on I built up a small client base. I did a few things to improve my skills...

I attended a training day in London with Drayton Bird and Howie Jacobson, the original author of *Google AdWords for Dummies*. Howie taught that AdWords was primarily a message testing laboratory, besides a source of customers.

I devoured Brad Geddes’ book *Advanced Google AdWords*, and hired UK AdWords consultant David Rothwell to help me. Hiring David gave me a degree of internal validation.

Besides networking, I also ran my own Google Ads to generate leads. When people searched for ‘Google AdWords’ and similar phrases they would see my ad: (I tested dozens of ads against this one and never managed to beat it!)

[Wasted £1000 on Adwords?](#)
Six biggest AdWords mistakes
Free 22 page PDF Special Report
www.rjdrummond.com/adwords-report

By mid 2012 I was spending just £20 per day on AdWords and getting 5 or 6 opt-ins. About one in twenty would make a serious project enquiry.

I’ve since advertised all sorts of things on Google. Solicitor services. Ink toners. Stairlifts. Employer DBS checks. Window cleaning. Infidelity counselling. Nitrile gloves. Ergonomic beds. Elderly care at home. Yoga classes. Financial training. Vending machines. Telecoms solutions. Cloud hosting. Wedding marquees. Painting and decorating. Building maintenance. Short let accommodation. And many more.

In 2013 I read Sam Carpenter's book *Work the System* and began systematising my regular AdWords procedures. Based on that I employed an assistant, and created a training product called *The AdWords Survival Guide*. I was told later it was like 'doing a masters in AdWords'.

I'm sometimes asked... why didn't I carry on with the AdWords business? Why didn't I build an agency? I was good at it, especially the ad creation part.

There are a few answers to that question.

I mostly worked with companies that generated leads (as opposed to clients who sold online). To my eyes things would be going well... conversions would be up, and cost per conversion would be okay.

Then one day my phone would ring. "I'm sorry Rob," the client would say, "but these leads haven't led to any work. We're going to have to end the project."

"Uhh, did you try calling them?" I would reply. But it was too late.

In 2014 I noticed that two of my most interesting clients used the CRM system Infusionsoft. I had been aware of Infusionsoft for a long time and knew that several big-name marketers relied on it. One day I watched a presentation by a guy called Jermaine Griggs. Jermaine had won Infusionsoft Marketer of the Year and ran a business called Hear and Play.

Jermaine explained how he ran a multi-million dollar business with a handful of employees and an Infusionsoft account. He had systems in place to sort customers by engagement, with concrete measures for recency, frequency and money. My jaw hit the floor as Jermaine pulled back the curtain on his campaigns.

I made an emotional decision that day to re-orientate my business around Infusionsoft. I couldn't afford Infusionsoft at the time, but it was a direction I felt compelled to follow

—

Many great stories contain a false point of resolution early in the story. In some respects, by this point in my story, I had 'made it'. I had survived the leap from employment to self-employment.

I quickly became a skilled Google Ads practitioner, but I also knew I enjoyed the emails and storytelling more than the ads. So something didn't sit right.

The obvious route was to scale up, grow an agency, and build a team. But at the same time, the idea of scaling filled me with dread. Every time I tried to scale, I sabotaged myself.

My initial Google Ads agency work was an early business success, but I wasn't yet acting as my authentic self. It wasn't the business that only I could build.

Your task today is to think of a 'false start' story. When did you achieve traction with something only to realise it wasn't right for you? These stories both demonstrate your expertise but also showcase development.

Tomorrow we'll look at the 'key insight', which usually follows on from the false start.

Rob

Email 6: The Key Insight



What would you say is the single most important insight a potential client needs to know before working with you?

And... how did you come across that insight?

I was telling you yesterday how I used email marketing to generate leads for my Google Ads business, and how Jermaine Griggs showed me the power of marketing automation with Infusionsoft.

In 2015, I finally switched my email marketing system from AWeber to Infusionsoft. I didn't just *buy* Infusionsoft, I signed up to take the full Infusionsoft partner certification!

Over the next few months I did just about every job you can imagine in Infusionsoft. I built campaigns. I created sales pipelines. I wrote copy. I created referral tracking systems.

Meanwhile, my AdWords business wasn't going so well - probably because I was doing 17 other things. The lead flow from my free report had dried up. I had gone from having a simple offer ("I'll help fix your AdWords account"), to a more complicated offer. I was now part AdWords consultant, part Infusionsoft consultant, and part email copywriter. Fundamentally I was confused, and too close to the business to see through my confusion.

In 2016 I booked to go to Infusionsoft's ICON user conference in Phoenix. It was an act of desperation - I needed more clients, so hanging out with three thousand other Infusionsoft users seemed like a sensible thing to do.

As I sat on the plane I knew I was in trouble. I knew people would ask what I did. I knew I didn't have a solid answer, besides yawning and asking what they would like to hear about.

On the last day of the conference, Gary Vaynerchuk was the final speaker. Whatever you think of 'Garyvee', something he said slapped me in the face.

"All of you who are sitting there trying to do seven different things," he started, "should just stop. Pick ONE, and start winning..."

—

Email 6 in the Lead Incubator was the '**key insight**': the single most important thing you needed to learn to get to where you are today. My own key insight was to do with focus. My business lacked a simple, clear and obvious front door. The people I spoke to at ICON didn't look at my business and immediately *get it*. They didn't immediately feel excited.

I had fallen into the trap of selling what they needed, but not what they wanted. The people I spoke to at ICON wanted more leads, when really what they needed was better follow-up.

Instead, the correct approach is to sell what they want, but *include* what they need.

This is why my LinkedIn Ads service is now the front door to my business: lead generation is what people **think they need**. But to run ads profitably, you need a robust marketing follow-up system.

So, what's your own 'Key Insight'?

The story that illustrates your key insight may be related to a trip. We rarely realise important things when we are working at our desks.

Usually, your key insight will overlap with the key insight your customer needs to learn.

Rob

Email 7: Grounding Principles



You operate your business the way you live. Your business is an extension and reflection of you. Showcasing the grounding principles you live by is a way to deepen the connection with your readers. Your ideal clients will share and resonate with these principles.

Let me take you back to October 2005. I've been in Sheffield for 6 weeks; my first year as a student. I'm living **the life**. Out most nights. My circle of immediate friends has temporarily expanded beyond the usual 5.

I've also joined the university running club. I had been running a little at home, but nothing serious. Around the block a few times. Suddenly I'm running one 5-mile run per week, clomping around Sheffield's hills in a clapped-out pair of trainers; plus an interval sprint session at the track; then hill sprints on a Sunday, hangover permitting.

For a few weeks, things had gone well. My fitness was noticeably improving. Then one Monday after the 5-mile run I felt a dull ache low on the inside of my shin. I pressed my fingers down on the ache.

As the weeks ticked by I carried on running, clomping around in my bulky trainers. There was talk at the track of a race meeting coming up. Perhaps if I trained harder I could compete?

After every run the ache in my shin resurfaced. I didn't tell anyone. After all, I could still run. But each time the pain got worse. After the track one Tuesday I stopped on the way home to buy frozen peas. I pressed the pack to the inside of my shin until the skin felt numb with the cold.

One Sunday morning I ducked out of hill sprints and went running by myself. A beautiful autumn day with crisp yellow and brown leaves lining the paths. After two miles I pulled up, pain radiating up my shins. Something broke in me. I needed help.

Two weeks later I'm sat in front of an animated, fairly young doctor. The pain had eased up, but every time I ran the dull ache returned.

"No running for six weeks," he advised, "and take Ibuprofen." I walked out holding a prescription for free Ibuprofen, feeling unsatisfied. On the inside, I knew it wasn't a shortage of painkillers that had caused my shins to get sore.

Over the next two years I saw three different physios. "Stretch your calf muscles," was the usual advice. But I already knew that, having read thousands of articles. "And take more Ibuprofen..."

As a last resort, I contacted a private physio. I went over to his house in High Wycombe, where I was doing my placement year. He took a more holistic look at my leg length and spine alignment.

"You know," he mentioned in passing, "you don't see Kenyans and Ethiopians limping off running tracks. Mostly they grow up barefoot. Being barefoot conditions the lower leg. It strengthens the foot arch, which is naturally good at landing, absorbing the pressure, and transitioning into the upward spring. But it takes time. You might consider doing a little barefoot running - on grass."

I sat there, stunned by the obviousness of his words.

Six months later I'm back in Sheffield. I'm standing barefoot in a damp park on a rainy September day. My first ever barefoot jog.

I feel self-conscious. A dog walker wanders by, glancing over. I jog one slow, careful lap around the outside of the field. My feet slip slightly, but the ground feels soft and welcoming. On my third lap I get the innate feeling I've always run barefoot; I've just forgotten how. Afterwards, my legs feel tired in ways completely different to running in shoes.

It's been 15 years since that run. I've had the odd injury here and there, but mostly I've kept running. In the temperate seasons I'll jog barefoot up and down the park at the end of my road. There's a slight hill, with a backdrop of rolling Derbyshire countryside.

I run on roads too, although I've swapped my bulky trainers for a pair of minimalist 'barefoot' shoes. Barefoot running is what I do to strengthen, rebuild and recharge. It closes a feedback loop with the earth. It's a grounding principle for the way I live my life.

The 'barefoot' principle reflects the way I run my business, too. I run a streamlined operation that allows me to pick the kids up from school. I kind of believe that writing inspiration comes to you from the earth - usually at 4AM when you're meant to be sleeping. I believe we need deeper authentic connections with both each other and the natural world.

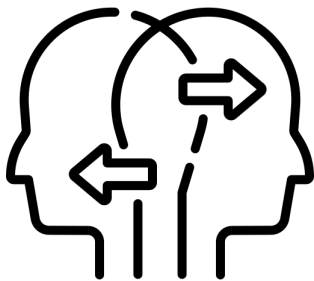
If we're ever likely to work together then what I've said will have resonated on some level, even if you (currently) think I'm mad for running around without shoes!

So have a think - what grounding principles do you live and operate by? What do you live and die by? How did you come to uncover those principles?

Are there any stories that illustrate how you came to understand and apply those principles?

Rob

Email 8: Self-Awareness



Telling your story allows you to illuminate your unique genius to potential clients.

Your 'genius' is like a golden thread that runs throughout your life, so often there will be multiple stories that illustrate it. Often, it is best to pick one that relates to your current business. Let me give you an example...

I've followed Perry Marshall's work almost since the beginning. Perry was one of the speakers at Ken McCarthy's System Seminar, one of the first-ever seminars on internet marketing.

Around 2013 Perry announced he was running a copywriting competition. The task was to write a 2-minute video script. The winning script would appear prominently in Perry's marketing.

This caused a backlash in Perry's community. Many people thought he was seeking free copywriting from his list. I saw it as a decent opportunity and entered a script anyway.

I didn't hear back for a while. Eventually, Jack Born, Perry's then marketing manager got in touch and told me I had got to the 'last few'.

Since then I occasionally get invited to participate in some of Perry's events as a copywriter. In 2018, Perry's team got in touch. They were running a high-ticket ad creation workshop on Perry's 'Swiss Army Knife' method. Would I like to attend and work directly with a client spending \$100k+ per month on ads? Yes, yes I would!

I argued with Linzi about going. My son Hugo was still a baby, and at the time we needed stable income, not speculative punts. As a compromise I booked the cheapest flight I could find.

So, I walk out the door at 9PM on Halloween. My plan is to catch the last train to London, getting in at 1am, then catch a night bus to Heathrow for a 7am flight.

Why didn't I just book a hotel? I don't know. I figured I'd only be at the airport slightly earlier than if I stayed over.

When the train pulls into London Kings Cross there are people everywhere, mostly drunk and wearing various degrees of Halloween outfit. People bustling into cabs. People eating takeaway food. I find the bus stop where Google reckons my night bus would depart, and wait.

After 30 long minutes, the night bus arrives. I fight my way on board through a gaggle of shrieking witches and find a seat next to a guy clutching a guitar and a can of beer. His name is Igor, he quickly informs me. From Latvia. Part-time guitarist, full-time beer drinker. Did I want some beer? I decline.

Igor eventually departs at Hammersmith. I'm left on the bus alone as it approaches Heathrow. Only a psychopath arrives at the airport at 3am for a 7.30am flight, right? I discover that security doesn't even open until 4.30. I sit on a metal chair in departures and

slump down with my bag. Cleaning staff work around me, whistling. Tinny music blares from a nearby toilet. My eyes start to droop.

"HEY MATE, WHERE YOU OFF TO!?" intrudes a scouse voice next to me. I couldn't believe it. First Ivor from Latvia, and now Jimmy from Liverpool wants to be friends. I groan inside. How long until the flight??

The flight itself is uneventful, but I don't sleep as much as I had planned. Never do on flights. May as well try to sleep in a pub.

In Chicago I can't check into the hotel for a few hours, so I plan another public transport jaunt across town. The ticket machines at O'Hare's Blue Line metro station reject my bank card, but contactless works. I'm not normally religious, but I thank God for contactless payments.

I love travelling around new places by public transport. It feels more real, like you've actually been somewhere and listened to real conversations. One guy on the train is talking loudly about 'assets'. I wonder what he does for a living, and whether he really likes his job. His tone suggests not.

The final leg of my public transport quest involves catching a bus. The lady driving the bus has no idea what I've asked her, or where I'm trying to get to. I study my map and keep a beady eye on the window for signs I need to get off.

Finally, at 2PM local time, a million hours, trains and bus rides after leaving home, I arrive at my hotel.

—

"How was your trip over?" somebody asks at breakfast the next morning.

"Long!" I reply, bleary-eyed. I decide to skip the parts about the London night bus, Igor the Latvian, and Jimmy the Scouser.

Several names from Perry's forum came into real human focus that morning. John Fancher and Joshua Boswell were there as copywriters. I've studied the work of both.

"*Are you sure you belong here with these guys?*" chimed the little voice in my head. "*They're gonna find out you're a fraud...*"

On the second morning, we were finishing breakfast. The room was perhaps 30% full, and Perry wasn't around yet. Suddenly legendary copywriter Jay Abraham strolled through the

door right next to me and looked around. He said "Good morning" to me. I said "Good morning" back, slightly surprised and starstruck. Then he walked out.

That was the only time I saw him at the event. Nobody else mentioned his presence. I didn't even tell anyone for fear I'd lost my marbles on the London night bus. But I'm telling you now - he was there!

The Paradigm Shift workshop brought together a handful of Perry's clients, expert copywriters, and high-level ads managers. You couldn't have assembled more marketing firepower in one room. I attended as a copywriter.

Over the two days, we drafted hundreds of ads for each client. The clients tested these ads live while we were at the event. It was the ultimate demonstration of speed and proliferation in ad testing. A brute force approach to creating high-performing ads.

I sat there watching the other consultants and copywriters. Hooks, headlines and copy angles were being churned out in real time. Businesses were being pulled apart and reassembled in new configurations.

I sat there and realised: *this isn't my unique genius. I can't help these people.*

As usual, I had to travel thousands of miles to discover I was on the wrong path.

—

Part 10 of the Story Incubator sequence demonstrates a development in self-awareness. I went to Chicago posing as a 'big shot copywriter', when that really isn't me. I struggle to churn out ideas on demand - often I need to incubate them overnight. My unique genius is that I'm a holistic connector of narrative dots.

Quests and journeys particularly lend themselves to this type of story - you rarely develop a better understanding of your true self by staying put at home.

This development in self-awareness, along with the key insight, paves the way for your current business and the transformation you currently provide to your clients. More on this tomorrow.

Rob

Act 3: The Resolution

In Act 3 you're going to showcase the outcome of all this personal growth, then present your vision for the future. This vision is intimately connected to your 'why', or purpose. Your ideal clients will resonate deeply with this purpose, paving the way for your call to action.

Email 9: Demonstrate The Outcome



So far in the Lead Incubator you've demonstrated your understanding of the problem. You've illustrated your journey, showcasing your unique genius in the process. It's now time to demonstrate the outcome you provide!

This email is the most 'expected' of all the emails in this sequence. It's the most 'salesy', in some respects. But by now, you've hopefully established a groundwork of trust with the authentic stories you've been sending so far.

Let me take you back to 2015. I'm managing Google Ads for several clients. I had been struggling with clients leaving, saying the conversions I had generated weren't turning into business.

I found this deeply frustrating. In my head I was like, "*Why?? Did you not call them? Did you send them any follow-up emails?*"

I noticed that one of my more sophisticated clients was using the CRM system Infusionsoft. This client took marketing follow-up more seriously. They did the best job of following up with the leads I was generating for them.

This client ran a mountain guide training company. Over four years they took students to places like Patagonia, Alaska and Northern Spain, and taught them to become mountain guides. The full tuition cost was around \$100,000. Perhaps today this is comparable to a university education, but it was a significant investment.

To generate leads, the company ran Google Ads (which was my job). When people opted in we added them to an email sequence in Infusionsoft.

The email sequence told stories. Stories from the founders. Stories of harsh reality from the mountain top. Stories from past students. Stories of terrifying blizzards. Stories that illustrated the leadership qualities of a good mountain leader.

The call to action in these emails was to enter an application process, but it was **the stories that did the selling**. The stories weren't superficial icing on the marketing cake. They were integral to the client education process. They were the foundation that supported everything else.

Fast-forward to January 2023. I'm managing a fairly large LinkedIn ads campaign for a client. The client is growing rapidly and has recently taken on funding. So in short, there's money to spend. (This for me is fairly unusual!!)

We've been running LinkedIn newsfeed ads to generate leads. The client has developed a white paper, and we're generating leads for about £150 per lead.

We've tried LinkedIn's 'message ads' format, where you send sponsored messages to people's inboxes. So far, these ads haven't worked. A big fat flop.

One morning, I receive an email from LinkedIn announcing two new ad formats: "document ads", and "conversation ads". Conversation ads, they say, will ultimately replace the older message ads.

Internally, I roll my eyes. I've worked in paid advertising long enough to be sceptical when an ad platform roll out another *great new feature*. Still, I throw up a new 'conversation ad' campaign. I spend 5 minutes on the ad, set the campaign live, then forget about it.

The next day I receive an email from the client. (Which is unusual, he never emails!) 5 leads have come in overnight, at a cost of £35 per lead. Boom!

I'm now no longer rolling my eyes. There's something in this new 'conversation' format.

I've since tested Conversation Ads on my own account, with reasonable success. In a one-week test I generated 8 leads at just over £10 per lead. At the time of writing, my current best-performing client campaign is generating leads on an ongoing basis at just over £4 per lead (approx \$7 USD).

Now to be clear, these leads aren't 'sales-ready' leads; we're adding people to an email list. So to convert your leads into clients, you'll need a few things:

1. A lead magnet (or initial offer) that your target audience wants
2. An email sequence to deliver it
3. A 'Lead Incubator' email sequence (like this one), which tells your story
4. An ongoing series of 'nurture communications'. This could be a regular email 'newsletter', podcast, YouTube video, or something else you produce at least every 2 weeks.

My work here has two aspects. I help people generate leads from LinkedIn without breaking the bank. I then build systems to follow up with those leads, share your best stories, and move people towards your sales process.

If that sounds interesting, you can catch the replay of a free webinar I ran called [Guerrilla LinkedIn Ads](#). I have a fixed-price done-for-you service called [Conversation Kickstart](#), or a low-cost course if you'd prefer to do it yourself.

Tomorrow I'll send you the last email in my 'Lead Incubator' sequence, which is where you showcase your vision for the future.

Rob

Email 10: Your Vision



The final ingredient in the Lead Incubator is to showcase your vision for the future, and what that means for your clients.

My son Hugo was born six weeks ahead of schedule. My wife Linzi had been in hospital for 21 days with pre-eclampsia. So when I got the phone call at 3PM the day before, it wasn't a shock.

But at the same time, you're never ready.

I stopped at a shop on the way home to buy size zero nappies and maternity pads. I didn't even know what a 'maternity pad' was. I later found out it's something you never want to ask about.

Hugo was born at 10.45AM. I remember several things about the experience. The number of surgeons in the room. The shuffle of clogs on the floor. The cheerfulness of the anaesthetist. The hum of huge extractor fans. Having Hugo whisked by, blue and angry, on his way to the neonatal team. Going to meet him and watching his tiny chest heave in an effort to breathe. I was utterly an observer on proceedings.



Hugo on oxygen in an incubator, a few hours after birth

Hugo spent the first two weeks of his life in an incubator. Even though he was small, Hugo wasn't the smallest or most critical baby in the neonatal unit, by a long stretch. Alarms beeped on other incubators while nurses bustled around holding clipboards.

The neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) is a unique bubble. Inside the unit it's hot – like being at your grandmother's house with the fire on. Babies lie in clear incubators. Most are monitored for heart rate and blood oxygen saturation. If either drops too low, distinctive alarms blare out. For the really sick babies you might catch parents glancing nervously at the readings each time an alarm goes off. The nurses are exceptionally skilled at watching the readings without appearing overly concerned. As one nurse put it, "sometimes premature babies just forget to breathe."

Twice a day, at 7AM and 7PM, something interesting happened. *Handover.*

New nurses arrived for the next shift. Each baby was discussed and notes shared. Then a new set of heroics were performed for the next 12 hours, by a completely different set of people.

Sometimes there were emergencies. The X-ray machine would be hurriedly wheeled in, or a doctor consulted. But most of the work followed scheduled tasks. In Hugo's case that was six-hourly 'cares' and 3-hourly feeds. Parents were encouraged to do as much of this as possible; the NICU is an enabling environment, not one of dependency.

I realised the marketing industry could learn something from that. Working as a marketing service provider shouldn't be about extracting as much cash as possible from your clients, for as long as possible. Good marketing should facilitate a better world.

I recently helped a client publish a book called *The Letter From 2100: A Possible World for Your Grandchildren*. In 2100, all being well, my kids will be 78 and 80. I think a lot about what kind of world I want them to live in.

I want them to live in a world where they are encouraged to identify their unique capabilities, and play to them. I want them to inhabit a world where collaboration has surpassed competition as the primary business paradigm. I want them to be sovereign human beings who proactively build the life they want to live.

My work here is my contribution to how marketing might be reimagined. A more natural, vulnerable, authentic way to communicate with potential clients.

The world needs leaders. The world needs changemakers. I believe we can collectively change the world by effectively serving the people we are uniquely capable of serving. That is my definition of leading, and we all have the potential to be leaders.

By 2100, leadership won't equate to power. Real sovereign power will exist at an individual level from self-understanding, empathy, collaboration, and service.

—

We're at the end of the 'Lead Incubator' series. Your final task is to think about your vision for the future and pinpoint a story that illustrates your vision. I've selected the birth of my son as a story that reassessed my priorities.

You should try to finish your Lead Incubator sequence with the most emotionally powerful story in your arsenal. People should feel this story at an emotional level, which then helps to deliver your vision for the future. If people buy into your vision they'll be pre-sold towards working with you, which is where you then place your offer...

My Offer to You

If you're ready to generate a consistent flow of leads from LinkedIn, my [Guerrilla LinkedIn Ads](#) service is the place to go. I have a fixed-price setup service if you'd like to try conversation ads.

If you already have enough leads (through referrals for instance), but you need to tell your story to new potential clients, have a look at my [Story Jumpstart process](#).

Finally, if you're more of a DIY-type person, the [Story Selling Lab](#) is my training and support community. Each month we have an 'advertising' support call, and a 'content' support call. I run each call at two separate times, so regardless of where you are in the world, you should be able to join one of the calls.

Lab membership includes access to all my courses. These courses are available to buy separately if you don't want the full membership, but most members get more value from the ongoing support.

What Happens Next?

At the end of your Lead Incubator sequence, you need to add people to your ongoing communications. This could be a regular email newsletter, podcast, or YouTube video. So make an offer to people, as I have above. (I think it's fine to link to multiple services). You don't need to be pushy - anyone who is ready now will follow the links.

I view marketing as a long-term game. People will only buy when they are ready, and you don't get to determine when that is! So make sure you have an ongoing schedule of broadcasts after your Lead Incubator. As a minimum, these should go out every two weeks.

Rob

Bonus: Optimisation Checklist

Once your Lead Incubator sequence is live you want to keep a close eye on how many recipients take you up on your call to action.

Some email marketing tools will allow you to create an 'A/B test' within the tool. In other tools, you may be able to clone the entire sequence, then use a separate trigger for your 'B' version. If all else fails, you can spread two versions of your opt-in form across your website! That won't give you a true A/B test, but it's better than nothing.

The following is a list of testing ideas:

At macro level (A sequence versus B sequence), you might test:

- Extending the sequence, potentially up to 30 emails
- Shortening the sequence, potentially down to 3 emails (one in each act)
- Changing the email frequency (from once a day to once every other day, or maybe twice a day!)
- Changing the ordering of your emails, particularly within the three acts
- Changing a completely different call to action offer (but keeping everything else constant)
- A completely different set of subject lines across the series (e.g. heighten the drama!)

- A different sender name (e.g. company name vs personal name)
- A different opening to each email (e.g. explaining to the reader what you are about to tell them, rather than launching straight into the story)

Personally I wouldn't bother testing design elements, fonts and layouts, although you could consider these. I recommend using black, readable text, on a white background, with no 'designed' elements except perhaps your footer. But again this is a rule of thumb, so you might test this against a more visual layout.

In determining whether you have a winner, feed your number of opt-ins and number of 'conversions' from the call to action into a statistical significance calculator. Once you hit 95% statistical significance, you can declare a winner and log the results of your experiment.

It is **very important to maintain a testing log**, or else you will forget what you have learned! This could be a simple Word document or Google Sheet.

At micro level (within the sequence) you should monitor:

- The open rate of each email (comparing each email to the others in the sequence)
- The performance of specific call to action links (to track this in Google Analytics, but a different utm_content parameter on each link)

For guidance and support on all this, please complete the [Story Jumpstart form](#).

This approach to testing comes full circle from my Google Ads work. You wouldn't ever launch an ad campaign then neglect to measure and test it. So the same goes here. If anything, you have even more variables to test than you do in a Google ad!

So however you go about it, get testing. The more people you add to your Lead Incubator sequence on a daily basis, the faster you'll dial things in. You'll end up with a sequence that pre-sells the people entering your world, so they understand your unique genius and only want to work with you.

Further Reading and Resources

If you have enjoyed this guide, you may enjoy reading *Simple Story Selling*. *Simple Story Selling* examines the full case for business storytelling and draws on the lessons of great literature.

You can find *Simple Story Selling* [on Amazon](#), or directly from the [Story Selling Lab website](#). I'll sign the book if you buy it direct.

Please let me know how you get on. Even if we never work together, I would love to hear from you. (info@storyselling.biz).

About Rob

Rob Drummond is a copywriter and direct marketing consultant, based in Sheffield, England. Away from work he's a keen runner, running barefoot on parks and fields in the temperate months.

Rob grew up near Liverpool, but now lives in Sheffield with wife Linzi, and two kids. He's a keen reader and student of literature; Ursula K. Le Guin is among his favourite writers. At weekends you may find him watching rugby league at Sheffield Eagles, drinking lager out of a 2-pint container.

He believes the business world needs to move away from a competition-based model into a collaborative paradigm.