



OFFBEAT BITS

Essays on life, technology, universe and everything in between. Personal writing by Łukasz Wójcik

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Hello world, I guess

Even the longest journey begins with a single step. Even 2326th attempt at starting my own blog begins with 'hello world'.

Ugh. I was in this position so many times.

Another blog. Looking at my text editor trying to figure out what I wanted to say. Wondering if I manage to keep my enthusiasm alive for more than one article. That weird mix of anxiety and excitement before hitting 'Publish'.

This journey is no different than any others. I'm not going to pretend I have it all figured out. I am definitely older and slightly more experienced than my former self snapshotted by [Wayback Machine](#) decades ago, but apart from that, not much has changed. I'm still a random human being with no clear idea what I'm doing.

One thing I know is that it's not about pleasing other people any more. It's first and foremost about myself. This is in fact crucial for keeping this site going.

Yes, this site is publicly available online and I indeed want it to be read by other people. But I'm not aspiring to be your favorite online writer, life mentor, tutor or even entertainer. I'm doing this because pouring my thoughts into text lets me free my mind. Reclaiming mental capacity feels good. More space for new fun stuff, yay.

This journey is particular for one more reason: unlike my previous takes at blogging, for this one I'm not using my native language. Filtering my ideas through limited range of words is enjoyable, yet quite a demanding challenge. Out of a sudden it turns out I can't use my old playbook of shortcuts like cheap nostalgia, awkward mannerisms, unnecessary wordiness or metaphors nobody understands. I hate looking at my past writing for this reason, but well, *shrug*.

I'm here to tell my own story, share my thoughts on stuff I find worthy of discussion, maybe post a hack or two to problems you and I are struggling with. I might occasionally mix facts with opinions and neglect to draw a

clear line between the two for cheap laugh. I might sometimes yell at clouds or reminisce the past and I bear no responsibility for you wasting time reading this.

Most importantly though, I'm here to contribute more heat to our shared entropy and see what happens next.

My name is Luke and this is Offbeat Bits.

Let's effin' do this.

What I use, what I think of things

For two decades I've been using software, online services and various devices as parts of my daily life. I'm writing them down so that I can track how my preferences evolve over time and hopefully help my future choices. Besides, I like reading this kind of lists written by other people, so here's mine for other freaks like me to enjoy.

First version: somewhere in April 2020. Last update: August 2022

Computers

Since October 2021 my primary workhorse is 2019 MacBook Pro with i9 CPU. I mostly use it at home with a dock connected to HDMI and USB switches, so that I can easily share displays and USB devices with three different computers. That setup introduces a separation between 'work mode' and 'home mode' which I find essential while working from home.

The reason I opted for an Intel CPU rather than anything-with-M1 was that at the moment of my purchase M1 MacBook Pro was a few weeks away from release. Apple's Intel platform had quite a few years to mature and iron out various deal-breaking bugs. For example, until the release of M1 MacBook Pro none of the existing M1 MacBooks could support more than one external display - something I take for granted on other platforms. I don't trust Apple enough to fix this kind of problems on a predictable schedule.

I still own a 2015 desktop with Intel Core i7-4790K and GeForce GTX 980 Ti which I mostly use for gaming. Unless any of its critical parts breaks down I have no plans of upgrading it. I'm even starting to question the need of owning a desktop PC at all.

Over the years I tested a few monitor setups. Initially I was using three full HD displays, then I switched to an ultrawide display + one full HD display. This setup irreversibly changed the way I use a PC. When it comes to productive work, one ultrawide display offers similar level of comfort as two full HD monitors while taking less desk space.

I use Apple Magic Keyboard and Magic Mouse as well as cheap generic wireless keyboard and mouse for non-Apple computers. I run two separate sets of peripherals because it's convenient and I have enough desk space for both. Running a single set for both Windows and macOS requires unreliable software tweaks that have to be maintained and I no longer have patience for that.

I retired my old Microsoft Ergonomy Keyboard 4000. None of its potential successors looked compelling enough to me.

OS / software

Since MacBook became my main development platform, I no longer use Ubuntu. I also run Windows 10 on a desktop and that's unlikely to change since my PC doesn't meet Windows 11 requirements.

For servers I use Debian or its derivatives. I know enough of Linux to feel comfortable with it and I'm okay to learn new things if I have enough time for that. I taught myself basics of Ansible and I try to automate as many server-related activities as possible so that I don't waste time on repetitive tasks. I store [my Ansible roles on GitHub](#).

For coding, I usually use Visual Studio Code with multiple extensions and a terminal app (Guake on Ubuntu, iTerm2 on MacOS) bound to F1 key. I sometimes use other software, like IntelliJ IDEA, but I'm not a fan of big IDEs. I also used Sublime Text and various flavors of Eclipse. I'm not strongly opinionated on my work tools. I'm open to trying new ones if they get the job done, but I'm rather bad at discovering them myself.

I used to run Pi-Hole on a Raspberry Pi 3B as a network-wide ad blocker, but I stopped due to problems with bringing it back after blackouts or ISP issues. I have a Raspberry Pi 4 with an SSD drive ready to take over but I'm too lazy to finally get this done.

I maintain my personal blocklists for [Pi-hole](#) and [uBlock Origin](#). Pi-Hole is slowly losing relevance with the advent of DNS-over-HTTPS or smart devices hardcoding their DNS settings and I'm not happy about that. I hate online ads and I'm more likely to pay for good content than to agree to disable ad blocking upon request.

Mobile

Since June 2022 my daily driver is Samsung Galaxy S21 FE 5G. I have nothing interesting to say about it. It just works. I wish it had better battery.

At any given moment I probably have one or two generic phones which I use for for work-related stuff or testing. I typically do not get attached to them, but I often use them more than my main phone.

In October 2020 I replaced my previous Android tablet with Samsung Galaxy Tab S5e. I use it as a tool for passive content consumption, usually watching videos.

In early 2010s I briefly owned a second-hand iPhone 3GS and I loved it. From time to time I think about switching to iPhone but I haven't seen any compelling reason to pull the trigger. Owning an Apple computer didn't make me change my view.

Services / online tools

Since late 2000s I use Gmail with my own domain. Around 2017 I started paying for Google Workplace (formerly known as Google Apps or GSuite). Ridiculous as it sounds to pay for email, I find it reasonable to pay for a service I rely so much on in my life.

I usually keep unread email count below 30. I don't understand the concept of 'inbox zero' nor people who complain about hundreds of unread items in their inboxes. I opt in to receive email notifications for as much online stuff as I can. I use labels and filters to easily keep tabs on stuff I find important.

I'm a huge fan of email newsletters. Curated by passionate people, newsletters can be very efficient sources of content. I'm going to write a separate piece on newsletters I enjoy and I'll link it here when it's done.

I use Google Calendar to save anything that has to do with my time and requires me to take action. That includes bus tickets, commute times, payment dues and so on. This doesn't mean I'm well organized. I just appreciate having a well-informed tool at hand whenever things get out of control.

I listen to music on YouTube, Twitch and DI.fm. I pay for YouTube Premium. I don't use Spotify nor any other music streaming service. I find

YouTube and specialized independent radio stations much better tools for music discovery than Spotify or alikes.

I rarely watch VOD content. Only recently (as of March 2021) I signed up for a Netflix account.

I generally find streaming platforms a huge waste of time. Whenever I gain access to a new one (I usually get it for free alongside other service I pay for) I get bored after a week of using it. I occasionally make exceptions to watch interesting series or movies I missed.

In 90% of cases I'm deaf to recommendations or marketing campaigns persuading me to watch anything in particular on any platform. In most cases, when I make an exception, it turns out it wasn't worth it. Yes Squid Game, I'm looking at you.

I almost certainly didn't watch any show you recently saw on Netflix / HBO GO / Amazon Prime / elsewhere. If you want me to watch it, be ready to answer and justify your choice: which of the following I should quit: a) work, b) books, c) games, d) sleep, e) fun side projects like this site?

I watch YouTube a lot, mostly for edutainment. I like to think it makes me smarter, but I'm aware it's just another type of entertainment product.

I made YouTube fun for myself by disabling watch history and opting out of all personalization options. I try to game their recommendation system by searching for random stuff that can't be suggested to me based on my behavior on the platform. That way YouTube is more likely to serve me random (and sometimes interesting) content rather than content *they* want me to watch because millions of my fellows clicked it.

The problem I have with personalized recommendations in online services is that algorithms 'believe' all I need is either (1) more of the thing I consumed earlier, or (2) a lot of the things millions of other people reacted to. Even though I have some shallow understanding of a business model behind that, I find that kind of 'personalization' incredibly boring and, to some extent, harmful.

I watch Twitch, but not as much as I used to before 2018. In February 2021 I switched from [Vertical Twitch](#) to [Alternate Player for Twitch.tv](#). I enjoy using third-party Twitch interfaces because they keep things simple and cut all unnecessary distractions. I use FrankerFaceZ and BetterTTV.

I rarely watch Twitch *actively*, i.e. paying 100% attention to it. I usually treat it as background noise while doing other things.

Messaging / social media

I use plain ol' phone calls and texts, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Signal and Discord and many others. I'm not a fan of voice communication with electronic devices outside of professional environment. However, the 2020 pandemic made me reevaluate my stance on this.

I read Twitter via TweetDeck on PC and Fenix 2 on Android. I maintain a long blacklist of muted words. I wrote a separate article on [how I use Twitter](#).

I browse Reddit via old.reddit.com and Relay for Reddit on Android. Some of my favorite subreddits are r/explainlikeimfive, r/NoStupidQuestions and r/OutOfTheLoop. Reddit is far from perfect but it exposes me to topics and ideas I have zero chance to come across otherwise.

I stopped using Facebook around 2015. It was severely disrupting my productivity while offering nothing of value in return. The only Facebook product I'm still okay to use is WhatsApp. You can also read my take on [hidden costs of quitting Facebook](#).

I use LinkedIn mostly for keeping tabs on job market and business topics but I find this site very unsatisfying. I rarely learn interesting stuff or read insightful conversations on this platform. People tend to treat it as a more "professional" version of Instagram, which makes it very boring and artificial. There are people who produce tons of interesting content on this platform and I sometimes add them to my network, but that doesn't happen often.

I often experiment with non-mainstream services and protocols. I'm that one weird guy that has had profiles in all social media sites before they get mainstream, including ones that never took off (remember Bebo? Orkut? MySpace?). For about a year I have been running [my own Mastodon instance](#).

In mid 2022 my stance on social media have been evolving and you can finally find me on TikTok and (again) on Instagram. I am not a fan of these platforms and I have a lot to say about them, but I treat them like additional sources of traffic. I rarely use them to consume content, I find them waste of time by design and there's no easy way to change my stance on this.

Art / gaming / varia

I read books, both on paper and on Kindle, but I never remember what I've read. I mostly read non-fiction. I believe real life brings enough interesting stories for me not to care about fiction at all. I particularly like biographies, documentaries and history accounts with focus on 20th and 21st century.

I like electronic music. I have a very wide understanding of this term, including so-called Berlin School, early 2000s European trance, drum'n'bass, dubstep, synthwave and many more. I don't pay much attention to contemporary pop music, but I don't dislike it too. What we nowadays call 'classical' music was primarily designed to entertain audiences - not much difference from what pop music has been doing for entirety of its history.

I don't have preferences on specific books, games, music, or any other works of culture, so I don't know what's my favorite piece of this or that. Everything I consumed in the past helped shaping my inner quality index even if it was objectively bad. I sometimes like things that are mediocre. And I sometimes get heavily unamused by things that have been critically acclaimed.

I like video games. My first computer was Atari 65XE and I played a lot of River Raid, Boulder Dash and Moon Patrol. In 1990s I owned a Famicom clone known as 'Pegasus'. Thanks to it I got to know dozens of popular NES games despite never having owned an original NES. In 2010s I briefly owned a PlayStation Portable, but I didn't understand its appeal in the era of Android phones getting more and more powerful. I like racing games, strategies, open worlds and story-driven single-player campaigns.

At some point I realized I have way more games than lifetime to play them all and only a few of them are worth my time. I also didn't want to skip big story-based titles. Instead of looking at my library as a 'pile of shame', I started to be more selective and treat it like a [FIFO queue](#). I start a new game, finish it, pick next one in the queue, rinse and repeat. Adding a new title to my queue means I'm unlikely to play it sooner than in half a year. I make exceptions for interesting indies or service-like games like StarCraft II or Forza Horizon 4 and I play them whenever I feel like it.

As a side effect of the above, I refuse all and any games offered to me for free if they hadn't been on my wishlist. I rarely follow recommendations or buy new titles on their release day. I also don't follow any gaming-related news. By the time I finish a title from the top of my queue, the next item in my list will most likely be cheaper than on the release day.

In March 2021 bought a Nintendo Switch. For my thoughts on it check out [Nintendo Switch, dishonest review](#).

To be continued or edited.

June 2001 or How did it all begin

When I hear people talking about how they got online for the first time they often mention dial-up modems or expensive connections thier landline phone line. My story is somewhat different.

Without futher ado: it all started in June 2001 in an internet café. Except it didn't happen exactly in June 2001 and it wasn't an internet café. I never promised my personal legend would be fully truthful.

I heard of the Internet for the first time when I was a child. It was this big thing that sparked my imagination from the very first moment I heard of it.

But things needed time to click together. Even though I had a PC as early as 1998, my parents weren't eager to buy a dial-up modem. I'm pretty sure they knew it was an expensive business and the phone couldn't be used while being online.

The other place I could try this great new "Internet" thing was a computer lab in my school. If I remember correctly, it used a single dial-up modem to bring 15 computers online. I distinctively remember that characteristic dial-up sound. We had to wait a few more years to upgrade to unlimited broadband. Until then our fun time was strictly limited.

According to PC magazines I've been reading at the time, internet cafés in my country have been a thing since at least mid-90s. In 2001 I learnt of one opening in my home town. It felt like a huge deal to me and I was super excited to give it a shot.

What was waiting down the stairs was a dimly lighted room with ordinary desks and cheap chairs. Each desk had a computer, and all computers were connected to a local network.

Whenever I entered the place I could hear [this particular song](#). If not, somebody out there would always loop [Rock the Discothek by Prezioso](#). Those two tracks got stuck in my head forever.

But I wasn't there for first-person shooters or spontaneous LAN parties. Computers at the internet café were, well, connected to the Internet. This new exciting medium to explore, right in front of me. This magical "cyberspace" I've been hearing a lot on TV. Except now I no longer had to deal with dial-up modems and expensive metered connections.

I paid for computer hours with my pocket money and I cherished every minute. I could afford a few hours a week, which was plenty, but never enough. Plus I had to get back home for dinner and homework.

My StarCraft-loving audience of 2020 could compare internet cafés to PC bangs in South Korea but I'm not sure. Yeah, competitive skill-based games were a thing just like everywhere else, but I don't think anyone in my teenage bubble played them to compete. We played games for fun and there was no deep rationale behind this. TV channels didn't broadcast video game matches in the evenings, so we weren't even dreaming of esports tournaments. Our gaming culture was different from gaming cultures in countries where Nintendo had established their presence.

But I digress.

The internet was made for porn

The Internet of early 2000s was a vivid space full of interesting things. Honestly, I don't believe it differed that much from the Internet of 2020s if we exclude technological limitations.

Despite all the false romanticism, the 2000s internet in Poland has been a widely commercialized estate for a while. Web portals and search engines did exist. Local equivalents of eBay existed and it was possible to buy things online. Politics was happening and news were published. Celebrities existed. Hateful comments were posted. Ads were displayed. Porn existed and was always two clicks away. People talked to each other online. Chat rooms, discussion boards, instant messengers and blogs were booming.

Okay, uhm, yeah. SOME things were different.

We didn't have enough bandwidth to stream music or videos. Porn was static. Ads were unobtrusive. The industry-disrupting marriage of peer-to-peer networks and MP3 file format was yet to emerge.

More importantly though, there were still valid reasons to call the internet *cyberspace* and think of it as an alternative dimension rather than augmentation of our daily lives. What happened online stayed online. News on TV rarely mentioned politicians or celebrities doing stupid stuff on the Internet. I had pen friends I met on chat rooms and we were sending hand-written letters to each other because internet access was still too limiting to us.

Also, there was a very clear distinction between people we met in 'real life' and people we met 'online' as if the latter were some alien race. My parents never said 'yes' whenever I wanted to meet someone from the internet in real life.

Life without the internet was still possible.

June 2001

Okay, I'm lying a little here. It wasn't *exactly* June 2001.

I'm too lazy to consult [Wayback Machine](#) about exact dates even though I still remember URLs of my first websites and discussion groups I participated in. But I keep saying all cool things started in June 2001.

In June 2001 I [accidentally watched VIVA and discovered club music](#). In June 2001 I got my first mobile phone for my own hard-raised pocket money. But most importantly, somewhere around June 2001 I discovered true potential of the Internet and started exploring how websites were made.

Learning about computers at school I had a chance to sign up for a free web hosting account and upload my poorly baked homepage via FTP to the Internet. I couldn't shake off a feeling this was much bigger deal than it was but I struggled to make sense of it. It's hard to rationalize about revolutionary ideas when you have schoolwork to do.

In the meantime, one of my classmates showed me his website about a well-known game franchise. For a fun after-school project it looked impressive and I was a little jealous.

I found this program called Microsoft FrontPage and I quickly realized the whole process was fairly easy to start. Even better, I didn't have to be a

skilled designer to build pretty websites. I could use one of thousands of premade web templates as a starting point.

June 2001 was the time I got my first mobile phone, a black Motorola V2288 with a prepaid plan that charged an arm and a leg for every call or text message. Apart from calls and texts, as well as prehistoric take on mobile internet called WAP, it offered an option to compose one's own ringtone. In the era when mobile phones were primitive generic devices with monochromatic tiny displays, being able to set up your own ringtone was a serious deal that gave birth to multiple businesses selling them via premium-priced text messages.

I found out I could easily compose my own ringtones and they could be sent to anyone free of charge via SMS gateways offered by mobile carriers. My website was a collection of those ringtones together with instructions explaining how to send them to one's device.

Between 2001 and 2003 I composed several hundreds of ringtones. Being an avid watcher of [Viva](#) and [MTV2 Pop](#), I was capable of keeping tabs on current music and churning new ringtones at a fairly quick pace, offering much wider selection than any other website available at that time.

 My fancy website from 2001

Oh, and one more thing. I'm not exactly proud of this but I supplemented my collection with several hundred ringtones from other sources. That means I copied them to my website without asking for permission. One of their owners noticed that and, uhm, he let me know he wasn't happy. I'm not proud of this, but hey, I was a clueless teenager. At that time I knew nobody who could explain how intellectual property works on the internet, okay?

For most of the time I was still working in WYSIWYG mode in Microsoft FrontPage. I quickly ran across its limitations when I wanted to add a JavaScript snippet or remove unwanted artifacts messing with site layout. So I started to switch to 'Code' tab more and more often.

I was fixing things through trial and error long before I knew these funny languages were called 'HTML' and 'JavaScript'. Once done, I'd carry floppy disks with my website code to the internet café and upload it using Windows Commander to my free web hosting account.

And this became my routine for at least 2 more years: make updates at home, copy files to a floppy, go to the internet café, upload stuff, done. Rinse and repeat once a month. According to Web Archive I was providing

regular updates up to June 2003, though some subpages seem to have survived up to 2004.

My website died in a rather anticlimatic way. I forgot to remove my FTP credentials from the computer in the café. As a result, someone defaced my website with a warning not to leave saved FTP credentials on a shared computer. I never managed to get my website back online.

Floppy disks I used to transport the website to the café survived to 2020 but data recovery software failed to extract anything of interest. In April 2020 I discarded them. No regrets.

My new superpower of building and putting stuff online proved to be useful sooner than I expected. I no longer had to care about computer lessons in any school or university I attended. I quickly gained reputation of this nerdy guy that knows computers.

Despite twists and turns in my life I kept my interest in the internet alive. Thanks to that I was able to land my first job in IT industry, move out of my sleepy home town and start a new exciting chapter in life.

I don't know what happened to the internet café in my home town. I'm pretty sure it stopped being a profitable business as soon as local internet providers started offering affordable broadband access.

What happened after 2005 was the Luke the Blogger era. I learnt PHP and WordPress, purchased my first domain name, started paying for web hosting, met a lot of like-minded people in the blogosphere. Quite a few of them are still in my contact list as of 2020. But believe me, this doesn't warrant an interesting article unless you want to read an old man reminiscing about good old days and complaining about bad new days. Nah. Gotta move on.

On music, mostly (not) techno

Okay, uhm... How do I start this without boring statements like 'music has been part of my life since I remember, yadda yadda yadda'. Let's try this: of all music-related things that happened in my life, none of them I owe to my music teacher or my family. If I could credit one person, it would have been [Daisy Dee](#).

You can't stop us

In 2001 I had no internet access at home so I had to use old-fashioned TV for accidental life-changing discoveries. Sadly, television in my country wasn't particularly educative or entertaining. At some point my parents bought a satellite receiver and I started watching foreign channels in languages I didn't understand. Apart from a certain type of channels my parents didn't want me to watch, especially late at night, there was another one, much more teen-friendly: music television. Since most of satellite channels were German, I watched German VIVA and MTV 2 Pop.

Somewhere in July 2001 (this time it's an actual date, not [a symbol](#)) one thing on VIVA randomly caught my attention. It was a live coverage of a major music festival in some German city. Unimaginable crowds of people on streets, live music played from moving platforms, a captivating atmosphere of love and unity.

Another Love Parade was happening in Berlin.

It hit me hard like nothing else earlier and nothing else later in my life. The music. The atmosphere.

At that time I was way too young to even think about this, but attending a Love Parade became my ultimate dream. I wanted to find myself in that crowd of people dancing to club music in a huge western city. Nothing possibly could have gone wrong about that. I just needed to wait until I could afford a trip to Berlin on my own.

Then [2010 disaster happened](#) and the dream was dead.

My fascination with club music, which I was still erraneously calling 'techno', didn't end there. I was discovering new artists every day. ATB, Kai Tracid, Paul Van Dyk, Kenny Takito, Mark'Oh, Starsplash, Tomcat, Prezioso... I can go on and on.

Club Rotation

Viva, Viva Zwei and MTV 2 Pop. The trifecta of German TV channels that were playing club music from western Europe became my primary source of music discoveries. Club Rotation was my obligatory position to watch every weekend.

It was a whole different world of sounds compared to the one I knew from mainstream media in my country.

Up to 2010s Polish pop music felt, I don't know, dead serious and boring. It wasn't about fun. It was more about telling stories, sometimes dark and serious, usually about love, spirituality or similar nonsense. I can't remember any notion of plain old unencumbered fun in Polish pop songs from late 1990s or 2000s that would stuck in my teenage head.

It took me some time to understand why it was that way. In 2020 I came up with my own unproven hypothesis.

Living in a country with traumatic chapters in its history made its music sound the way it sounded. If you wanted to sing about freedom and happiness, it was difficult not to sound emotional or nostalgic no matter how hard you tried not to. And that's what I didn't like about Polish pop music of my teenage time.

If you lived on the side of the Iron Curtain, well, things were different. Your country may have had its political problems, but you didn't have to take them that seriously. You weren't dreaming of regaining political independence from some big brother that had been pulling strings in your country since World War II. Pop music in your country could, and did, sound different. It could use this element of careless fun and genuine feeling of freedom.

Early 2000s club music from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France and a few other countries was closely related to dance music from 1990s. Computers and electronic equipment were already present in the production process. Vinyl records, remixing and scratching was still there.

Club music was supposed to fill dancefloors and make people tired, so repetitive drums, catchy melodies and atmospheric vocals were used.

Media in my country seemed to ignore western club music. At least that's what I was thinking. I eventually stumbled upon an equivalent of VIVA Club Rotation in a local radio station, played every Saturday night. When I went to a secondary school, it turned out quite a few people in my group were familiar with the same songs as me. We were a legion.

Somewhere in 2000s I finally saw the Berlin Victory Column, but sadly there was no music festival happening at that time. Felt great, timing a little poor perhaps.

A few years later I learnt about psychedelic trance, minimal techno and many other genres I wouldn't have heard of from TV. [Mahadeva by Astral Projection](#) still sends shivers down my spine. There was a time when you could get me hypnotized with [Conga Fury by Juno Reactor](#).

In 2015 I celebrated the new year with Paul Van Dyk playing live near the Warsaw National Stadium. That one and only Paul Van Dyk that brought me tears of joy with [For an Angel](#) and [Nothing But You](#) in the 2000s.

Fast forward

I never stopped listening to club music. I never made it to a Love Parade or any large-scale festival like Mayday, and that sucks, but it's fine. I witnessed slow but steady evolution that put a 'vintage' label to vinyl records and brought MacBooks to DJ tables. Electronic sounds typical for trance music started to creep into mainstream genres effectively rendering the notion of 'electronic music' meaningless. All popular music sooner or later became electronic music.

I'm glad I was at the right time and the right place.

People often tend to whine music used to be better when they were young. That's not me. Yes, I tend to feel nostalgic about old music and I don't understand some modern genres. But lot of great things happened in the meantime.

Dozens of great young artists produce amazing electronic music on a daily basis. Producers like [Raz Nitzan](#) still deliver tons of freshly produced beats as if 2000s never ended. I fell in love with modern drum'n'bass and

synthwave. I keep discovering new, less known artists that wouldn't have made it to MTV 2 Pop in the 2000s. Internet revolutionized music discovery to the point I'd never have dreamt of.

Oh, and one more thing. I maintain a [nostalgic eurotrance playlist on YouTube](#). It is the most comprehensive selection of club music as I remember it. Keeping it up-to-date is getting more and more difficult as a lot of songs are getting increasingly harder to come by. But I love getting back to it for my quarterly nostalgia trips. Go check it. It's good.

How I use Twitter and (not) get insane

Disclaimer: Since October 2022 I winded down my Twitter activity and moved to Mastodon, effectively rendering this article irrelevant. Leaving it intact for archival purposes.

I've been using Twitter with various breaks since 2008. Until mid 2010s using it outside of the US made very little sense, but it was steadily gaining popularity while suffocating locally available alternatives until it became the only player in the field. My approach to Twitter evolved a lot and it took me a few years to figure out how to use it in a sane way.

Not gonna lie though, I like Twitter. But it's a very complicated relationship. As of 2020 I treat it like a fun, zero-commitment medium to communicate with a close circle of people outside of my usual filter bubbles.

It wasn't always that way. I've tried different approaches, including using Twitter in a professional context, tweeting stuff related to web development, meeting mutuals in real life and so on. I eventually decided I need some breathing space between Twitter and my 'offline' life so that I have some control over what my followers know about me.

Twitter as a medium is broken and the world is broken due to its existence. But I can't spend my life being an old man yelling at clouds. To make Twitter fun and useful for myself, I developed some non-obvious personal strategies. It is by no means a magical recipe to make Twitter perfect again, but it works for me.

So, here's how I Twitter.

Chronological timeline

Since 2016 Twitter presents tweets in algorithmic fashion and lets users switch back to chronological timeline. This wouldn't have been an issue if Twitter had made the setting permanent, but no. Having to switch back to

chronological order is annoying as hell, as it's clearly Twitter's ill will rather than technological limitation.

Algorithmic timeline presents tweets out of order, out of context, based on opaque criteria I can't customize in any way. Additionally, it often presents tweets and interactions between people I don't follow, which effectively renders the whole notion of 'following / follower' useless. I can make educated guesses about which of my followers uses algorithmic timeline based on their response time and certain behaviors, such as engaging in conversations they weren't invited to or late reactions to time-sensitive content.

But most importantly, by treating reactions as a useful metric, algorithmic timeline is prone to muting people whose tweets get little to no attention. This is exactly the opposite of what I want for two reasons. First, noisy tweets aren't always the ones I want or need to see in my timeline. Second, I want those faint voices of people who post one tweet a month to be visible in my timeline. When they bother to wake up and speak, they probably want to be heard.

Chronological timeline puts the responsibility for content quality back on me. I want to see everything that has been posted by people I follow and nothing else. Of course I will still see a lot of irrelevant content or miss a lot of stuff I may have been interested in, but I can work around that or catch up whenever I want. No algorithm will spend my attention budget better than me.

TweetDeck and non-official clients

At the time of writing, I use TweetDeck on desktop and Fenix 2 on Android devices. Except TweetDeck, I avoid using default Twitter clients whenever I can. The web version of Twitter on desktop, apart from failing to remember my timeline settings and pushing lots of unwanted content into my timeline, is very confusing and too distracting to use daily. It's slightly better on mobile and I sometimes use it to vote in polls or check communities.

TweetDeck is the last officially supported tool that makes Twitter experience widely customizable so that I can see content I want to see and nothing else.

Unofficial Twitter apps on Android have one major flaw: due to Twitter being hostile to third-party API consumers those apps miss some features. In Fenix 2 I can't see options in polls or people who liked a particular tweet due to stupid restrictions on Twitter's end. But I still prefer using crippled, but more usable version of Twitter interface rather than touching their official apps.

Mute words and phrases first, people second

I rarely block people. I block bots disguised as people for stupid marketing practices or bots auto-retweeting my content. Blocking actual humans for whatever they said or did is usually pointless, since it doesn't block content visibility or ability to interact (it's easy to evade with a different account anyway). People tend to use blocking in very childish ways, treating it as a statement rather than actual moderation tool. Being able to block people we don't agree with ranks high among Twitter's worst gifts to humanity. I didn't sign up for this.

I do, however, mute words and phrases. Thanks to English language having very limited declension compared to my native language, I can block a single word rather than a whole array of variations to achieve the same effect.

My list of muted words contains phrases used by automated spammy tools like Affinitweet, hashtags related to other social media sites (with Instagram and TikTok being among the top offenders), some specific emoji, as well as phrases related to giveaways, retweeting, following or liking tweets (if your content is attention-worthy you won't have to beg for it), and a lot of other stuff I don't want to care about for my own reasons.

Sadly, Twitter's mechanism of muting is lackluster. It's impossible to mute everything I don't want to see without collateral damage. I'm aware of the fact muting some critical phrases will yield dozens of false positives. But the ultimate game is about my own comfort of using the platform first and foremost. All the sacrifice here is the kind of sacrifice I'm willing to make.

No retweets

Under the hood Twitter is a very primitive mechanism with many legacy parts covered by fancy user interface. For example, blocking words like

“RT” or “retweet” brought an interesting side effect: I stopped seeing retweets of all people in my timeline. At first it was an accidental discovery, then I loved this cool undocumented feature.

Retweets aren't bad per se. But they take away from the same attention budget I want to spend on people actually creating content. Writing and publishing a tweet takes time and effort and this is what I want to recognize among people I follow. Retweets are too easy, usually posted impulsively, and rarely meaningful enough to pay attention to them. Nobody in the world is famous for retweeting stuff. Even an ape can be taught to push a button.

Quote-tweets are marginally better, but they introduce problems of their own: people usually abuse them instead of replying to the original poster. But I do quote-tweet myself too, so let's pretend you didn't read this paragraph.

Watch who you follow...

That is self-explanatory enough. I try to keep my following list lean so that I can say a sentence or two about each and every person I follow. I don't have any specific preferences or insights in this regard. Everyone is a DJ on their own dancefloor and can play whatever music they want.

...or use lists

...but there was a time when I followed more people than I had attention budget for and some of them were particularly noisy. For this kind of humans there is a separate place in hell.

I handle noisy but interesting people on Twitter in a following way: I mute them on my timeline and put them on a separate list I check alongside my timeline. That's it. Problem solved.

As of December 2020 nobody in my following list receives this kind of treatment.

Additionally, Twitter lists are underappreciated tool for following people posting on highly specific topics that would otherwise get lost in my timeline. Obviously, creating a new list effectively adds another feed to check, but customizable tools like TweetDeck make it a less painful than it sounds.

No politics

Okay, politics on Twitter is a complicated topic. I see no way to reliably mute or block all of it. I don't blame people for discussing it. I have evolving political views myself.

But I treat being on Twitter as a very personal game and it's about my own comfort first. And I want to keep my part of Twitter free of politics for as long as possible. It's not exactly easy living in a country where politics has always been a heated topic. But I ultimately want my Twitter 'bubble' to be a safe enclave, free of pointless discussions nobody ever wins.

That doesn't mean I don't want divisive topics or heated discussions on my timeline. But I demand quality topics to argue about. You are always fine to bring the greatest hits like pineapple on pizza or Polish language sounding gibberish.

I eventually figured out the following rule of thumb: no political commentary on my timeline if it doesn't personally concern me or the person posting it.

I support political activism with clear calls-to-action that could benefit from attention on social media, like fundraisers, petitions or other forms of helping a group of people in need. Politics matters as long as being involved in it has potential to change reality. If not, it's just cheap online slacktivism. And no, I don't believe in 'spreading awareness' if you don't put money where your mouth is.

Commenting on a presidential election in a country you don't even live in or discussing some controversial law change that has no effect on you is effectively a waste of time, both yours as a commenter and mine as a reader.

Yes, exceptions do happen from time to time. I break these rules myself once or twice a year.

Build your own bubble in a conscious way. And pop it sometimes

There's this popular concept of 'filter bubbles' formulated by Eli Pariser in early 2010s. I'm aware of it and it definitely made my online life better

and worse at the same time. Some of the strategies I discussed earlier harden my bubble even further.

At first I thought I should beware of bubbles at all cost, but this is not a fun way of living. I can't spend all of my online time gaming algorithms and dealing with constant stream of randomness.

On Twitter I often follow people of diverse backgrounds. We may share some common interests, but the ultimate power of diversity is that I get to see content I wouldn't have seen otherwise. It's those people who bring interesting perspectives to thought-provoking topics and give visibility to issues I wouldn't have spotted myself. They bring this element of randomness to the usual curated stream of content.

On threads

One more thing that deserves a dishonorable mention: threads. Sadly, I don't know what to do with them, so I'll just rant.

Threads on Twitter are an interesting feature for series of tweets on common topics. However, people abuse them to publish essays, which completely misses the point. Twitter threads make them very inconvenient to read. External tools like Threader App work around this problem but they don't solve it completely.

Besides, there's no difference in visibility between a threaded essay and a short tweet, which I believe is unfair given that they aren't equal to each other. I'll put it this way: writing an essay on Twitter is an equivalent of writing an essay on toilet paper. Yes, as a reader I think Twitter sucks this much as a blogging platform. Even Medium.com, which I hate for different reasons, is miles better as a home for your essays.

If you value your readers' time, write long pieces, but give them readability and discoverability they deserve rather than opting for a lazy option. Even posting them on external services like TwitLonger and linking them is better if you don't want to start your own blog.

In the end it doesn't even matter

And that's what I wanted to say about Twitter. It sometimes frustrates the heck out of me. I genuinely believe its management team has no clear product vision. I believe alternative takes on social media, such as

[Mastodon](#), deserve more mainstream attention if we want to live in a healthy society.

But I do keep coming back to Twitter because, well, it's there and I can't help that. Sheesh.

Love letter to racing games

I enjoy video games. Racing games is a genre I enjoy in particular. I played at least one on every single gaming platform I've owned. Some of them took hundreds of hours of my life and here is my love letter to all of them.

It's been quite a weird story so far. The concept of racing against opponents with pixel boxes on limited surfaces using some sort of computing device is neither new or innovative. And I'm fairly quick to get bored with frequent reiterations on old ideas.

I don't even consider them competitive games, at least I think I don't perceive them that way. 90% of my time is spent racing against computer opponents. I just learn and repeat exact same moves against some stupid computer logic extravagantly referred to as 'AI'. I like racing against friends but I rarely take it super competitively.

Nor do I even consider myself a 'car guy'. I never watched any installment of Fast & Furious. In a country whose automobile industry died before I got my driving license I had no more affection to cars than to my vacuum cleaner. Every bit of my interest in cars, from subscribing to Doug DeMuro to being able to tell if that was a Supra, came way, way later.

So what the heck?

I don't know.

I think it's less about racing and more about that cliché notion of experiencing stories I wouldn't have experienced otherwise.

In real life I'll never know what it feels to drive an expensive overpowered car without worrying about totalling it on a nearest tree. Games were always there to scratch that itch.

Some modern games offer even more: an organized journey through various stages of driver's personal development. I start at the very bottom, struggling to survive the whole event. Hundreds of hours later I end up topping time trial leaderboards with fastest vehicles available.

While I'm rarely interested in reaching the very top, the journey is what is an ultimate fun part.

Anyway, enough of this old guy talk. Here goes. From the early 1990s to 2021, below is my racing journey so far.

Pitstop (Atari XE)

I got it on a cassette tape somewhere in the 1990s. This game started it all, both my interest in racing games and my fascination with computers. Just like all games on my Atari, 50% of the enjoyment was waiting 20 minutes until it loaded a welcome screen.

Despite its primitive nature Pitstop had some mind-blowing features for an ancient 8-bit game. Tyres were degrading, fuel was depleting and I had to pit from time to time. Pit crew members had to be operated manually one by one, so it took a while to change all four tyres and refuel. Fortunately, there was no need to rush as the game wasn't tracking times or maintaining any rankings. And this simplicity was amazing enough for my child brain.

Lotus III (Amiga)

I saw it for the first time on my brother-in-law's Amiga. First fully-fledged racing game I ever saw, with refueling, ranking system, interesting tracks in different sceneries and a car selection (only 3 cars, but still). It also made my jaw drop with an amazing soundtrack. Until then I had no idea any computer could sound that good.

A few years later I got a PC version of this game. However, the soundtrack played on primitive MIDI instruments (or worse, that squeaky thing stupidly called a 'PC speaker') didn't sound that good any more. Amiga version was unmatched.

Micro Machines (Famiclone / NES)

A rare gem from a Famiclone era. It was also quite hard to come by. Very few people in my area owned it.

When I managed to get it (usually by borrowing it for a few days, never actually owned it), I loved this game. Compared to other games I played on my Famiclone, Micro Machines felt truly premium. It was released on a

single cartridge alongside 4 other Codemasters titles and that made it feel like a serious deal unlike those 500-in-1 bootleg cartridges we could have for peanuts.

I needed quite some time to learn how to control vehicles in this game. If my vehicle was heading upwards, I could press the right button to make it turn right - easy. But if the car was heading downwards and I wanted it to face the right edge of the screen, I would still push the right button as if perspective didn't matter at all.

Well, some people had trouble using a computer mouse. Others were scared to death when they watched a movie showing a train arriving at a station. I had trouble internalizing how perspective works in a top-down video game. *shrugs*

Monster Truck Madness 2 (PC)

Monster truck racer published by Microsoft for Windows 95. One of my first PC games at all. It had sensible arcade physics, selectable camera angles, looked reasonably well for its time and sounded good. It even allowed for ignoring the race and exploring the map as if it was an open world game.

I played dozens of hours of it. It wasn't a big breath-taking title but it felt satisfyingly right in every department.

Midtown Madness (PC)

First game I ever played that married racing with a 3D open world. I didn't play it much as a racing game. I just loved cruising around a simplified, but captivating recreation of Chicago.

Sadly, the game was too demanding for my PC and I had to play it in 320x240 on 15" display. Not fun, but still better than nothing at all. It was still enough to infect me with an idea of exploring open maps and driving anywhere I could see. Other games, like Driver, were already exploring that concept, but I had to wait a few more years before my PC was capable of handling this kind of complexity.

International Rally Championship (PC)

I got this game as a full version attached to a popular PC gaming magazine somewhere in early 2000s. I already had a fairly powerful desktop that could handle newer games, but IRC was memorable (which is a covert way of saying I couldn't afford getting Colin McRae Rally). It had decent selection of iconic rally cars, fun physics and a [great soundtrack](#) I'd listen for hours and hours.

I have a feeling a lot of those early games made themselves memorable by great music rather than gameplay. Is that a bad thing though?

Excessive Speed (PC)

Another game from a PC magazine. Obscure but fun top-down racer with a few game modes: classic racing, time trial and driving with a bomb, as well as a limited selection of cars and tracks to unlock. It had really good visuals for its time. Even in 2021 it doesn't look that bad. But it has some rough edges to warrant dozens of negative Steam reviews.

I still own a CD with it.

V-Rally (J2ME)

First mobile game that was significant enough to be mentioned. I played it on a few phones up to Sony Ericsson K810i.

For a game designed for a tiny phone screen it looked stunning, with 3D visuals, varied tracks, convincing physics and an option to watch replays. I appreciate it for giving me early taste of great things to happen to mobile devices within next few years.

Asphalt 8: Airborne (Android)

Another mobile racer. But this one came out in a 'modern' era when I no longer knew how to type fast on a numpad. At that time I had a Samsung Galaxy S III and this hooking game to grind for hours and hours.

Memorable tracks, physics that promoted drifting, jumping and barrel rolls, low friction multiplayer mode, interesting progression, great soundtrack. For quite a while this game was really big in my life.

Need for Speed: World (PC)

Until 2021 it was my first and only game from Need for Speed franchise. I kid you not. I never experienced any others before this one. Either I didn't have access to them or my PC wasn't strong enough.

I loved this game for combining racing events with open world free roaming. It was the exact type of game I wanted to play since Midtown Madness. Cruising around the city and collecting diamonds was as much fun as racing in itself. Even though I already experienced open world car games like GTA: San Andreas, NFS: World was the title that reignited my love to the idea of having a city to explore and doing silly things with different vehicles.

Sadly, I hopped into this game in 2013 when it had been troubled with rampant cheating and lack of proper maintenance. I was super bummed to kiss it goodbye in 2015. I had to wait until 2018 to feel the thrill of exploring an open world car game while sitting in a powerful car.

On a side note, Need for Speed: World was reverse engineered and it's still somewhat alive as of 2021, known as Soapbox Race World.

F1 2016 (PC)

This game convinced me to buy an Xbox controller. Until then I had been playing all games with a keyboard and it was fine. But for a game with powerful purpose-built cars and fairly demanding physics analog precision was a must.

As an officially endorsed Formula 1 game it does its job reasonably well. But the whole franchise suffers from one major flaw: every single installment gets obsolete after a year. To experience new season with all up-to-date changes I have to pay full price for a new game. And it's quite expensive.

That's not the only problem. After 2017 I can no longer play it comfortably with a controller. I never figured out how to switch between ERS modes without losing focus on racing. I eventually gave up trying and moved on.

The Crew 2 (PC)

At first it was an accidental discovery. Then it turned out to be a game I needed to fill the gap after Need for Speed: World. The Crew 2 was the game that gave me the thrill of unlimited exploration on a huge open

world map. I inevitably had to play it before I was ready to understand the phenomenon of Forza Horizon franchise.

This also was a game that made me fall in love with long endurance races. 40-minute hypercar course between two US coasts belongs to one of the best gaming experiences I ever had to date.

Sadly, nowadays I find it impossible to play. Physics and car handling felt okay when I didn't know any better. Getting back to it after playing other driving games felt very uncomfortable. I can't handle heavily assisted car behavior any more.

Good racing game has to be believable while translating my input into car behavior. It doesn't have to be realistic. All it has to do is to be consistent, even if it means punishing my frantic overcorrections, braking too late or being on a wrong gear. GTA V, while not being a racing game per se, is a good example of what I have in mind.

Forza Horizon 4 (PC)

What do I say? Let numbers speak: more than 1000 hours spent and still counting since the release in 2018. Collected all 700+ cars and drove all of them for at least 5 minutes. Playing it religiously at least once a month with various breaks. No other game I've played that much in my life. This game finally managed to explain 'car culture' to me.

It's not a perfect game. Not even close to the best racing game. It could use better post-release maintenance, numerous UI improvements and better networking. Endgame is severely lacking and the novelty wears off as soon as all single player events are completed. But it has some specific charm that makes me come back for more.

I don't even perceive it as a racing game. It's a game about experiencing cars in general. You get a huge map with various surface types and a collection of 700+ cars and it's up to you what to do with that. Whether it's racing, drifting, doing stunts, fooling around in free roam mode or taking photos, this game offers it all.

Dirt Rally 2.0 (PC)

Rally simulator that prompted me to buy a steering wheel. The idea of switching to racing simulators didn't stand the test of time (controller is

easier and faster to plug than a full wheel setup) but I'm glad I tried.

I still keep coming back to this game from time to time. It offers a very specific kind of pleasure. Unlike other games I've tried, it takes no prisoners. It requires insane levels of focus and offers plenty of satisfaction when I manage to finish events in one piece. It teaches patience and precision like no other racing game.

Forza Horizon 3 (PC)

I never experienced Forza Horizon 3 after the release, so I bought it on sale to kill boredom between content updates in Horizon 4.

Experiencing Forza Horizon 4 felt like a magical experience that changed everything, but it felt that way because I didn't know what to expect. Playing Forza Horizon 3 in 2020 still felt like playing a long awaited sequel.

Familiar, but still fresh environment, unique atmosphere of a car-themed festival with amazing music, dozens of events to participate. I knew what to expect and I wanted it all, right in my face, once again. Australia felt big and spacious compared to the UK from Horizon 4. Hot Wheels DLC is by far the best DLC I've played in the franchise. It makes DLCs from Horizon 4 look half-baked.

Wreckfest (PC)

Demolition-themed racer with dilapidated cars. In this game winning usually means dying as late as possible. Sometimes it has to do with being first to cross the finish line, but it also involves levels of violence unknown to traditional racing games.

It took me quite some time to give this game appreciation it deserves, but when I did, it turned out to be the most captivating experience I had in car games for a while. Unlike other games, it's not about being the fastest or the most skilful. It's more about imagination, survival instinct and a little bit of luck. Or giving up all hope and bringing a school bus to a demolition derby event.

For a genre where every single game reuses ideas from the same old playbook Wreckfest is an underappreciated gem.

What's next?

I tried many other games I didn't mentioned here. Some of them were fun, others were regrettable. Over the years I got better at telling the two apart from the distance.

As of 2021 I'm sure I'm not going to explore sim racing any further. 50% of the success is getting a comfortable setup and I'm too lazy for that. I settled with arcade racers for good.

I'd love to experience a Gran Turismo franchise, but I'm unlikely to buy a PlayStation console. Only a few major game studios make good racing games these days. Sadly one of them is Codemasters, another is Ubisoft.

So yeah, I guess I have to wait for a new Forza Horizon installment or a completely new franchise.

Nintendo Switch, dishonest review

Nintendo Switch has always been this weird product I struggled to understand as a lifelong PC gamer. As a citizen of a country Nintendo pretends doesn't exist I have zero nostalgia about any of their popular franchises. I'm not sure if I ever met anyone who owned any original Nintendo console before. So it was absolutely logical that I found a reason to buy a Switch and see what the deal is.

Boom. It happened.

Before we talk about Switch, I have to get through the boring part of explaining who I am and where I come from. It matters because I'm not your average lifestyle blogger or a tech reviewer who spent half their childhood playing all Zelda games.

Before Switch, there was... nothing?

Until 1990s, the history of gaming in my country involved mostly 8-bit and 16-bit minicomputers, mostly Atari XE, Commodore 64 or Amiga. In the meantime Nintendo had decided that our market, as well as a few others on the 'wrong' side of the iron curtain, was not worth gracing with their official presence. As a result, Nintendo consoles weren't as easily available or affordable as in other European countries. If anyone in my area in the 1990s had a Game Boy, NES or SNES, they belonged to quite an elite club.

We were familiar with a significant chunk of Nintendo's portfolio thanks to [Pegasus console](#) and dozens of unlicensed cartridges that could be traded legally due to faulty copyright law. Importers of bootleg NES clones made better job at introducing Nintendo to us than Nintendo themselves.

I played Super Mario Bros, Contra, two Dizzy installments and dozens of other games from American and Japanese markets. Light guns for Pegasus were a thing, so I got to know Duck Hunt, Hogan's Alley and Wild Gunman. On the other hand though, I never had a chance to see any installment of Zelda, Earthbound, Pokémon or Castlevania. I had no idea

there were more installments of Super Mario Bros beyond the very first one. For most of the time me and my friends were at the mercy of local sellers trading bootleg cartridges. We played whatever was available.

Fast forward to 2021 and Nintendo still maintains their presence in Poland via a [third-party company based in Czechia](#) that does bare minimum as company representative. Authorized repairs take time and are unjustifiably expensive, as the console has to be sent to a repair centre in Czechia. Switch interface has no Polish translation. I've never seen any marketing campaigns involving Nintendo consoles in my vicinity. At the same time, Sony and Microsoft have had official branches in Poland since forever. Their flagship titles were on every billboard I've seen on my way to work.

I have zero reasons to love Nintendo for anything. Their games were indeed part of my childhood, but I don't give Nintendo any credit for that. They missed the opportunity to enter our market when people still remembered bootleg NES clones and they keep pretending the part of Europe between Germany and Russia is a meteor crater. Therefore, I treated buying a Switch like a gamble, with a plan to resell it if I fail to find a compelling reason to keep using it.

Tl;dr: I still own a Switch with no plans of reselling it. I enjoy it despite its flaws. But my feelings towards Nintendo as a company didn't change much. Nintendo is an Apple of gaming, except they use underpowered hardware. Switch is essentially an overpriced 2017 smartphone.

Okay, so what is this thing?

To understand what Switch is, it makes sense to look at system specs and Nintendo history.

Nintendo has been selling consoles since 1970s, with NES released in 1983. Until 2017 they released seven generations of home and portable consoles, with Wii U and 3DS being the last generations before Switch.

Nintendo Switch, introduced in 2017, combined separate lines of stationary and portable consoles into a single form factor with an option to choose between docked and handheld mode. Nintendo Switch retains a lot of design features from earlier iterations, such as familiar button layout or the ability to use joycons as motion-based wireless controllers in a similar fashion to Wii Remotes.

Under the hood Nintendo Switch uses 4 ARM cores at 1.02 GHz, 256 nVidia Maxwell-based GPU cores and 4 GB of RAM. Somewhat decent for a system designed in mid 2010s. What differs Switch from a 2017 smartphone is that it has active cooling and highly specialized operating system that could be optimized to be more lightweight than any version of Android or iOS.

There is also Switch Lite which is purely portable, e.g. can't be plugged to a TV. I never found it compelling though. It makes sense to pay more for a fully-featured console and enjoy the ecosystem to the fullest.

I keep calling Switch a 2017 smartphone but I don't necessarily consider it sarcasm. It accurately describes what Switch actually is, effectively calibrating my expectations. I hold a similar view on Xbox and PlayStation - under the hood they are nothing else than custom-designed purpose-built PCs.

~~At the time of writing Nintendo Switch Pro is being rumored but I'm not willing to comment on a product that doesn't exist yet.~~ Instead of rumored Switch Pro we got Switch OLED, which is same old Switch with minor improvements.

Nintendo Switch, good parts

There's quite a few of them. It's a very interesting piece of hardware that sits in a specific niche.

Portability and form factor is what make Nintendo Switch unique.

The fact you can switch seamlessly between stationary and handheld mode is a great feature. But I'm more willing to praise Nintendo for the fact that Switch is a portable console at all. ~~Since the discontinuation of PS Vita there are no other competitors on this market except mobile devices.~~ Steam Deck may be an interesting alternative once it gets released, but it's a completely different beast.

Buying a Switch you enter into a very specific ecosystem of games

that have been perfected over many iterations on multiple hardware generations. Some of them are criminally addicting and surprisingly detailed for a low-spec platform. Almost all of them are designed to age relatively well. You won't understand twenty-somethings getting excited over cartoonish games for kids unless you join this camp yourself.

It boots within seconds and can be kept in sleep mode all the time. Picking it up takes seconds. That makes Switch great to be used often but in irregular intervals.

Touch screen, even though it feels cheap and it's useless for anything other than typing, is acceptably responsive and reliable.

Aaaand not so good parts

It's expensive to buy and not so affordable to own. Apart from hardware you also need a decently sized SD card. You probably want to sign up for Nintendo Switch Online subscription to get cloud saves and access to more games. For longer sessions in front of your TV you probably want to buy a Pro Controller. This is still a 2017 smartphone with a fancy form factor and no amount of marketing can make up for that. I agree there's a fundamental difference between a game console and a smartphone but I still don't think it's reasonable to put Switch in the same price range as some PlayStation or Xbox bundles.

Flagship titles are expensive. Cloud saves as well as some older games require a paid subscription. Indies, even though abundant, are a mixed bag. I'm writing this as a citizen of a country in central Europe, with product prices like in Western Europe and average wages like in Eastern Europe, hence my perspective might be a little skewed.

It's made by Nintendo, a Japanese company with specific values and foreign cultural code that heavily influences various decisions, from inability to craft multiple items in Animal Crossing: New Horizons (no Nintendo, inanimate virtual objects don't have 'souls') to completely ignoring some European markets throughout its history (but that we already established, right?). And just like every single corporation, Nintendo understands money as their only language. So, be ready to get frustrated over weird design quirks and have nobody to listen to you.

Also, why the heck does this whole 'amiibo' thing exist? How does Nintendo get away with locking additional game content behind physical items while other AAA game studios get heavily criticized for much less?

No ratings, download metrics or player reviews in Nintendo eShop. Visuals and descriptions on product pages are usually ~~bullsh~~ written in marketing language that screams 'Buy me! I'm great!' rather than 'This what I have to offer, take it or leave it'. To effectively discover new games

on this platform I have to rely on external sources. And some of these sources may be sponsored.

Some games are sluggish and laggy. I know many games are ported from other platforms, but in case of Nintendo Switch there's only one platform to target. It's not a PC or an Android device with millions of different hardware and OS combinations. Game studios deserve most of the criticism for that but Nintendo as a gatekeeper deserves its share too.

Nintendo flagship games often make offensively poor job at explaining themselves. Picked up Tetris 99 and you keep losing battle after battle? Good luck figuring out 'badges' or 't-spin factory' without googling, and yes, you will need to know those to have a chance to win games. Do you keep losing races in Mario Kart 8? Did you know your choice of vehicle, tyres and parachute isn't as cosmetic as it seems? Can you figure out how to disable 'smart' steering without looking for instructions? Discovering hidden chunks of knowledge is enjoyable as long as the game itself prompts us to look for them. Games that require googling to discover their full functionality are poorly designed.

Some Nintendo flagships run at 30fps in docked mode on a console that sends 60hz full HD signal to external displays. Yes Animal Crossing, I'm looking at you. Other games run at 1600x900 in TV mode and they still have performance issues - that's The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. I'd have forgiven this kind of issues to a third-party title. But we're discussing platform-exclusive flagships.

In case of indies, especially affordable ones, you never know what you get. You may be playing a game dedicated for the platform or a quick cashgrab ported from Android / iOS. This may be good or bad thing depending on the game.

No refunds and downloadable demo versions are scarce. It makes me think twice before paying full price for any digital game on this platform. Imagine Cyberpunk 2077 getting released on Switch.

Not all games are released physically. Sometimes it takes time before it happens at all. Additional paid content makes things even more complicated. Producing physical copies of Switch games is expensive.

Analog controls in joycons are so flat they're in fact digital input. Maybe that's a flaw, maybe a deliberate design, I don't know. Pro

Controller marginally solves this problem but I disagree throwing money at a problem can be called a 'solution'.

~~**No official support for wireless headphones** except a few models that rely on their own proprietary adapters. And let me remind you we're talking about a console that has Bluetooth connectivity built-in. Okay, having a 3.5mm jack port in 2021 is a good call, but in that particular case I'd be okay to sacrifice audio quality for convenience.~~

Firmware update to v13.0.0 introduced limited support for Bluetooth headphones, but audio latency is noticeable. I tried three different headsets and all of them emit game audio with an audible lag, making the whole experience distracting. Your mileage may vary though.

Games that play well on other platforms may not play well on Switch for reasons completely unrelated to performance. I struggle to explain it well, but believe me, Switch can break a lot of interesting ideas solely by the way it's designed. It's a challenging task to design a game that plays well both in handheld and TV mode and that's what many indie studios seem to struggle with, especially when they port an existing title from other platforms. The term 'Switch sacrifice' was coined for a reason and there's more to it than subpar hardware specs.

Handheld mode is very unergonomic and inconvenient to use for long periods of time. If I play for too long, my hands get numb. Unplugging joycons and using them as a controller in tabletop mode? Poor workaround that introduces a new category of problems. Of course I can mod my Switch to be more ergonomic, but this is once again throwing money at a design flaw.

Very flat analog thumbs in joycons. It's hard to get a good grip on them. Pro Controller is a little better.

If you switch from an Xbox controller, thumb button layout is inverted and it takes time to develop muscle memory. Yes, it can be switched programmatically. Yes, Nintendo was the first and everybody else does it wrong. But many game tutorials use pictures to explain controls and I can't be sure if they follow my setting as well.

Pro Controller for Switch has two rows of small function buttons ('+' and '-', Home and screenshot) that lack any texture. It's hard to develop any muscle memory around them. If I drank every time I

accidentally minimized a game with the 'Home' button I'd need a new liver.

Something something cost management

Buy physical copies, preferably used ones. Switch is still a fairly young ecosystem and second-hand game cards are in mint condition. Thanks to that you can always get some of your money back if you decide to resell games you don't like. Thank goodness, games aren't region-locked.

I don't know what to do with games with downloadable content that can be purchased digital only. In this case it's up to Nintendo to re-release those games, but that may happen next month, next year or (most likely) never. For now I try avoid digital purchases for as long as I can.

Think twice before buying any digital game because you won't have a chance to refund it. Wait for sales, they happen. Play demo versions if available. Use external sources such as [Deku Deals](#) to make informed decisions. Don't buy impulsively.

Get a decently-sized memory card and take responsibility for owning and archiving any game you buy digitally. This is not your Steam library and you won't transfer it between different hardware generations. Nintendo won't be maintaining Switch forever and their shop can't be trusted to be operational 100% of the time.

Games that play well on Switch

All Nintendo flagships. Well, you can't get them on any other platform and Nintendo needs a valid reason to overcharge you for a 2017 smartphone in a fancy form factor. Also, all those games are essentially sequels adapted to a current hardware iteration, which is both a good thing (you get a good product) and a bad thing (you get a product you've already seen on GameCube, 3DS or Wii, just with minor improvements).

Platformers, both 2D and 3D. 3D platformers are tricky, but they're still playable.

Games you would play on an arcade machine or your old NES.

Technically Switch isn't an emulator but it offers a small selection of

games from older generations as part of Nintendo Switch Online subscription.

Visual novels and story-driven games that require very little user input.

Slow games that don't require many actions in short periods of time. But that concept works on any platform.

Good ports of mobile games. I repeat, *good*, i.e. carefully tested and optimized. Switch offers similar performance to a mobile device plus controllers that can work miles better than touch controls. Also, mobile ports on Switch are less likely to pull sketchy schemes involving microtransactions or loot boxes.

Games without endgame. Stardew Valley, Animal Crossing: New Horizons and alike. Part of the addictive nature of this kind of games is that Switch is a portable console and you can pick those games any time you want anywhere you want, whether lying on your bed or doing number 2.

Party and local multiplayer games, but that is something I haven't tested in a social setting. Joycons can be used as independent wireless controllers and this opens interesting design options.

Turn-based games. Again, the platform doesn't matter that much when you don't have to rush.

Games that are bad on Switch by definition

Ports of major PC games. I'll repeat, Switch is a 2017 smartphone with a proprietary operating system. Kudos to studios that successfully downgrade their flagship titles (Witcher 3), but buying them on an underpowered console is and always will be a gamble.

Any game you played on PC for longer than 4 hours. First, it's probably waste of money to buy it twice. Second, you'll probably have to relearn controls. Your mileage may vary though.

Majority of racing games. WRC 9 is playable, but very difficult without analog triggers, even with ABS and traction control on. Mario Kart 8 works well because its physics model is heavily assisted and the game requires specific skills that have little to do with racing. Any Need For

Speed remaster will work fine because its physics is offensively simplistic. Asphalt 9, like a true mobile title of its era, has more to do with buying and collecting cards than racing. Grid Autosport is great and it even supports GameCube controller with analog triggers, but it's a fairly old game.

First person games. Okay, they are playable, but not as convenient as on PC. It's highly subjective though. If you come from Xbox or PlayStation and you're used to aiming and shooting with a controller rather than keyboard and mouse, you'll be fine. Switching from keyboard and mouse is painful though.

Games that involve precise aiming. Not only shooters. Games like Portal, QUBE or more advanced strategies are playable but quite challenging to play compared to their PC versions. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild utilizes controller gyroscope for motion-based aiming, but many other games don't bother.

Games that require managing multiple entities in a single view. Many Switch games are good because they're cleverly designed to limit the amount of presented information. Complex games, like strategies or simulators, even if playable, will not be convenient on this platform.

So, should I buy a Switch?

Yes and no.

If you like popular Nintendo franchises like Mario, The Legend of Zelda or Pokémon, or you want to catch up with them, definitely yes.

If you like anime or Japanese RPG games... oh come on, you've been owning a Switch for a while and you're reading this for fun, no?

If you don't mind buying an underpowered piece of hardware produced by an eccentric Japanese company that doesn't differ that much from popular AAA game studios (in many cases it's even worse than them), probably yes.

If you want a portable gaming device that is not a smartphone, maybe. Steam Deck, despite being way more expensive, might be a worthy option to consider.

If you have children and you would like to introduce them to a safe and easy to use gaming ecosystem that will last for years, probably yes.

If you have friends that have a Switch, definitely yes. If you have no friends at all, upgrade your PC.

If you ever owned a Nintendo console or its clone, probably yes. Even just for nostalgia trips.

If you play on PC and you don't fall into any of the categories mentioned above, probably no.

If you don't have any other gaming hardware but you have a TV or a computer display, absolutely not. Get a PlayStation or an Xbox instead.

If you have no better idea what to do with your money, get an iPhone or a mechanical wristwatch.

~~**Be aware that it's probably not a smart idea to buy a Switch until Nintendo releases Switch Pro.**~~ A lot of questions about fragmentation and compatibility are still open since the difference in specs will be huge. It's probably worth waiting until the current generation of Switch starts to be called last gen to pull a trigger. Or get a second-hand one from an unsatisfiable whiner like me. As of January 2022 there's still no information on anything called 'Switch Pro'. Instead, Nintendo released Switch OLED.

Let's talk some pandemic

To say 2020 was a rough year is like saying nothing at all. I still have fresh memories of it so I'm going to jot them down before they evaporate so that I can have a moment of oddly-directed nostalgia in 2030.

2020, January

I started responding to LinkedIn messages and landed a few interesting job interviews. Sadly, all of them ended up disastrously due to major misunderstandings on recruiters' end. This made me lose faith in my skills and shattered all the remnants of belief in LinkedIn as a serious service for serious people wanting to close serious deals.

I had a car on a long term rental and was commuting daily to work. Scarcity of parking space effectively taught me to wake up early. I enjoyed driving through the city shortly before the traffic peak even though it was taking two hours of my lifetime a day.

Jokes about some Chinese virus started spreading at my workplace. We kept shaking hands though.

 No clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of novel coronavirus, as stated by WHO on Twitter in January 2020

2020, February

I bought a train ticket, booked a bed and went to Wrocław for the Dance with the Dead concert. This was my third time visiting that city and I loved coming back to it again. Headbanging to Dance with the Dead made me tired, but the real unappreciated gem was Das Mörta! as a supporting artist. His set was incredibly atmospheric. I'd love to hear him live again.

In the office, we stopped shaking hands. Some of us started using a gesture that is politically incorrect but the most hygienic of them all. I won't tell you what it looked like but you may want to search 'Roman salute' in Wikipedia.

2020, March

A wild animal ran into the road while I was driving home and my car gets got totaled. No humans were hurt but my 150hp Opel Astra was no longer usable and I had to pay a penalty fee. For two months I'd use a replacement car, a shitty Nissan Juke. I was also presented with offers for a new rental agreement but none of them looked interesting. I even started visiting car dealerships and I learnt they offered long term rentals as well.

On March 4th first coronavirus case in Poland was reported.

Two weeks later the national lockdown began. We were sent home by a text message from my boss. For a few days I was struggling with remote access to the projects I maintained as I was one of the few members of my department who never worked from home before.

I couldn't get toilet paper or pasta in any of the shops in my area. Friends on WhatsApp reported product shortages too.

I bought a batch of face masks. They immediately became my primary piece of clothing next to a wristwatch.

Talking to my mum on the phone I figured that every single generation had to deal with a major historical event within their lifetime. My grandma had witnessed World War II. My parents had seen the collapse of communism in my country in 1989. I, for a change, was observing a worldwide pandemic unfolding. In fact, until March 2020 I had no idea the word 'pandemic' existed at all.

2020, March

News of layoffs in multiple industries started spreading. The situation got quite stressful but no official news from my company was released. Some of my workmates changed their LinkedIn statuses.

Almost all of our work communication switched to Microsoft Teams. This was the first time in a few years when I could reach every single workmate in my company, including the CEO and board members, with a single messaging app. Until then I had to use goddamn Skype or Microsoft Lync or Google Hangouts. Two of those I never had installed.

Weeks later it turned out we were working just as efficiently as we did before the lockdown, maybe even better. Most of us were enjoying

working from home. More time for getting things done, easier to stay focused.

I watched interesting streams on Twitch. In one of them, a teacher used a VR headset and Half-Life Alyx as an aid.

I spent Easter alone at home. I learnt to cook white borscht.

2020, March

I learnt what Zoom was.

I was following news about contact tracing API baked by Apple and Google as well as national apps consuming it. The one used in my country turned out to be a PR nightmare. Even former developers advised against using it due to serious privacy concerns and unsolved inaccuracy issues.

I purchased a ticket for a Scooter concert in October 2020. At that time I was deeply believing the pandemic would have been over before the end of 2020.

I learnt about anti-vaxxers and observed massive spread of misinformation. Conspiracy theories, much to my dismay, became a mainstream topic that couldn't be killed with laughter or merciful silence. I explained to my mum how YouTube works and why exactly that fun guy on YouTube was talking bullshit about flat Earth alongside his usual health-related advice.

Presidential election, done via postal voting, was expected to happen. It eventually didn't, but 70 million PLN was spent on it nonetheless. Derived from the name of the minister responsible for organizing the election, we adopted a 'sasin' as a numerical unit worth 70 million.

A company I had bought corporate bonds from in 2018 started showing signs of incoming bankruptcy. At the time I'm writing this it entered restructuring phase which is supposed to save me and dozens of other investors from inherent money loss. If everyone is supposed to lose something due to the pandemic, this is going to be my biggest loss. And it's still better than losing a job.

2020, March

We came back to the office. Half of us was working on-site, another half remotely. I had hard time working from the office, especially during meetings on Microsoft Teams when some of my workmates were sitting next to me and I could hear them twice. I didn't figure out how to mute selected people on my end like it was possible on Teamspeak.

The pandemic wasn't stopping and we were sent back home again. 10th September was the last day we've been working on-site. I marked the date in my desk calendar.

2020, March

I officially ran out of steam at work. While I still enjoyed working from home, the work itself really wore me off. I was snoozing my alarms multiple times in a row. I was no longer stressed about losing my job but I was also bored to death.

I also started accepting weekend shifts at work. They were paying well and required very little to do. The only thing that was missing comparing to prepandemic shifts at the office was free pizza.

[Major strike protests](#) began. Local politics became painful to follow.

2020, March

I spent Christmas with my family. For the first time since totalling the Astra I rented a car. They brought me a Nissan Juke. Aaaaw, dammit, not this crappy crossover again. At least it had automatic transmission and that made it much more pleasurable to drive.

2020, March

I landed 10 job interviews within a single month. All of them, except one, failed. I also turned down that one offer that succeeded because... nah, maybe some other day I'll get back to this. But I was so close to turning this around and failed big time on that day.

I once again stopped reading LinkedIn messages.

2020, March

Still working from home.

I bought a [Nintendo Switch](#). Animal Crossing: New Horizons saved my sanity in most critical moments.

I once again spent Easter alone at home. I learnt to cook red borscht with traditional beetroot sourdough.

For a few days I couldn't smell or taste anything. I could eat onions or hot sauces without even smelling anything. I didn't observe any other disease symptoms. I wasn't brave enough to get tested though. Having heard of healthcare crisis happening I decided I wanted to stay away from it for as long as I could.

2021, May

I got a vaccine appointment within 5 minutes since the registration was opened and got vaxxed with AstraZeneca at the very next day. I spent next 24 hours dying. Then I got back from the dead as if nothing had happened. My next jab was scheduled for the end of July.

For the first time since months we had an office day at work. I saw my desk calendar again. It had stopped on 10th September 2020.

It was the least productive day I've ever had at work.

2021, June

I bought a ticket for the Scooter concert in Warsaw in October 2021.

Fingers crossed for Scooter officially ending the pandemic.

To hopefully not be continued.

Type carefully or deamons shell arice

I've owned way too many domain names. Some of them I use for actual production projects. Some of them wait for their turn to host a new brilliant business idea. Others I buy for funsies because they look cool. Yes, I agree my spending habits are questionable. But sometimes this is too much fun for wrong reasons.

You see, when you own a domain name, you can attach an email address to it. That way people can send their nudes to you at *literally.whatever.here@myfancydomain.com*. The trick is that it's no longer relevant what you type before the '@' sign. All you have to do is to get the recipient's domain name part right, i.e. that part after '@' sign (*myfancydomain.com* in our example).

Gmail offers similar functionality by disregarding a dot '.' altogether (you can receive email at *penisland@gmail.com*, *pen.island@gmail.com* as well as other uncanny variations) and supporting a plus sign '+' (you can subscribe to your favorite newsletter about pens at *penisland+newsletter@gmail.com*, sign up for a Twitter profile using *penisland+twitter@gmail.com* and many, many others - any mail sent to these addresses will reach your inbox).

Email providers that support custom domains usually offer a 'catch-all' option which does this *nothing before '@' sign matters* trick. It's a powerful feature that makes managing incoming email way easier and unlocks many cool usage ideas as long as our anti-spam measures are good enough.

Because you see folks, when you decide to go ahead and enable catch-all email with your domains, you cross the point of no return. You will see things you may not want to see. Domains somebody else has owned before become scary in particular. Domains that look similar to other existing domains are dangerous tool if you know what you're doing.

No, I didn't forget the password. You did.

It all started with notifications from a social media site I stopped using a while ago. I distinctly remember the moment of quitting every single social network because I usually do it out of frustration. I was 100% positive those notification emails shouldn't have reached my end.

That wasn't a big deal until the email frequency was low. Easy enough for a filter to redirect them to trash. But sometimes I get impatient too quickly and this is where things get hairy. I had an idea.

Let me click here... Check my inbox... Set up new password. Whoa. It worked.

The annoyance of unsolicited notification emails from a dead wannabe-Facebook stopped forever.

And did I mention I sniped a cool domain name a few months ago? No? All right. Now you know.

Nigerian prince but not exactly

The other day I got an email informing me about a thank-you note and an award from a local council in a town I had no idea existed. I was also supposed to receive a paper copy of the thank-you note to my postal address.

Sadly, the award never arrived. Maybe it was because I never replied to that email, because you know, I suck at replying to emails.

But more importantly, I wasn't a famous hang glider like a certain guy whose email address on his website looked very similar to mine.

Famous? Oh stahp it you

Okay, unsolicited photography newsletters were kinda cool because I'm interested in photography. But I don't necessarily print all of my photos so it's probably a waste of time to pitch this kind of services to me.

Looking at weird Google documents I clearly wasn't an intended recipient got old way too quickly.

Then, one evening, I was approached by a teacher from some school asking for a short personal headline and a few works of mine, claiming I was a 'famous graduate'.

Does it have anything to do with the fact one of the domain names I had bought a few months earlier had quite a long ownership history? Maybe. You tell me.

You're hired. Maybe. I don't know?

Another day I started working on a personal project that was using a very short internet domain so that I could squeeze as many characters into the URL as possible.

Then I got a job application. Someone wanted to become my business development officer. Boom, another one followed shortly. Application letters, references, passport scans.

Hang on. I was building a side project, not a startup featured in TechCrunch.

Doing the best of my Google skills I found a job opening both of these gentlemen referred to. And yes, you guessed it right. Applicants were supposed to send their applications to an email address that in fact belonged to your strully. Except I don't remember running an oil company somewhere in Africa.

There's no 'Luke' in real estate business. Unless there is.

Meanwhile on the other side of a planet, some property management company was happily minding their own business. Until their business became partly my business regardless of whether I liked it or not.

First, it was an invoice for security services.

Then, some welcome emails from free trials of paid online services.

Then, a payment alert for security services.

Some random email threads discussing stuff I didn't really want to know about.

I was even treated with some communication from a disgruntled coworker, sent via MMS from an iPhone.

The domain name of a company in question, unlike mine, contained a digit at the beginning. Someone forgot to include that number in their email. And it all snowballed from there.

Casino, not royale

But most of all, I would like to shake hands with that gentleman who decided to sign up for an online casino using an address in another domain of mine. Dude, I'm glad you were smart enough to use all of the bonus you were eligible for because you know, I like playing poker for money. Especially when someone else sponsors my games.

Moar!

Yes, I have more stories like that. No, I don't feel comfortable sharing them. No, I no longer use catch-all email with domains that have online presence way too rich for my liking. No, I am not writing this to brag.

You see, Google's motto 'don't be evil' wasn't really a moral paradigm. It was a covert way of saying 'don't compete with us at being evil'. I never tried because I prefer better and less stressful ways of wasting my time.

But it didn't have to be me. Believe me, I could easily make a very questionable use of those juicy details about random people online.

If there is something I would like the internet to take away from this piece, it's the following:

TYPE. CAREFULLY. WHEN. IT. MATTERS.

Especially on a touch screen. Especially when it's an address, bank account number, your social security number or any other detail that offers no room for error. Especially when you're on the rush.

Slow down and look critically at the atrocities your autocorrection just committed. Maybe think twice before sending.

Don't drink and text.

Also, there's a difference between *fancydomain.com*, *2fancydomain.com* and *fancydomain.com.pl*. I kid you not. Just like [Poland in Europe](#) and [Poland in Maine](#) are not the same places, similar addresses on the internet might not (and in 99% cases will not) point at the same resource.

I agree user interfaces of our computing devices don't always cater for wide range of human imperfections. Not all input fields on forms we fill have reliable validation, if any. It doesn't change the fact it is still your sole responsibility to get your message delivered to each and every person you want without inviting extra guests to the conversation. People lose money due to mistyped bank account numbers. Space equipment gets lost in space if numerical data isn't precise enough. Antisocial nerds write blog posts about cases like that.

What does even 'struly' mean? Nevermind, I'll leave it as is.

What HR says vs what I hear

I have spent a few years sharpening my saw and looking for a new professional challenge after 7 years of a decently paid, yet very boring corporate career. Since 2017 I attended numerous job interviews, talked to dozens of recruiters and cancelled many promising processes at various stages. I also heard certain statements way too often and we need to talk about them.

This wasn't the first time in my life when I was looking for a new job. But this was the first time it took more time than I thought. It yielded lots of confusing messages and massive loads of disappointment.

I completely rearranged the way I look at interview processes and I feel I'm a little better at understanding what the other side looks for. I'm also a tiny bit better at predicting my chances long before I send my resume. I no longer feel bad about saying 'no' to interesting opportunities if I see any red flags.

I want to start immortalizing things I learnt so far by noting down common statements I've heard during various interview processes and sharing my true thoughts about them, even if they sound very unpopular. My opinions evolve over time and this blog is designed to live longer than me, so I sincerely hope this article ages badly.

As an introvert by nature I listen very carefully and analyze a lot but I'm not always as vocal as I'd like. So, this is what I really think when I hear certain statements during job interviews.

'We don't have traditional hierarchy / We use Spotify model'

Not true. You love fancy terms too much.

You do have some sort of hierarchy. There's no such thing as 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' in a world that moved from the industrial era to the information era quite some time ago. The world didn't start in 1990s and didn't stop evolving in 2020s.

We, humans, are the products of millions of years of evolution. We're slaves to numerous instincts we may no longer need in a contemporary workplace, but they still determine our behaviors whether we like it or not. Developing notions like 'leaders' and 'followers' allowed us to survive as a species. They also prove to be somewhat useful tool for creating organizations that want to get big things done.

Regardless of your state of denial, your company isn't by any means special. It DOES have some sort of hierarchy. You misrepresent reality by refusing to use commonly known terms like 'leader', 'manager' or 'subordinate' to describe it. Just because I call my team leader a 'coworker' and drink litres of alcohol with them doesn't change the fact they have some degree of control over what I do within my work hours.

And one more thing. Please think twice before mentioning 'Spotify model' or other fashionable terms. I never worked at Spotify and I have no idea what it means. You probably don't know for the same reason. You spend a significant chunk of time probing my technical skills, so nothing stops me from examining your level of knowledge of agile methodologies to prove you don't know what you're talking about. Describe your company in our own words or stick to common boring terms that leave no ambiguity.

'We strive to be something more than just a workplace'

I never know what it means. Every single company has something different on their mind. It can sound like a promise of something exciting, but it can also be a cheap brainwashing technique. Only a very fine line separates one from another.

Having been rejected so many times I no longer treat this message as a positive signal. It only provokes me to ask detailed questions about different aspects of daily work.

For some companies it's an unfortunate way of saying something absolutely innocuous: that they care about their employees' well-being and there's no catch. This is fine and I'm always eager to discuss that in detail. Other companies try too hard to introduce weird rituals copied from corporate blog posts or LinkedIn 'celebrities'.

'We value work-life balance'

Really? Your recruiter was sending messages at 7pm on Friday and I remember you mentioned 9am to 5pm as your working hours.

Also, one of your employees admitted they were checking Slack once every few days during their vacation.

And finally, the decision about coming back to the office was made by the management board on the basis of a non-decisive poll result. Could I talk to someone who was against that decision so that I can evaluate what questions were asked?

Work-life balance means a lot of things for different people and it's a highly individual matter. I reject a lot of interesting offers solely based on the office location or the amount of office days per week. I consider myself very flexible in this regard as long as some rules are followed, like paying for any amount of overtime work and not imposing them against my will. You aren't CD Projekt RED and you aren't inviting me to help building the next Cyberpunk 2077.

I get it. It's called 'work' for a reason and you can't cater to every single wish I may have as your employee. But I have one expectation: be honest and be ready to explain where my freedom ends and committee-driven decision making begins.

And yeah, your HR department may have a work regime that is very different from mine, hence the rejection at 7pm on Friday. But how do I know for sure?

'There's a chance it can be negotiated'

Meaningless noise. Common answer to uncomfortable questions.

There's no way I can verify your claims or hold you accountable for them. My next question will be 'how many people succeeded in negotiating that so far' and you better be ready to provide a real number, even approximate. I'm also happy to hear 'no such option' as the answer.

Underpromise and overdeliver and we will be fine even in the worst of times.

'We also considered you for higher positions within our company structure'

Meaningless noise disguised as transparency. It has strong potential to discourage me from looking at your job offers ever again.

Don't tell me what you were doing if it didn't end up with any meaningful decision on your end. I can't verify your claims anyway. Plus it makes you lose face if you eventually decide to decline my application. What is this sudden bipolar disorder?

'We need people who know our work methodologies better than you'

Nice term for 'we found a better match' or 'we want to see if grass can be any greener' after an interview process I spent quite a lot of time on.

You know, finding a better candidate for your job is fine. I'm not a tomato soup, I don't expect each and every one to love me. I'm not a seven-year-old any more and I'm used to being told 'no'. But I expect to be able to extract some value from every 'no' I hear. I grow as a professional and a human being thanks to actionable feedback.

Oh, and one more thing. In case you really meant what you said about my knowledge of 'your' work methodologies. Unless you developed your own patented way of organizing work (highly unlikely), 'your methodologies' aren't really yours. They have been around longer than your company and you adopted them like everybody else. Basics of them can be learnt from YouTube within an hour. If I wanted to give up my free time, I could easily get certification on them. It is my grave mistake I didn't lie about knowing them during the interview process.

Actually, if you use such a weak reasoning to decline my application, then maybe it's good news we won't work together. What would be your reasoning if you had to terminate my contract due to company downsizing or other reason outside of your control?

And if you really need someone who is good at agile or whatever looks good on LinkedIn this year, at least edit your job offer and add it as a requirement so that other candidates with high levels of self-awareness can save their time and not bother applying. You know, some of us do read job descriptions very carefully and dislike wasting our time.

‘...if we get back to you with a positive answer, which will probably happen...’

Hold on, hold on, hold on. We may have enjoyed talking to each other, but please, don't promise things you may not be able to deliver.

I once was a fool to believe that. Once. Then the company said 'no' and I was also a sad fool.

Any person who uses similar statements during the recruitment process is either a liar, a politician, or has no idea how decision making works within the company they work for. I no longer treat those messages as positive signals. It's nothing else than a meaningless placeholder.

‘We're considering hiring more people so we can get back to talks soon’

Nice way of saying 'we spent so much time and money on this recruitment process and we want your permission to keep your resume in our base so that we can save some money'.

I have no reason to believe any of your future plans. You can basically say anything that makes me feel good and I have no way to verify your claims. You can also change your mind.

A handful of recruiters reach the level of intimacy when we start discussing weather, our day at work or current events. They stick out from the crowd and I'm more likely to cut them some slack when they mention any future plans for their department. But I still treat statements that sound too good to be true with a lot of caution and nobody is exempt from this rule.

‘We only hire best talents’

Everybody says so. This is such an overused cliché. If everybody hires the best people, nobody hires the best people.

Most human qualities, from work skills to coffee preferences, can be placed on a spectrum. If we agree on Gaussian distribution, there is very little chance you will talk to anyone who is ahead of the bell curve unless you misalign numbers on your graph. And if your recruitment process is well designed, you will have filtered out questionable candidates anyway.

You are most likely to meet average people who may happen to have unique skills and interesting stories to tell and you're there to decide if you find those relevant to your context.

Also, I have a high level of self-awareness. I'm humble enough to admit I actually know very little about my area of expertise. Admitting I suck at stuff is a powerful force thanks to which I keep learning new things and get better than the past version of myself. In no moment of time, however, I thought of myself as 'exceptional', 'the best' or 'outstanding' and your job offer might actually sound discouraging to me solely because it uses these terms. Don't tickle my impostor syndrome. I'm a skilled craftsman, not a marketer.

Whenever you say 'we work with the best / hire the best' you produce harsh noise that will likely scare me away. 'We work with experienced engineers with wide technical experience and extraordinary magician skills'? Way better.

There's only one rule

Be. Freakin. Honest. Even. If. It. Makes. You. Look. Bad.

Employer branding is not about fancy photos on your LinkedIn page. Not even about a nice office and perks. Abundance of emojis in your status messages won't make any unhappy employee of yours less unhappy.

Every single company has at least one skeleton in their closet. Great companies, even if they let their skeletons rot for too long, aren't afraid of acknowledging them.

Be ready to get any claim challenged by me during a recruitment process. After all, you have a liberty of examining every statement of mine so nothing stops me from taking my time to ask a lot of questions. I take lots of time to prepare for each interview. I tend to ask very specific questions and treat all answers as meaningful. Even 'I don't know' can be the answer I want to hear.

I didn't start my professional career yesterday and I know my role in the process. You, the interviewer, know your role too. There's a chance we're both struggling playing our roles well and we're trying to get through this with minimum damage. There's also a non-zero chance we're totally not

destined to work together. Sometimes tiny details break the deal. This is absolutely fine.

Say it the way it is. Even if I hate it

You want a stronger craftsman with proven technical experience and I didn't exactly cut it? Okay, cool. Tell me what objective quality I was lacking.

You actually expect me to work overtime and answer phone calls 24 hours a day? Okay. Let me know as soon as possible. I may say 'no', but I will appreciate honesty.

Your management board reads Dilbert strips as an educational resource and takes notes? All right, good to know.

You had doubts about my application? Okay, I appreciate sharing that.

I gave a wrong answer at a critical stage of the interview and that buried my chances early? Okay, let me know which one it was. I can handle constructive criticism.

You want to reach out to me next time you look for a new employee? Don't tell me that, but just do it next time you see an opportunity. My inbox is operational 24/7 and I read every message even though I suck at replying to all of them.

And that's it. No need to overcomplicate.

Remember. No loyalty

In 2016 the corporation I was working for signed a contract for building a unified business solution for all of its companies. The project was developed by an external entity, a very well-known name in the industry. We, the IT department employees, were supposed to maintain the new system once it was done. For a brief moment I thought something new and interesting was behind the corner. Then, a few years later, I abruptly woke up to a feeling I had made one of my biggest professional mistakes.

The whole deal revolved around a out-of-the-box commercial system with all of the “best” qualities of a super-duper-serious enterprise product: limited access to source code, licenses costing small fortunes, paywalled knowledge bases, questionable design choices in the codebase, and finally, costly training courses.

Aaaaaand we need to talk about those training courses.

To make effective use of the new shiny toy, some of the people in our department had to complete training courses paid by the company. The content of each of the two modules involved setting up the platform and doing simple programming tasks within a pre-configured environment. Among the people who attended them were a few Java programmers and yours truly as a front-end developer.

And did I mention those courses were paid by the company? Oh yeah, I did.

My company had a rule that for any course, training or anything else they were paying on behalf of their employee they demanded signing a loyalty clause. Basically it was a way of saying ‘all right mate, we pay for this expensive thing, but you are obliged to work for us for another 2 years. If you decide to quit before 2 years have passed, you pay that money back to us’. The exact duration of each loyalty clause was dependent on the value of the gig that was sponsored by the company.

I agreed. Or to be more precise, I wasn’t objecting, as the decision was already made by my boss and I was too scared to say no. I barely even knew the course agenda.

As a front-end developer refusing to touch any backend programming in my company, I struggled to keep up with the course. According to the instructor, both courses were at some point attended by people with no programming background, but I honestly have no idea how it was even possible. Anyway, I completed both courses, received my certificates of completion, all was good.

Time was passing. The course price was divided into 24 monthly installments. I made a Google sheet to calculate how much penalty I would have to pay on any given day if I decided to quit. It took a year and a half until numbers dropped to the levels I could afford paying back from my pocket.

I also started interviewing with other companies. Not a single one cared about my loyalty clause as long as they didn't have to participate in paying it back (yes, I was this stupid to explicitly ask about that). A few ghosted me as soon as they learnt about the clause. And I didn't have enough leverage to negotiate satisfying salary yet.

In 2019 the big project was officially declared dead. The system was never deployed. The contract was eventually terminated. Sensationalized pieces of news were published online. Lots of time and money was wasted. Some heads among the upper management were cut. 2016 was back again, with metric tons of legacy projects waiting for a major overhaul.

Somewhere in 2021, long after my loyalty clause expired, my former boss said during a beer meeting that our company never enforced loyalty clauses when people were quitting.

Even though that statement may have been merely anecdotal, something broke inside me. Seriously. It hit me like a hammer.

When I write these words, I'm a week away from quitting the company. I terminated my contract after 7 years. Should have done that at least three years earlier.

If you're a recruiter and you mention certain keyword related to this story, I won't reply to your message. I don't care if I'm highly sought after due to attending some highly specific courses. I am full of regrets about all of this. Things I'm doing these days I should have been doing three years ago.

But I can't turn back time.

Okay. Serious talk time

Loyalty clause, also known as 'lojalka' or 'umowa lojalnościowa' in my native language, is a common way to secure employer's interest whenever they agree to invest money in something that benefits their employee. After all, they don't want to see their money going to waste if the employee quits next month.

There's nothing wrong about this as long as both parties sign it willingly. Some of my former workmates agreed to sign those in exchange for funding their university studies and this is absolutely fine.

My case was different. My training courses, despite looking otherwise, were in fact voluntary. I had poor understanding of the whole situation. I could have said 'no' with no consequences. Two years was in fact a lot of time. Enough to put two or three different companies in my LinkedIn resume while still not being considered a job hopper.

I'm not saying loyalty clauses are bad. It all depends on the context. But they are a powerful tool that can make or break careers.

Don't be me. Think what you sign. Or don't sign it at all

In case it wasn't loud and clear: loyalty clauses secure your employer's interest, not yours. Losing money is ultimately way less painful than losing time. Money, unlike time, can be earned back. Have that in mind before you put your signature on the document.

If the loyalty clause is related to any current project in your company, ask what happens if you say 'no'. Chances are that the Earth won't stop spinning, the sky won't fall on your head and the company will keep doing its stuff whether you agree or not. Don't be a scared fish like me. Go on, ask.

Calculate if you can afford paying back the fee should anything happen in your life. Even if you don't plan to quit your job, a lot of other things can happen in the meantime. You may even get fired. Don't take your current job situation for granted.

If you decide to pursue other career goals while your loyalty clause is in effect, be sure to know how much money you have to pay back for breaching it. Maybe you can leverage that knowledge during your salary negotiation. I didn't figure out how to do it effectively, but I'm not saying it's impossible.

And finally, make long-term decisions about your time and money yourself. Don't let others decide for you. Your boss, pressuring you to sign that goddamn loyalty clause, might have been pressured by their principal to do so. Corporations are a weird mixture of human-shaped cogwheels, money, politics and general thoughtlessness.

Or quit your company, launch a startup and start researching time travel technology. I'll be your first client.

Three months with MacBook Pro

Hell froze. I bought an Apple computer. And now I should write ten paragraphs on how Apple is supremely better than anything and bait those poor Windows plebs to argue with me. I totally should. Not today though. Even I maintain certain standards for cheap laughs on my own blog.

Don't worry. We're not gonna start an Apple church here. Whether we will refrain from bashing them for no reason, that I can't promise.

Backstory, yay

Back in September I figured I needed a separate device dedicated solely to everyday work. I could choose between relying on my employer to buy one for me or bring my own. Despite the cost I opted for the second option so that I could have final say on the workhorse I was gonna spend lots of time with. I didn't want to use my desktop PC for work because having separate machines for work and entertainment is my way of switching between 'work' and 'home' modes while working from home.

I chose a refurbished Lenovo P53 with an i7-9750H CPU and 32 GB RAM. Powerful and mobile, yet still within budget. Or so it looked.

From the very first day this machine was an absolute pain to work with. Finding a matching docking station for it was a challenge due to its humongous power requirements. When I finally forked out extra budget for a beastly dock with two power adapters (yup!) the laptop still wouldn't work as expected. I had tons of issues people have been complaining about on Lenovo forums since 2017.

I eventually decided to sell it and get another laptop. But I didn't want to go through the same hell with a different manufacturer.

It's time

Aaaand it happened. MacBook it would be, I decided. But which one?

It was October 2021, just a few weeks away from new generation of M1 MacBooks being released. That didn't matter anyway. Any M1-based computer was out of question due to lack of support for more than one external display. Previous generations of Intel-based MacBook Pros were still available. Maybe spending extra for a machine that would potentially outlive any of the computers I owned wasn't a bad idea after all?

Yup. This one. A 2019 i9 MacBook Pro with 32 GB RAM. Not the latest or beefiest of them all, but still powerful. Boom. Done.

At the moment it serves as my daily driver. Funny enough, I no longer need it as my other job provides me with a Windows laptop. That's fine though.

So, are Apple computers that good? Or bad?

Yes and no.

Switching to MacOS is painful if you use a computer in a productive way and want to keep doing so. MacOS is insanely unintuitive at first and has dozens of weird design quirks. I can't believe I had to google [how to get past country selection screen](#) because nobody in the design department thought I'd want to use Tab and Enter to navigate.

Typing and using a mouse requires relearning. Using any non-Apple peripheral requires software tweaking and third party software is often needed. Functions of Ctrl, Win and Alt keys are split between Fn, Control, Option and Command and I found them very difficult to adjust to. I eventually ordered a Magic Keyboard and a Magic Mouse to alleviate some of the adaptation pain. I'm slowly getting my typing speed back but I still have a long way to go.

As for MacOS itself... **At first, it's annoying.** It's annoying because most of its weird design quirks can't be tweaked or disabled. I'm not a fan of computers forcing me to adjust to them rather than letting me adjust them to my needs.

Then, after a few weeks, the system itself becomes boring. And it's a good thing actually. It just works and doesn't stand in the way between me and work to do. I notice a lot of metaphors and design choices I've seen before with Ubuntu. MacOS doesn't add any substantial productivity

boosts to my workflow but it doesn't slow me down either. I truly appreciate the feeling of power and stability of a desktop machine in a laptop form factor.

Then, from time to time, lack of polish and awkward bugs pop out.

I quickly learnt to [treat each MacOS update with caution](#). Sometimes the system disregards my wallpaper choice and switches back to a default one for no good reason. Unlike Windows or Linux, fatal problems rarely give useful tracebacks beyond generic error messages. Fortunately I can defer updates for as long as I can without the system trying to know better than me.

And finally, my i9 MacBook requires an 87 W power adapter, which means it runs just fine on the 90 W Lenovo dock I use for my underpowered work laptop. Meanwhile, my previous Lenovo P53, sporting an i7 CPU, needed a 170 W power adapter or a dock powered by two power adapters at once. What the heck happened here?

But was it all worth the pain?

Yes. MacOS gets the job done without fuss and I like it. And it seems I no longer need a desktop PC for anything else than gaming. And for gaming [I already have a Switch](#), so I might consider getting rid of a desktop altogether soon.

Is Apple hardware worth getting instead of anything non-Apple? Uhm, I'm not so sure. Apple does things their own way but I don't consider their products particularly innovative to treat them in any preferential way. They're a viable option to consider if they fit the budget. I strongly disagree they're inherently superior to anything else available on the market at any given moment. There's more to effective computing than fancy looks or CPU performance.

Am I an Apple fanboy now?

Nah. Even worse, I now have legitimate reasons to criticize anything about Apple should I ever decide my keystrokes are worth it. But hey, I already criticized them by voting for them with my wallet, so who cares?

Just another personal summary of 2021

When I'm writing these words, 2022 is around the corner. I guess it's a good idea to write some sort of summary of 2021. It also looks like a perfect opportunity to say something foolish so that I can laugh at my past self next year.

In a semi-random order, here's a list of thoughts I have about 2021 and what I'd like to do in 2022.

Blogging

Well, I have this site. For the first time since 2010s. And you're reading this piece. That counts.

(yes, there are 2020 articles in the archive, but they had to wait some time until the site eventually got live. In fact, many of my drafts date back as far as 2017)

Getting it online, populating it with content and developing a workflow that lets me write as often as I want without overinvesting time into it (who reads blogs nowadays anyway?) places high on my 2021 accomplishment list. I didn't expect much in this department and I'm happy with the outcome.

I have no wishes about this site for 2022. It was not intended to meet any arbitrary goals and never will be. It's meant to be there whenever I feel an urge to say anything I find worthy of archiving rather than letting it rot on any of my social media channels.

Tech / career development

Mixed success here.

I finally managed to dive into Docker. I'm still figuring out Docker Compose and rethinking my strategy of hosting personal projects based

on the knowledge I have. Ideally I'd live to move away from setting up my own virtual servers but that will definitely raise a lot of new questions.

I wrote more React code and gained some commercial experience with it. But it was too little and ended prematurely. I remember stating 'new job' as my 2021 wish and it remains valid for 2022. In fact, I find my job situation the biggest disappointment of 2021 and I could write an entire article on this, but let's just leave it as-is.

I still haven't built anything in React Native. It still ranks high among tech I'm interested in, even if it's only for the sake of satisfying my own needs. Boom, another item on my 2022 wishlist.

I committed numerous improvements to [my open source projects](#) and watched them grow. I intend to keep doing so in 2022.

Overall, in 2021 I gained a little more perspective on software development and product building. I may code less, but I think about architectures and try to paint the bigger picture before getting into the implementation stage. Before 2021 my projects usually started their life on GitHub. Since 2021 they're more likely to emerge as a Google doc or loose notes on paper. Not a big deal, but quite significant.

Gaming

Surprisingly revolutionary year for Luke the Gamer. Quite a few unexpected things happened in parallel.

First, I bought a [Nintendo Switch](#). What initially was meant as a short-term experiment effectively turned into my primary way of consuming video games. I play games in short but frequent sessions rather than once-a-week multi-hour sittings and I still manage to sink hundreds of hours into single titles. Whether Switch manages to maintain the spot of my primary gaming rig in 2022 is yet to be seen.

Also, in 2021 my desktop PC started showing signs of age. At first I thought it was thermal issues but replacing thermal paste didn't solve the problem of random crashes among numerous titles. In the meantime I [bought a MacBook Pro](#) and it effectively took over the role of my primary workhorse. At this point, having in mind I'd have to pay quite a lot to get a PC as powerful as my current one was in 2015, I'm seriously questioning the need of owning a desktop computer at all.

But the final nail in the coffin was something else: disappointing releases of games I was impatiently waiting for. Far Cry 6 didn't run well on my PC and I didn't want to play a 30fps-capped Google Stadia version that looked like a washed-out movie. Forza Horizon 6 at the release turned out to be a messy pile of bugs that made the whole experience incredibly frustrating. I'm gonna revisit it somewhere in 2022 but I don't have high hopes any more.

Also, something minor and totally unexpected in 2021 was Pokémon Unite. The first MOBA game ever, as well as first team-based game in a very long time, that managed to overcome my disdain for team-based games as well as steal the top spot of my most watched categories on Twitch. It's simple enough to learn quickly, doesn't require big chunks of time to fully enjoy and it's still challenging enough as a competitive experience despite a clear aim to attract casual players. Obviously it still suffers from problems typical for team-based games but right now is the best moment to get into it.

Other

Just another year of working from home. I still enjoy it and I don't miss daily commutes a tiny bit. But I have my own share of struggles related to it. Among things I have to address in 2022 is my sleep quality and physical activity.

I miserably failed at reading books. I can't recall anything worthwhile I read in 2021. My stack of books I'd like to read grew significantly and my Kindle collects dust. It's gonna take some serious habit formation to get back on track with this.

Nothing of importance happened in the video department. Video category in my wishlist, intentionally broad to cover a lot of different things like becoming a Twitch affiliate or editing YouTube videos for other people, is still there for 2022 and beyond.

Twitch, YouTube and Netflix fiercely competed for my attention in 2021, with Netflix clearly winning that battle despite being the newest kid in the block. I'm still catching up with numerous popular series from 2010s and I'll probably keep doing that during my meals in 2022.

And...

...that's it. No need for fancy closers here. Happy new year.

Should you really quit Facebook?

When I'm starting this piece, news of the day is that Facebook's userbase declined for the first time in history. The side effect, apart from crashing stock prices, is that it became fashionable to brag about having quit Facebook a while ago and calling others to do that. I've been living 'Facebook-free' since mid-2010s and I want to say: sure, if you feel like it, go ahead. But first, let me tell you what is gonna change if you decide to quit Facebook cold turkey. Because, you know, maybe you shouldn't.

But first, let me take a selfie

I mean, my personal story first.

I've been on Facebook since late 2000s up to 2016 or so. It was long before my parents or anyone from my family picked it up. It was long before the COVID pandemic, anti-vaxxers and various political tensions that would render people angry while scrolling their news feeds. Just a few years before the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Facebook and Messenger, as I remember them, regularly placed on top of most battery-draining and productivity-disrupting apps on every single device I've owned. I took steps to make them work a little better by curating my friend list, using custom lists and focusing my attention on a small selection of groups. I would try using each and every feature that would enable me to customize my experience even a tiny bit. But I still couldn't help the feeling I was wasting too much time on this damn site.

So uhm, one day I quit

Just like that. Not much else to say.

Even though I have strong (mostly negative) opinions on Facebook's contributions to humanity, I didn't quit for ideological reasons. I never stopped using WhatsApp and lots of people in my circle still use it. I can be reached on Signal and Telegram, but very few people do that.

Years passed. My profile URL on Facebook was taken over by someone else. I no longer had to worry about my phone dying before the end of the day. I reclaimed a lot of free time I could use in productive ways. I've been happy.

But that kind of happiness came at a cost. I needed quite a few years to get a grasp on how much I was giving up back then. I'm in a fortunate position where none of my critical life needs depend on having a Facebook account, so I label that cost as acceptable collateral damage.

My life is not your life. I'm not gonna say you should blindly follow my path. If you feel Facebook is making you unhappy, quitting it might be the option.

But first, I'd like to tell you about the hidden cost of quitting so that you make an informed decision. Some of those factors may apply to you, others may be completely irrelevant.

So, what exactly changed since I quit Facebook?

Contacting my family got harder

In mid 2010s only a few members of my extended family could be reached online. If so, they would use Skype on their laptops.

Fast forward to 2022 and everyone, including my mum, can be reached any time on Messenger. Meanwhile, some of my most tech-savvy relatives never heard of WhatsApp. And it's them who look weirdly at me when they can't find me on Facebook, even though they perceive me as the most computer-literate in our family tree.

Obviously, plain ol' voice calls and text messages never went anywhere. Alternative instant messengers entered the scene. Reaching me is as easy as always. I can still contact my closest family any time.

My problem is different. As long as Facebook Messenger remains the dominant messaging tool I'll always have to keep a few messaging apps because none of popular alternatives to Messenger gained enough traction among my whole family. I contacted some of my family via WhatsApp video calls. With others I chatted on Telegram. And I'm totally not ready to explain why Signal is better than all of them.

If you live in a country where WhatsApp is more popular than Messenger, I envy you a tiny bit.

Getting hyperlocal news got almost impossible

There's a layer of reality that doesn't get covered by news sources. Highly local news that affect small communities and never make it to mainstream outlets. Gossips, discussions and interesting insider tidbits. Unfortunately, most of this stuff is hidden inside numerous Facebook groups.

Honestly, I am not sure if I really need to know all of that. I personally believe in 'the less you know, the better you sleep' mantra. I also believe I'm much healthier by not knowing how idiotic my neighbors are based on what they post on our neighborhood's group.

But I have no doubts I missed a lot of interesting opportunities by not being at the right time at the right place solely because I had missed some announcement on Facebook.

There's no clear solution to that problem. Nor am I looking for any, to be honest. But if you need your dose of gossip like I need caffeine, well, good luck.

Finding interesting events got trickier

I must give it to Facebook: it worked quite well as a tool for organizing, managing and discovering interesting events, whether it was your friend's birthday or a marketing conference you always wanted to attend.

For events available to the general public, like concerts or conferences, you should be fine without Facebook. Meetup, LinkedIn, Eventim and a few others fill that niche fairly well. But without Facebook, anything smaller in scale became hard to come by on my radar. And that's one of few things about Facebook that I genuinely miss.

I'm cut off from knowledge from specialized groups

A decade earlier certain Facebook groups would have been online forums. Easily discoverable and searchable, full of intimate knowledge on a vast range of topics, maintained over the years by tightly-knit communities.

Facebook groups irreversibly ruined that. Other closed platforms, like Discord, are ruining that even further.

Want to know what it feels like to be a migrant to a specific country? Looking for other enthusiasts of your niche hobby? Asking for honest non-sponsored buying advice from people who faced your dilemma earlier? For these and many other topics, the valid answer is still, unfortunately, 'go ask on Facebook groups'.

In my country, local Reddit-like sites do exist. Reddit itself is slowly getting traction as well. For everything else not covered by Reddit and alike, I have to ask people from my circles or use creative ways to find answers. That takes time and doesn't guarantee satisfying results.

If I ever signed up anywhere with Facebook, I can no longer access it

Many websites offer 'Sign up with Facebook' option and that is fine. However, not all of them made it possible to set up alternate login methods alongside Facebook login.

In 2010s I wouldn't have thought of quitting Facebook. But I definitely forgot I had accounts elsewhere for which Facebook would be the only method of access. Those accounts are left there hanging until another data leak.

If you used Facebook login on any non-Facebook site, don't delete your Facebook account before you set up an alternate login method for it. Or delete that other account as well.

I'm cut off from interesting connections outside of my bubble

There's a wide group of people that will never make it to other social platforms for this or that reason. They won't understand Reddit, Twitter or Discord. They'll never have a need to be on LinkedIn. They won't check their email. They won't have time or will to maintain their social presence at all. Facebook might be the only way to ever reach them online, ever.

By quitting Facebook I irreversibly lost touch with sizable group of people from past chapters of my life. Obviously, there's still a burning question

whether keeping my Facebook account would have changed that, but burning that specific one bridge certainly didn't help.

If you're worried about same thing happening to you, reach out to people you want to stay in touch with and make sure you can connect with them outside of Facebook. There's always some alternative way. Alternatively, ask yourself if losing those people would really harm you long term. Maybe there's no point dragging dead weight along.

I have no access to the most frictionless board for classifieds

This is another rant at Facebook groups, just worded differently.

Facebook is fast and easy to use and that makes it a fairly efficient platform for buying or selling stuff with minimum friction. Which means I'm missing on many interesting deals that would disappear within minutes after.

From the seller's point of view, it's not that big of a deal. There's commerce outside of Facebook. Ebay, Amazon and their local equivalents in my area do exist and they serve their purpose very well. If I want, I will manage to sell all of the stuff I don't need. But it will still take more of my time to post an offer on eBay, OLX or anywhere else than dropping a quick message on a Facebook group.

I'm cut off from information if businesses rely on Facebook as their only channel

I am not necessarily blaming Facebook for that. Business owners who gave up on the idea of having their own up-to-date website are to blame here. Putting all eggs in such a volatile basket is incredibly reckless.

It gets even worse when Facebook is the only reliable channel to get customer support. I still remember that one awful time when I couldn't force my bank to resolve a certain problem about my mortgage credit. I managed to successfully escalate the issue by posting a complaint on my bank's Facebook page and humbly asking my friends to drop hundreds of likes on that post. I hated that moment of boring dystopia with passion. Never again.

If you live in a country where Facebook is a building block for majority of your local commerce, well, I'm afraid I might have bad news for you. Maybe you shouldn't do it.

Other platforms filled my need for dopamine hits

Quitting Facebook left me with plenty of time and I had to find new ways of spending it. I started reading more books. I found new ways for discovering interesting content. I started coding after hours. I build side projects.

But I'm still a simple human being with 1.5 kilograms of walnut-shaped matter inside my skull. I can't be productive all the time. I'm a slave to my passions. I sometimes need easy dopamine hits. Quitting Facebook did nothing to solve that problem.

Rather than scrolling my Facebook feed, I switched to Reddit, Twitter and LinkedIn. All of these platforms have their own share of problems. Any other platform with unredacted human-generated content would have filled that void in my life anyway.

I'm still researching ways to cure my dopamine addiction but I have nothing interesting to say about it yet.

So yeah, quitting Facebook is going to leave a void in your life. Free time is a valuable asset and you can either make it work to your benefit or find new ways to waste it. Nothing's wrong about having fun in your life but that fun shouldn't mess with your brain chemistry.

None of my privacy or security concerns ever disappeared

Both privacy and security are broad categories and there are no easy solutions here. Putting them together with Facebook in a single sentence is like opening a can of worms.

The ultimate privacy problem I have with Facebook these days is 'shadow profiling', but I do not see any ultimate solution for that. Besides, I still use WhatsApp and that alone nullifies any of my potential effort in this department.

Security-wise, I am privileged to admit Facebook never rose into relevance in my personal threat model. And I was using it just like everybody else, sometimes oversharing stuff with little regard to privacy settings and keeping way too many secrets in my Messenger threads.

If privacy and security are your concerns, you probably know your threat model already. And you totally know better than me whether staying on Facebook is a right choice for you. But thanks for reading this. :)

There's probably more...

...but fortunately none of that stuff was of enough relevance for me to remember.

It was a good decision after all. A lot of stuff that happened in my life wouldn't have happened if I kept wasting time on Facebook. Inconveniences of being absent from popular social platform at the time eventually faded away.

Should YOU quit Facebook as well? Probably. I'm all for depowering that platform as much as possible and giving better options a chance. But it has to be your own choice, with all pros and cons carefully weighed up. Don't blindly follow random people on the internet.

4 months in Hyrule but is the world my oyster?

Faint female voice broke the silence. Light faded in. I opened my eyes. Still disoriented, I got dressed and picked my smartphone from a wireless charger. No new mail. No Twitter mentions. No missed calls. All right then... Wait, what? Why is it showing March 2120? Why is my system corrupt? What happened last night? And why did 'last night' take 100 years? What happened to that bat virus from China?

I saw a blue light near the door. Smart home terminal recognized my device. Massive anti-theft door opened. Blinded by the sunlight I stepped outside. Where am I? What is this place?

Okay, yeah, that's not exactly how it all happened.

So I bought this Zelda game

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. Released in 2017 as the last Nintendo game on Wii U and one of initial releases on Nintendo Switch. Nineteenth entry to The Legend of Zelda, a franchise that has been present on every single Nintendo console generation since 1986. Critically acclaimed and pompously cited as 'the greatest game of all time'. Yadda yadda yadda.

In November 2021, as a fresh owner of Nintendo Switch, I got my own copy.

I love open world games and I approached it like another game of the genre. The only detail was that I had it running on a 2017 smartphone with detachable controllers rather than a beefy PC with an ultrawide screen.

With no prior exposure to other Zelda games I had no sentiments towards the whole franchise or strong opinions on what it should look like. I approached it with my usual set of expectations shaped over the years by numerous open world games I played on PC.

Boy, what a ride it was.

Within 150 hours between November 2021 and February 2022, *Breath of the Wild* managed to question all I ever thought about open worlds and gaming in general. Maybe that was an effect of novelty, maybe the game was really that good, I'm not sure.

Let's talk about what I learnt about myself while playing *Breath of the Wild*.

Spoiler non-alert: I mention story and game mechanics, but I don't delve much into details. This is not a review or a critical piece, just a highly personal collection of thoughts. But why am I even doing this if it's 2022 and the game has been around since 2017?

I don't like difficult-by-design games

By a game that is 'difficult by design' I understand any game that forces me to die multiple times before I make any progress on the premise that I'd feel satisfied once I overcome the challenge.

That's not how it works with me. Over the years I'm more likely to say 'oh, I remember how much of a struggle that was' than 'oh, feels so good I managed to complete it'. I associate that kind of learning process with wasting time staring at the loading screen and repeating the same moves over and over again. I believe there's a middle ground between appeasing super casual players and making games challenging to the point they feel like work.

Call me a dirty casual, but I play games for fun between other activities and I tend to find my own sources of challenge in them. Given the size of my backlog I don't want to waste time doing unfun things such as struggling with that one particular mini-boss or fighting against a random number generator to find a rare item. Exceptions happen from time to time.

Breath of the Wild isn't a game that is difficult-by-design, but it is hell of a challenge at first. Unlike other open world games I've played, it's very light on explaining things or giving directions. It expects me to put in a lot of work and doesn't refrain from putting tough enemies in front of me very early. It kept me starving for easy wins for hours and hours. I didn't find this fun. I explored Hyrule with a lot of anxiety until I made my character more resilient.

Then, completely seamlessly, *Breath of the Wild* morphed from a fierce fight for survival into a slow-paced tale of exploration and self-improvement. At that moment I started enjoying it even though I still had that tiny seed of anxiety in my head. Before the finale I turned my character into an overpowered killing machine. Thanks to that I could explore without fear and tackle challenges in creative ways.

I don't like fantasy games

I'm generally not a fan of fantasy. I find it hard to relate. In most cases it stereotypically presents medieval worlds with supernatural additions, magic or non-human living creatures. I am sorry, I find that boring. I can't help that.

Science fiction, on the other hand, I find more relatable because it's set in a future and there's a tiny bit of possibility our world could indeed look like that within the next hundreds of years. That by itself makes my imagination run wild.

Breath of the Wild does something interesting. Hyrule, the land we explore, looks like another fantasy setting. But I quickly uncovered the sad plot twist: it was in fact a devastated kingdom that used to be a highly technological place, with modern inventions used by rational people to keep evil forces away. It was a world where state-of-the-art engineering was eventually turned into a deadly weapon, rendering lives of whole generations miserable and stagnant.

That's a theme I didn't expect to find in a light-hearted game about riding horses, swinging swords, killing monsters and talking to a giant broccoli. I liked it.

I don't like learning untransferable skills in games

To fully enjoy *Breath of the Wild* I had to learn combat the hard way. It wasn't particularly easy given that I'm very new to console gaming. I still struggle with camera control using a thumb stick rather than a mouse. Dying to not-so-overpowered enemies happened a lot.

In addition, I don't like medieval-style combat, with swords, shields, spears and horses. Apart from the fact I find it boring, it never works the

same across different games. Each game brings something unique to the table, such as situational magic skills that have to be learnt and will be forgotten once I finish it.

Learning skills in Breath of the Wild won't make me any better at Witcher 3 or any other game that relies on medieval-style weaponry or supernatural skills.

Driving on racetracks, shooting, basics of strategy, tactical thinking, T-spin factories in Tetris - those skills are fun to learn because they can be transferred and upgraded between different games of similar genre. They can also make games competitive.

Nothing about Breath of the Wild is transferable to other games. The only way I could make this game competitive is speedrunning.

I love immersive worlds

I perceive open world games as journeys. I live and breathe the atmosphere of each new world I explore. I spend hours roaming around before taking up main story tasks. I look at NPCs. I check each edge of the map. I try to believe the illusion in front of my eyes.

The Mafia franchise was interesting to me because I found it exciting to look at cities as they could look like decades before my birth. Red Dead Redemption 2 was exciting because it put me in the world of stark contrast: urban areas during the industrial revolution versus the glorified American frontier, with outlaws, sheriffs, Indians and relatively simple life close to nature.

The world in Breath of the Wild wasn't immediately clear to me. It's way too easy to misunderstand it as a stereotypical fantasy island.

In fact, it's a journey through a post-apocalyptic world. And it wasn't the type of post-apocalyptic world I had seen before. The apocalypse took place so long ago that the ruins were getting increasingly hard to recognize. Human settlements were scattered far away from each other, isolated from the source of all evil by natural barriers.

That was something. I believed this world even though it wasn't grounded in reality at all.

I don't know how I feel about 'original' design in games

Breath of the Wild has an experience system, but it doesn't work like in typical ARPGs. There's no leveling, experience, skill points or progress bars. Instead, it's the world that secretly levels up. I was disoriented by that, but that system eventually turned out to work quite well.

I didn't like the fact that weapons break in this game, but discussing this in 2022 is totally pointless. I get Nintendo's reasoning behind it, but in my eyes it added a lot of boring inventory management. I want to have my favorite sword and shield to use in dire situations. There are ways to make this work without making weaponry feel like it was made of paper.

Another thing I felt weird about was the inherent scarcity of everything. Weapons? Well, you have to take them from your enemies. Nobody in the area produces and sells weapons any more. Arrows? Of course you can buy them (as long as you have money, and of course you start with an empty wallet), but sellers won't sell you more than 20-30 at once. Oh, you got more than 100 arrows? Sellers won't restock, sorry.

Want to fly, climb or swim? You need stamina. And you'll always be limited by stamina, even in your late game. And if you want to climb while it's raining, well, tough luck. Waste more time by time traveling to a day with better weather.

It takes many hours until some of those systems become somewhat less limiting. Out of a sudden the game starts raining weapons, while still imposing significant time costs on expanding inventory space.

I don't like games that keep me starving for easy wins for too long

Literally everything about Breath of the Wild takes lots of work. At the same time it's easy to die by accident. Some puzzles are difficult to solve without consulting tutorials on YouTube. In the early phase I found it discouraging to the point I was about to give up on the game altogether.

Two things saved me from doing that.

First, I found a 2017 GDC session called [Breaking Conventions with The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild](#). It was a rare case when Nintendo

took time to explain their thought process. It tremendously helped me understand how the game works and why it works that way, effectively curing my trust issues and decreasing my fear of failure.

The second thing was watching other people playing it on Twitch. Even long-time Zelda fans struggled with the same things as I did. Everyone was dying from one monster hit too much or making silly mistakes while sneaking into enemy camp.

It wasn't only me who was struggling. And that was somewhat comforting. The game got easier over time.

I like games with mature storytelling

Story of Breath of the Wild isn't particularly great. It spills everything we need to know very early and offers no further development beyond it. Additional bits of knowledge are scattered throughout the map but they serve as a retrospective, with no influence to current events.

To add insult to the injury, we're served another bag of cliché tropes. Once again some enormous faceless evil does evil things for no good reason. Once again there's some damsel in distress we have to help. Once again the whole world looks at our character as the only lord and savior.

I enjoy games that offer interesting plot twists and moral questions. I like when good guys turn to the dark side. I like when bad guys have clear motivations for their wrongdoing. I like when things suddenly go wrong. I love when games make me feel two contrasting emotions at once or squeeze tears out of my eyes.

Breath of the Wild is like a porn movie. Its story is lightweight and serves as an invitation to get your hands busy. Except it's rated PEGI 12. With violence.

Oh, and one more thing. The protagonist doesn't speak. To me that ruins every single emotional moment of the game. I don't buy any explanation for that and it doesn't make me feel like it's *me* who is taking part in action. Protagonists devoid of personality are the ones I quickly forget.

That was still a fun journey

Yes, Breath of the Wild is an exceptional game. I fully understand why it was such a big deal in 2017. I find it mind-blowing that it was originally designed for Wii U rather than Switch. It's far from perfect but it has personality.

For me, Breath of the Wild was a game that questioned my assumptions about gaming. It showed me a different school of game design. Rather than holding my hand for most of the time, it offered me unparalleled freedom right off the bat. It was shocking at first, but it proved to be super refreshing.

For those who are still laughing at me for calling a Zelda game 'difficult': yes, I know. Also, I started Metroid Dread. I struggle with it even more.

That tiny JavaScript library that couldn't

In 2019 I was working for this well-known local equivalent of Initech from The Office Space, building and maintaining dozens of landing pages designed to sell entertainment services to millions of people. Apart from tight deadlines, delivering magic as ASAP as possible and bazillions of legacy code my work was slow and devoid of any adrenaline. It was so bad I had to invent my own ways of injecting fun to dull days in the office.

Since I like building things, and my job was mostly patching existing things, I once decided to build a new thing.

What I didn't expect was that thing would haunt me every time I would look at my GitHub profile.

The year 2019, apart from being the last year of 'the old normal', was another year of agony of Adobe Flash. Since we're discussing codebases with decades of history, millions of commits in SVN repos and no budget for refactoring, finding old Flash creations in weird places wasn't much of a surprise to me. It was all good as long as it was animated banners that should have been deleted years ago.

Then this particular Jira ticket arrived. The presentational component on one of the landing pages stopped working. Since the page was related to a flagship product, it needed a fix. Preferably here and now.

The component in question was a 360-degree product viewer. Using a series of images shot from all angles, it would create an illusion of movement on user interaction. Very neat concept and fairly easy to code with modern JavaScript.

But until modern JavaScript arrived, fancy presentational features had to be built, well, somehow. In dark pre-jQuery times, that 'somehow' was probably Flash. And that's what happened on our landing page. The image viewer in question was a commercial Flash-based plugin provisioned by an external contractor in early 2010s. No chance to get it upgraded.

Searching Google and GitHub yielded only one interesting result. Rough at edges, lacking some specific configuration options, but fully functional. And that's where this story should have ended. But we're far from a happy end.

I forked the script, rebuilt it in TypeScript, polished the interface and added extra options I needed. Since I sunk too much time into this project and 99% of it was spent outside of my working hours, I added documentation and put it on GitHub to see if it can be useful to someone else.

And boom, Tridi was born. Tridi. You know, like three-dee. 3D. Man, I'm so good at product naming.

I posted a link to Tridi on Reddit and Hacker News. I was super scared of this as I'm not a frequent submitter to either of these sites. Needlessly. The project didn't gather much interest except a few comments and stars on GitHub. Well, that happens. I solved the problem, marked the Jira issue as resolved and moved on.

Four days later I was lazily scrolling through Hacker News when one link grabbed my attention. Well, someone built a script that addressed the same problem as I had. While it wasn't a direct copy of Tridi, it worked in a very similar way. Submitted from a similar no-name account to mine.

But we weren't equal.

The difference? 87 points and 28 comments catapulted that project to the front page of Hacker News. A few days later I saw it in super-duper popular email newsletters I was subscribed to. The GitHub repository amassed hundreds of stars and tons of attention.

It hit me like a train.

Don't get me wrong, I wasn't jealous. Okay, maybe a tiny bit confused. But most of all, I regretted putting time, heart and ambition on solving an issue somebody else, somewhere else in the world, was tackling at the exact same time with the exact purpose of sharing it freely. What were the odds of that happening?

Tridi eventually got its share of attention after all. Some people did use the project. I saw a handful of forks and stars from very well-known

companies. Bug reports, feature requests and project inquiries appeared. Someone else ported Tridi to React.

It didn't change the fact this whole story left me in an awkward state. It's like this piece of art I've been anxious to show to the world, only to learn somebody else did a similar one and rendered mine irrelevant. Nobody cares about also-rans.

It's May 2022 and someone just commented on a feature request I had received back in 2021 and never bothered to touch it. 57 pull requests with unmerged dependency updates are waiting. The codebase could use some refreshing.

Technically, Tridi outlived its purpose. In 2022 I'm working somewhere else and my GitHub profile helped me a lot. I no longer need to amuse myself in stupid ways to have fun at work.

I guess it's time to end this once and for all.

Yes GitHub, I know this repository will become read-only. I understand the consequences. Copy-paste the repository name to confirm. Click that red button.

[And boom, done.](#)

How to get a job in IT?

Disclaimer: Kliknij tutaj, aby przeczytać polską wersję tego artykułu - <https://offbeatbits.com/jak-dostac-prace-w-it/>

I have been working in IT since 2011. Once in a while I am asked to give advice on getting a job in this industry. Much as I love sharing everything I've learnt, giving a concise one-size-fits-all answer is quite a challenging task.

The simplest yet sincere answer you can get from me is: I have no idea. I'm a self-taught nerd who spent a significant chunk of my life doing various things with computers for a simple reason: I enjoyed doing that.

The fact I got really deep into computers is something I owe to my parents. They worked hard enough to afford buying an Atari 65XE in early 1990s and my first desktop PC in 1998.

I kept exploring creative ways of using my computer even though my parents at some point thought I was wasting my time. I never got a degree in IT and it wasn't immediately obvious I'd ever get into this industry at all. I never googled 'how to get a job in IT' or had anyone mentoring me. The awareness that I could someday be paid for what I had been doing for fun came much, much later.

My personal story is much longer and it may be difficult to replicate step-by-step in the 2020s. But the general idea didn't age that much: invest time and effort to learn technical skills, look for opportunities and try to maximize your odds of success. Rinse and repeat until you succeed.

But I'm not here to give you generic advice any SEO-aware click-driven content marketer can give you. Instead, I'll try doing something else. I decided to note down specific questions I've heard myself and provide my own answers to them up to my best knowledge so that I can link to this article every time the topic comes up.

Some prerequisites before we start

- Being a web developer, I'm heavily biased towards programming. But IT is way, way wider than that. Sadly, I don't know much about cybersecurity, networking, IT support, game development, testing or project management. In case of these my point of view may not apply.
- I assume you're on your own. You know no one in the industry. You have no friends that could help you out. It makes things more complicated but it doesn't render you helpless.
- I assume nothing about your age or life situation but I'm not going to say it doesn't matter at all. I've seen success stories of people switching to IT after long careers in various industries. It requires perseverance, mental capacity, time management skills and various degrees of support.
- I assume nothing about your gender and I badly want to say it doesn't matter, but that's more complicated. As a cis male I acknowledge being privileged by never having to deal with rejection based on my gender - but I cannot deny it does happen. I'm fortunate to know many women that thrive in the industry. I have had women as my direct managers and I worked with women as my teammates. I leave it to your judgment whether my advice presents anything of value based on that prerequisite.
- I am unable to post advice specific to one's ethnicity, nationality or skin color. I stand for racial equality and I try to educate myself on this topic. I am sad to acknowledge systemic discrimination is a thing and I want to be a part of the solution rather than the problem. But I can only do as much and posting advice from a position I never experienced is not something I'm willing to do. If you want to hear stories about getting into tech as seen by people of color, check out one of the following YouTubers:
 - [TechGirlSteph](#)
 - [Bukola](#)
 - [The Only Girl in the Room](#)
- I have no ambitions of being your only source of truth. I cannot cover everything in a single article. Don't stop here. Google a lot. Keep exploring on your own. Confront opinions from various sources. Establish your own plan and try executing it.

Okay, so how do I get a job in IT?

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of getting into the industry:

1. Do it as a hobby and learn at your own pace, then apply for a job
2. Get formal training (university degree, courses, bootcamps, etc.), then apply for a job.

Combining both is the most efficient.

Fundamentals of many fields of IT can be learnt free of charge using publicly available sources of knowledge. You can google answers to many questions you may have on your way.

Certain degree of “passion” is important because it helps you cut corners on your way and stay focused on your goals. Inexperienced yet passionate beginner has equal chances against a generic university graduate during a job interview.

You don't have to spend 100% of your free time learning stuff, but you should do that on a reasonably regular basis. Find your own rhythm, set yourself small objectives and assign chunks of time to work through them.

Okay, but how do I develop a “passion” for IT if I don't know what I want to do?

There are two ways:

1. Pick up that one thing that looks interesting to you and dive into it,
2. Try as many things as you can and see what sticks.

Those two ways may look very similar to each other, but there is a slight difference.

I always enjoyed exploring the internet. I quickly developed natural curiosity about how websites are made. I wanted to know how to publish my own things online. I figured that out, I started looking deeper and deeper into the subject, broadening my range of skills. Building stuff that could be accessed via a web browser was that particular one thing I stayed focused on.

But I also tried other things that were fun but failed to convert into anything serious. Over two decades I designed a few logotypes, produced

music, wrote two books, took a lot of photographs, edited some videos, published articles on tech blogs, and many others. Every single one of those activities could present interesting opportunities to me if I had decided to pursue them. But I didn't stick with them for various reasons. Do I regret it? A little. But this is fine.

Yes, things are way easier if you know what you want to do and you don't have to spray and pray.

But can I really get into IT without a degree?

For some specific areas of IT, especially those that involve programming, it's absolutely possible. But you need some sort of proof of work you put into your self-development.

Programming is relatively straightforward in this regard. Start learning a programming language of your choice and try building a project or two on your own. Tackle and solve problems with tools you've learnt. Experiment with technologies and tools and be ready to talk about them. Learn Git. Set up a profile on GitHub / Codeberg / Gitlab and share stuff you find worthy, even if it's unfinished and not pretty.

Design? Very similar path. Design for friends or yourself. Redesign popular applications. Learn about user experience and be ready to discuss it. Try to build a portfolio.

Networking, security? Certifications and knowledge of popular tools may be your best bet.

I'm sure there are similar paths for other IT-related fields, but I don't feel competent enough to comment on them.

So, what's the point of getting a degree in IT? Is there a point at all?

Yes and no.

Unless you study at MIT, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge or other internationally recognized university, your degree doesn't say much about your actual skills. Your potential employer won't care about your grades.

Yes, there are cases where higher education is required by law and cannot be easily bypassed. In my country this often happens in public institutions that have to conduct processes in a certain way to ensure legality and transparency. But that's just a fraction of the whole picture.

The real value of university education in IT career is somewhere else.

First, it's a great opportunity to network with other folks who are into the same things as you. Make friends with like-minded people in your group. Or just get to know your potential competitors on the job market.

Second, university forces you to learn to work on schedule, meet deadlines and provide extrinsic motivation to do things you may not always be interested in, like in your future workplace.

Your mileage may vary. Maybe you're fortunate to live in a country where university education is better than mine. But I'm fully convinced that chasing an IT degree solely for knowledge and skills is probably a waste of time and money. And you totally shouldn't do that just because some companies put IT degree among requirements in their job offer. Sooner or later nobody will ever bother to look at the education section of your resume.

Okay - I have some tech skills. Do I need anything else?

Yes. Bad news is that even though you signed up for this industry to work with computers, you're gonna work a lot with people. Even worse, those people will have diverse levels of awareness of their own needs.

It's safe to say 99.9% of employers will expect you to be a team player and problem solver. It's even more important than your technical skills, but you definitely shouldn't neglect either.

To be a good team player, you have to enjoy talking to people, especially non-techy ones. Be friendly, treat others with respect, listen carefully and react to their needs. Being a likable human being is the bare minimum that will get you far.

To be a good problem solver, you have to develop techniques of tackling problems as well as be ready to admit you don't know it all. Not all problems are worth solving and not all problems can be solved at all.

If you can't come up with answers on the spot, don't be afraid to say 'I don't know, I'll get back to you with answers later'.

Google a lot, even the silliest of questions. Everybody on every level of seniority does that. Google doesn't judge.

If you're struggling, don't be afraid to say it loud. You're part of a team and it's absolutely fine to ask for help.

Also, if English is not your first language - spend time improving your English, at least passive skills (reading and listening). Majority of first-hand industry knowledge is written in English and some of it may never get translated to your mother tongue. Spoken and written English matter as well, especially if you want to work with clients that don't speak your language, but you should prioritize understanding what you hear and read before trying to talk or write.

Is getting into a field other than the one I'm interested in (e.g. testing) a good idea?

I've heard of this approach quite a few times: get into a field of IT that requires little to no skills, work in it for some time to gain experience, then switch jobs. The usual suspects mentioned are manual testing, IT support and probably some others I don't know about.

Of course, having this kind of opportunity at hand is million times better than waiting for the one you really want. And you totally want to have a monthly paycheck rather than having no paycheck at all. It makes sense especially if you're trying to figure out what exactly you want to do in IT - maybe one of those 'temporary' careers is the one you were looking for.

But honestly, I find this approach strange for a number of reasons.

First, it creates a false feeling that some IT fields are easier than others and I don't consider that statement true. For example, manual testing requires a great deal of discipline and attention to detail - it's about preparing and executing test scenarios, reporting bugs and living a happy life despite tight deadlines and programmers low-key hating you. Helpdesk and support jobs require patience and creativity to solve problems other people may never be facing in their everyday work.

Second, you have to ask yourself whether it's really the best way to invest your time if you know for sure it's not the one you're looking for. A lot of fields within IT, despite similarity, are completely different from each other. There's a difference between web application development and video game development even though skill requirements are vaguely similar. And there's definitely a lot of difference between testing and programming applications. Taxi driving and touring car racing might look vaguely similar on the surface, but both require very different skills.

If you know what you want to do, pursue it and don't accept substitutes as long-term solutions.

Are bootcamps any good?

That's a frequent question from people interested in programming.

My personal answer is: I don't know. When I was starting my adventure in IT, bootcamps weren't a thing yet.

In terms of knowledge, there's nothing bootcamps will teach you that you cannot find anywhere else. You don't pay for a magical cheat code to get a dream job in IT. Knowledge can be found online free of charge.

You pay money for the fact someone else made an effort to select, organize and present the material to you.

Treat bootcamps like a product you pay money for and expect it to fulfill certain promises, but keep your expectations modest. Look for reviews, ask for recommendations and compare offers. In fact, that applies to any form of learning you have to pay money for, including books or online courses.

Should I learn programming? Which language?

You don't have to. But you should, at least a little. It helps a lot, even if your dream job in IT has nothing to do with programming. Basic principles of programming can be learnt within a few hours with free tutorials.

Some programming languages are more beginner-friendly than others, but I strongly believe any popular programming language with good documentation and a sizable community is good enough to start. All

programming languages operate on a shared set of principles, so switching between languages isn't as daunting as it may seem.

Is the tool X better than Y? Is one language better than the other?

This question comes in various flavors. Angular or React? TypeScript or JavaScript? Java or C#? Python or PHP? Christmas or Easter?

There are a few ways to answer this question.

In case of libraries, languages or tools that co-exist next to each other while offering similar functionality, the answer is often political.

By picking C# over Java, you're likely tying yourself to Windows and a vast range of tools offered by Microsoft.

Angular and React do the same thing in different ways, but the most significant difference is that one is made by Google and the other is done by Facebook - two humongous corporations competing for top talent in the industry. Unless you want to work for either Google or Facebook in specific, there's no good or bad choice here.

Comparing programming languages like Python or PHP is like comparing gasoline to diesel. Cars running on either of these have a steering wheel, headlights, fuel cap and an ignition. But as an experienced driver you will feel the difference between either as soon as you start the engine. Does that mean one is better than the other? Not necessarily.

Programming languages are built for specific reasons and operate on specific sets of assumptions. But that doesn't mean one is inherently better or worse than the other *per se*.

Is there anything else I should know?

Absolutely. There's tons of stuff I didn't touch here. I didn't mention LinkedIn or GitHub, how to write a CV, how the 2020 pandemic changed the job market, how to cope with rejection, and many, many others.

If you would like me to elaborate on any of these topics, or have questions I didn't answer here, [contact me](#) and I'll write a follow-up to this article.

How to change your life with Twitch and StarCraft (vol. 1)

In 2017 I failed two job interviews for React developer positions. Normally that isn't much of a news by itself, but it all happened at a time when I was incredibly frustrated and I badly wanted something new. After receiving devastating feedback from my interview rounds, I needed a few years to rebuild my professional self-confidence. Things went very, very wrong back then and they would keep going wrong over and over again for a while. That's how it all started and it didn't feel romantic at all.

React is a popular framework created by a developer team at Facebook to speed up building modern web applications. It wasn't the first nor the last attempt to revolutionize the way to do things, but it was done by a big brand that probably knew what they were doing. Alongside Angular, another similar tool created by Google, it paved a way to a sensible, yet quite sophisticated approach to building things on the internet. What five years earlier would take me a few days and two programming languages to build, I could now build in a single evening using one language. And it felt like building things out of Lego blocks.

After years of doing boring things for a boring company I really wanted to jump into that train and do exciting things again.

Me, myself, video, video games and I

And there was Twitch, that huge video streaming service owned by Amazon I've been enamored with since 2014 or so. Watching it in the evenings was my way of making dull times a little more interesting. Unlike YouTube or other social platforms, there was something refreshing about the idea of watching a real human live on a video feed and interacting with them through a text-based chat.

Until then, I was used to various text-based modes of communication, like chatrooms, instant messengers and blogs. But Twitch was something different in my book.

I never got into streaming on Twitch as seriously as I could I struggle with the idea of being a content creator. I was born a craftsman and I am not used to doing things while having audience behind my back. It is on my list, but whether it happens this year, next year, or at all, is yet to be determined.

But I digress.

Oh. And I almost forgot.

StarCraft II

Around 2014 my flatmate showed me a single player campaign of Wings of Liberty, first installment of StarCraft II trilogy. The game looked interesting to me because it reminded me of dozens of hours spent in Warcraft 2 back in 1990s. I never got into StarCraft even though I knew it was a thing. It was easier for me to find friends to play arena shooters than strategy games. And StarCraft was never aired on TV in prime time like in South Korea.

I bought my own copy of StarCraft II soon after and we would spend hours learning strategies, playing team games or just fooling around. With help of Twitch, I discovered a vibrant community gathered around the game. Everything was there: esports tournaments, players of all kinds of skill, an elusive group of young pros earning real money, and a huge game studio taking care of the game that revolutionized the industry and legitimized the phenomenon of nerds watching other nerds playing games on the internets.

When Legacy of the Void - the third and final installment of StarCraft II campaign trilogy - came out in November 2015, I bought it on day one. At that time I have been playing the game fairly competitively (though I would never get out of silver league due to lack of patience). I was hooked to it for good.

September 2017

On the last day of August, 2017, [Twitch introduced Extensions](#). It happened after a period of closed testing on various popular channels. At that time most of my Twitch viewing happened on a desktop computer, so I quickly noticed those interesting dynamic panels on creators' channel

pages, such as Amazon wishlists and other flashy stuff that couldn't be done with old text panels.

Early gallery of extensions included projects for many popular games at the time, such as League of Legends, Dota 2, World of WarCraft and many, many others. Streamers playing those games could quickly and easily install them on their channels.

Also, the process of building custom extension was very well documented, with tutorials and code samples widely available. Anyone with decent programming skills could start doing that immediately. A typical Twitch extension is in fact a small web application with logic to present data and keep configuration details saved by a creator. It was possible to build one's own extension with tools as streamlined as jQuery or plain JavaScript or as sophisticated as any popular framework of the time.

But I couldn't see one game being covered there. And I knew that game had great community APIs to consume. And I knew right off the bat that this idea was easy to build within a reasonable time.

StarCraft II, where art thou?

2017-2018: Let's get to work

I didn't think much. I registered a developer account on Twitch, went through a boring onboarding process involving tax information, created an extension skeleton and registered a client with Battle.net API to fetch player data. I created a very early prototype in a few weeks.

Since I decided to use React, I took my time to learn new tools and experiment with various approaches, hence it took more time than I expected. I was working in the evenings while watching other streamers, generally enjoying the journey rather than rushing myself. I had no deadline to meet. Lots of beer was drunk, lots of all-nighters were pulled.

 Prototype

I had no faint idea what the extension was supposed to look like and I didn't have many designers among my contacts that would understand the medium. But there was this StarCraft II streamer who was struggling a lot in the gold league at the time. And since she was streaming from Mexico

in her morning hours, her streams aligned nicely with my boring afternoons at work.

Oh, and she was (still is) a graphic designer. Even better, a graphic designer that plays StarCraft II. What else could I ask for?

There, [Lex, the most excellent graphic designer I know](#), was summoned to handle the visual side of the extension. She came up with a neat logo and nailed the user interface.

 First version of the extension as seen in promotional graphics

Damn, those mobile devices from mid 2010s aged a bit.

Meanwhile, I was this close from scraping the project altogether for the stupidest reason possible.

I had no idea how to authorize with Twitch so that the prototype would work inside a frame on a Twitch channel.

At the same time, another extension for StarCraft II appeared. Not the same idea as mine, but using Battle.net community APIs as well. It was built with jQuery, so its code was very easy to read for me. I checked it. One evening it finally clicked for me. What a damn fool I was to not understand the simple idea of invoking a callback after Twitch completed authorization on extension load. Well, not the last time.

In 2019 I put this critical line of code in a [reusable React component](#) - initially as a render prop component, and since version 2 as a React hook. You may scoff at the idea of building npm packages out of single lines of code but you have no idea how much sweat, tears and distress hides behind them.

Since the development process was taking so long, I was sometimes approached by Twitch employees due to lack of visible progress on the project. They were nice enough to ask if there was anything they could help me with and they even offered exploratory calls. I politely declined and I never talked to any of them beyond that (after all, all I needed was more focus to get the thing done) but that was a really great moment. At that time Twitch was growing fast as a friendly platform to build cool things and they were improving tremendously in their support department, with developer-focused Discord server, web forums and

community volunteers acting as a first line of support before engaging Twitch employees.

Real life was getting in the way as well. For majority of 2018 my dad's health has been deteriorating and in October 2018 he passed away. Much as I tried to get through this with strength and dignity, 2018 was still a very slow and devastating year for me. You can't do as much coding in the evenings as you want if your mind is elsewhere.

2018: All done. Here we go

Anyway, in August 2018 everything was ready. Debian-based virtual server installed and secured. Cloudflare configured. Extension backend in Node.js tested and deployed. MongoDB database ready. Frontend installed on Twitch. Jacked up and good to go. I invited 47 Twitch streamers for the closed testing stage of the project, mostly my followers from Twitter.

I was freaking out a lot about server performance and unnoticed bugs but it all went better than I expected. Watching a Twitch stream and looking at a stream of server logs in the meantime was a mesmerizing experience. Felt like the Matrix, not gonna lie.

In October 2018 the Twitch extension went live for everyone. But for me, that was not the end.

The journey had only barely begun. I once said this on Grizzly's website:

I like to think about this project as the beginning of a long personal journey. Like in Borderlands 2, someday I'd love to look back on this moment and be like, "heh".

We were still a few years away from that moment. In fact, I still had doubts whether it would ever happen at all.

[Jump to part 2 of the story »](#)

Self-hosting Mastodon for the adventurous

Somewhere in March 2021 I found time to give Mastodon a proper shot. The idea of decentralized social media based on a common protocol has been alluring me for a while. And to make it even more interesting I opted for a hard way: I launched my own Mastodon instance on a cheap VPS.

It was a fun time. I'd like to share some thoughts for anybody who would like to follow my path.

You have to know that Mastodon is NOT a lightweight toy. It can eat all of the available resources if not groomed properly and I've seen that happening. Obviously, I couldn't scale up my server to infinity and beyond. Even worse, with recent events I was forced to cut some costs from my personal budget. Self-hosted Mastodon instance was fun, but it had to go.

However, Mastodon on my VPS never failed me for any reason I couldn't explain. It was always there with acceptably high uptime. Invasive operations like upgrading software or restarting services never brought any destructive effects. If anything was going wrong, I was always able to figure out why.

At the moment of writing I no longer run anything related to social media in general. [I still toot elsewhere](#) and I often spend more time on Mastodon than on Twitter. Nowadays I strongly prefer self-hosting my own projects rather than popular tools that can be easily accessible elsewhere, free or paid.

However, I figured I may not be the last human craving to satisfy their curiosity about owning their platform. So I decided to note down all of the stuff I learnt and share some resources I produced on the way.

I'm intentionally leaving this article vague because I want it to stand the test of time. I won't get deep into technical stuff. This kind of details may change any time and I cannot guarantee keeping this article up to date. General principles of craft stay timeless.

Also, I cannot stress this enough: I am specifically discussing running a Mastodon instance for a single user (me, myself and I). Creating a thriving community on fediverse introduces a lot of additional responsibility and I am not competent enough to discuss it.

So, before you jump on and become an administrator of your own Mastodon instance, let me share some friendly advice with you so that you keep sleeping well at nights.

Know your craft. Or at least try

Mastodon is a fairly mature project. It's well documented and it can be set up by following step-by-step tutorials. Container tools like Docker make the process even more streamlined. But there is still some barrier of entry and I am not saying it's all sunshine and rainbows along the way.

Be confident and know your tools at least a little before starting.

While I don't consider myself the greatest server administrator in the world, I am fairly comfortable with the Linux command line and I know how to harden my virtual servers based on online tutorials. I know how to edit text files on a server and copy / paste stuff. I know how to set up a basic firewall and open / close ports on a server. It was enough for me to successfully kick my instance off and keep it running for a while.

But I probably wouldn't have tried if I had never played with virtual servers or Linux at all. And I absolutely wasn't ready to open my instance to other people, even any of my friends. Being responsible for my content and only my content made my life a bit easier. My experience is probably insufficient to consider opening a public instance.

If you don't consider yourself comfortable with Linux and its command line, this is fine. Try to have some strategy to fall back on in case things go wrong. Backup critical files, be sure to always save your changes, use snapshots of your server if your provider offers them. There's no such thing as too much safety.

It's gonna be costly at times

Learn how to monitor CPU and disk space usage. Sooner or later the cheapest VPS may not exactly cut it any more. Even if you enable periodic cleaning jobs, your Mastodon instance will still cache a lot of temporary

content. One day you will have 50% disk space left, the second day you will be at 90%.

You will also face interesting moments you won't be able to predict early. One of those moments for me was Elon Musk announcing his will to buy Twitter. Following that news the whole Mastodon network had to deal with a massive spike in traffic as more and more new users would sign up. As a consequence, even my single-user instance was more stressed, as it had to cache more content and process more incoming requests.

Be aware that even a smallest Mastodon instance has to cache a lot of temporary files if it's supposed to communicate with other servers freely. You won't always see all of the cached content at all. If you can increase server capacity to have some buffer, do it.

But at the end of the day remember that your instance is expensive to run by design, as all of the cached content is consumed by a limited number of users (only you + other instances that communicate with you). That is the reason why it's more economical to join a sufficiently big instance that hosts a lot of active users at once, even a paid one.

I am not discussing cloud services like AWS or Azure here because my knowledge of them is limited and I'm on a budget. Cheap virtual servers are my way of hosting things if I'm not sure how much resources I will need in the long run.

Think about a different tool. Mastodon isn't the whole fediverse

We talk a lot about Mastodon here, but in fact it is not the only option. The beauty of fediverse, compared to 'traditional' social media, is that various platforms can easily talk to each other using a common protocol.

There are two types of tools you want to have a look at: Mastodon forks and alternative tools that retain compatibility with each other.

Mastodon forks are modifications of official Mastodon distribution. They may solve a lot of problems of the original implementation, offer additional features and so on. At any given moment you should be able to search 'mastodon' on GitHub and find actively maintained projects.

Alternative tools, such as Misskey or Pleroma, offer better performance and full compatibility with Mastodon, but they may not offer all the features you got used to in Mastodon.

Some platforms are way better suited to host specific type of content. Bookwyrms works great as an alternative to Goodreads. Pixelfed shines as an image sharing service. WriteFreely is a neat long-form blogging platform.

Take your time to play with as many of them and make an informed choice.

You don't have to run a dedicated domain but it makes sense to have one

I ran my Mastodon instance on a subdomain of one of my high-profile domains. I was fairly comfortable with Google indexing it. All was fine, but in hindsight it was far from a healthy practice.

As mentioned earlier, your Mastodon instance caches a lot of files and communicates with other servers. You may not be able to fully control it all the time. Bad news is that not everyone on the internet is nice.

Some servers on the fediverse emit questionable or illegal content. There are ways to block unwanted instances from communicating with yours. But you do not want to risk the reputation of your main domain in case Google indexes it.

Fixing error messages in Google search results is not a fun process at all. I've seen numerous cases when Google would yell at me in their Webmaster Tools but they wouldn't show me any of the affected URLs. It can be very infuriating when you don't know where to look.

Also, enterprise antiviruses and corporate security solutions can be annoyingly overzealous and you can't expect them to regularly update their databases. Malicious reputation of your Mastodon instance shouldn't bleed to any other assets of yours.

Therefore, make sure you use a dedicated domain for your Mastodon instance, or at least don't share it with other important projects of yours. Pick a domain name that will be easy to replace and cheap to renew.

Have email delivery configured so you can recover your password

I used Mailgun, as it was easy to set up and offered a generous free plan. Other options exist as well.

You want to be able to recover your password in case you lose it or it gets compromised. Otherwise you'll have to manually reset it on a database level and that's not a fun process.

Enable two-factor authentication

Two-factor authentication is important for many reasons and it's healthy to have it on. I used Yubikey and my MacBook as 2FA devices. Use anything you have available. An authenticator app on your phone (Authy or Google Authenticator) works fine as well.

You can also consider enabling two-factor authentication for SSH sessions, but using password-protected SSH keys and strong exchange algorithms is already a lot. And you shouldn't need to SSH into your server that often unless you host anything else alongside your Mastodon instance.

Have backup strategy for your own content

In other words, backup your database. Preferably in an automatic fashion.

I'll be honest - I wasn't doing that. Fortunately nothing disastrous ever happened. But I was fully aware that if something went super wrong that would render my database unrecoverable, I'd have lost my content. It wouldn't be a major nuisance to me but I would be a little sad to start from scratch again.

Also, accidents happen. My VPS provider had their data centers going down due to fire. Fortunately none of my projects ever suffered, but hey, I may not be this lucky next time.

Dead serious - don't skip backups.

Upgrade with caution. Know how to revert just in case

There were moments when upgrades were failing on me because of some forgotten detail. In those cases I'd either start over or revert to my older backup. The Mastodon application consists of numerous different services that utilize tech stack I'm not familiar with. Therefore I was strictly following the instructions and didn't allow myself much room for guessing.

Automate this process as much as you can. Use Docker, Ansible or plain old Bash scripts so that you can fire and forget. Don't perform repetitive tasks by copy-pasting commands because it gets old quickly and introduces room for errors.

My upgrading strategy was a bit wonky and my instance was often lagging one or two versions behind. For a single-user instance that isn't much of an issue.

Follow administrators of other instances

Each well-known instance has administrators. And they're almost always prominent users of their platforms. Follow them to know what's going on in the wider picture. They may know and share stuff you as an administrator may need to know.

Block instance domains at will

Once again, not everyone on the internet is nice. The horror of decentralized social media is that everyone can spin up their own server and it takes a bit to take them down. But the beauty of decentralized social media is that you have control over who your instance talks to and who your instance refuses to serve. You don't want certain stuff to be cached on your instance.

Mastodon makes it possible to block entire domains from federating with your instance. Exercise your freedom and use this option to save resources and keep your instance clean.

Mind your cache settings

If you use a CDN provider such as Cloudflare, remember that your instance has to communicate with other instances. Like a lot. If needed, add firewall rules to ensure it's possible to hotlink images from your

instance. Tweak caching settings to ensure your server load remains predictable.

Have terms of service / code of conduct, even on a single-user instance

Much as it seems counterintuitive, even a single-user Mastodon instance should have some sort of code of conduct. Some Mastodon relays require subscriber instances to have one. I found it easier to write my own version rather than asking each and every relay owner if they'd accept me.

My way of dealing with this was that I acknowledged the existence of [Mastodon Server Covenant](#) and made some promises I intended my instance to deliver.

See [my old Code of Conduct](#) and feel free to reuse it if it fits your scenario.

Note on Mastodon relays

As a single-user instance owner, you're a lone wolf. Discoverability of you and your server is determined by your own interactions with other people. Unlike Twitter, there's no algorithm that could make you famous overnight.

Relays are one way of getting some visibility into the rest of the fediverse with minimum effort. Consult terms of service of each relay and subscribe to each and every one that fits your thematic niche and speaks languages you understand in order to gain some boost to your visibility.

Also, be selective about relays you subscribe to. Content from relays substantially increase the amount of temporary data hosted on your server. And sometimes you may be seeing things you may not want to see - spam, content that should be marked as NSFW but isn't, statuses in foreign languages, etc. Unfortunately, Mastodon doesn't make it easy to determine which relay delivered specific content.

Once you grow your following list, relays lose their relevance - people on your timeline should bring you enough interesting content. You can also try checking local timelines of other instances you find interesting and follow other people.

A pattern I observed long after closing my Mastodon server was setting up a dedicated account - usually called 'federation' or something like that - solely for following interesting people and bringing their posts to local timelines of smaller servers. Think of it as a secondary following list of a server administrator. I have no opinion on that practice though.

See the [list of relays my Mastodon instance was subscribed to](#). More up-to-date lists should be available online.

Aaaaand that's it, I think

There's more to managing a Mastodon instance. There's definitely more knowledge I haven't discovered. But I believe all of the above is a good starting point. Don't cut corners and don't stress out too much and your instance will serve you well for years to come.

How to change your life with Twitch and StarCraft (vol. 2)

For the whole time [I was developing the extension](#), I was getting invitations to recruitment processes on a nearly constant basis. And I ignored pretty much all of them as I didn't want more disappointment to drive me insane. My way of thinking was that once my project was out, I'd use it to prove my expertise until I have got relevant work experience in desired fields. Anyone who wanted could see it in action or read source code if they knew where to look. And, uhm, it kinda worked.

Kinda

Yup, kinda. At least not immediately.

It still didn't prevent recruiters from pulling a 'too long, didn't read' on my resume altogether and asking what my commercial experience in technology X or Y was. I didn't want to go through the humiliating path of proving that I was worth a shot. If my resume didn't stand out immediately, well, I didn't feel confident to fight. And I didn't want to start from the low ground.

I had a few interview rounds with companies that seemed genuinely interested in what I was doing but sooner or later they'd turn me down as well. Some of them rejected me for blatantly ingenuine reasons. It really felt like all those online articles about the value of open source work in my resume weren't true at all. I felt HR people were treating me like a filler to benchmark other candidates against.

I also had a few promising processes that were perfectly within my reach. I still botched them due to my historically low levels of self-esteem.

One day I had an interesting talk with a CEO of a certain software house. He listened to my story carefully and said something that would simultaneously bless and taint my job hunting:

You're transitioning from years of building websites to building web applications. And you're gonna struggle. For some

companies you're gonna look like you are trying to switch careers.

He was right and wrong at the same time. Much as I disagreed, I couldn't argue with that logic. And he was nice enough to offer me a job that was exactly what I was looking for. I declined for a reason I'm not comfortable to share publicly. Buy me a drink and ask me in private and I'll tell you why.

On the verge of depression, completely demotivated, I was still in search of that one right door to knock.

[The 2020 pandemic](#) slowed me down even further. Rumors of various companies cutting their stuff were circulating. I heard of cases when people would be turned down by their new companies right before the zero hour. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go through the same horror at such a pivotal point of my career. Fortunately, the position I was holding at the time survived. We had even more work to do.

Gigabytes of excitement

But you want to read about that StarCraft thingy. No worries. I'm warmed up yet.

For starters, you have to know that my Twitch extension never employed any third-party statistics. There were a few reasons for that. Most importantly, I didn't know what to measure. There was no point to compromise viewers' privacy for numbers I wouldn't know what to do with. And I wasn't hiring a marketing person for an open source project without a clear business model. And I totally wasn't interested in chasing numbers for the sake of chasing numbers.

But there were two significant metrics I had access to and I treated them somewhat seriously.

First, the amount of data served by Cloudflare. I had fairly aggressive caching configured, so Cloudflare was standing between the user and the extension backend for 90% of the time. While it wasn't a particularly precise metric to draw useful conclusions, it was sufficient enough to answer many questions about the number of people seeing my project.

Second, the number of confirmed installations. Before Twitch introduced extension statistics on their end, I figured out I could check the number of

user configuration objects in my database. 'Confirmed installation' didn't necessarily mean streamer was actually using the project. I had no idea how many of those installations were visible on streamers' channels for more than 30 seconds and I wasn't attempting to verify that. But I had something. And those numbers were impressive.

One day, while doing something else, I clicked into bandwidth statistics of the extension domain. My jaw dropped.

4 gigabytes of traffic served within a few days.

I wasn't used to seeing numbers like that in any of the things I ever produced online since the 2000s. That was insanely lots of traffic in a very short timespan.

I looked at Twitch and I quickly figured out what was going on.

That one popular StarCraft II streamer picked up my extension and put it on his channel. And since he was streaming for many hours every day in front of hundreds of viewers, I could see traffic from nearly all countries of the world in my project.

The consequence was that the project got massive exposure that quickly turned into dozens of new installations on smaller channels. I've seen streamers that would play StarCraft II more passionately than any popular content creator. People that would play team games with dozens of other people. Streamers from countries that spoke languages I didn't understand.

Another big name that I confirmed to use the project was an actual professional player.

Big things were happening and I felt I should do something to make use of all that energy that was gathering around me.

I decided to redesign the extension. It was meant to be bigger, better and more powerful, if an app inside a tiny frame on some other site could be anything like that.

Version two point oh

So in mid 2019 I started working again.

It was quite a big deal, to put it nicely. The new version supported up to 3 profiles from any game region and showed MMR ratings for each individual league streamer would play in. It also presented cumulative statistics and recent match history.

From the technical standpoint, complexity of the project grew exponentially. More API endpoints were used, including ones marked by Blizzard as 'legacy'.

With version 1, particularly active streamers that were playing a lot of various types of games, even if their viewership was low, were putting quite a strain on the extension backend. Cloudflare and Redis made the experience much more tolerable at the cost of nearly real-time freshness of the data. After all, a typical StarCraft game would last anywhere between 5 minutes and 5 hours. Real time didn't matter.

And with version 2, more endpoints of Battle.net API had to be queried. Results from one endpoint would be sent to a few other endpoints. All of that had to happen without reaching hard limits on API usage. A lot of objects had to be cached in the process. Once the object was generated and cached, serving it was very cheap and efficient.

It was also an occasion to significantly upgrade the codebase. I started using TypeScript and refreshed various libraries I had developed on the way. Some of them, like [twitch-ebc-tools](#), would get featured among [Twitch Community Coding Resources](#). Others, like [BlizzAPI](#), would gain traction of their own and serve as a basis for numerous other projects such as Discord bots or clients for other games, with World of Warcraft being the most prominent representative of the category.

I also decided to split the project into independent microservices to mitigate the need for scaling up the backend. Rather than dealing with a fairly massive monolith that did many things at once, I had two tiny services ([bnet-auth-service](#) and [sc2-api-service](#)) that would do one thing and do it well.

As for the design, Lex once again delivered [something truly pleasant to interact with](#).

 Second version of the extension as seen in promotional graphics

In September 2020 version 2 was out.

And I had even more cool stories to tell during the job interviews if I ever decided to go through that misery again.

Are we there yet?

Almost.

Eventually, I managed to land a new job after way too many years in one place. Much to my surprise, it was a startup building another Twitch extension related to esports. It was a great pleasure to join a project where my unique experiences would be put to use immediately. I felt the curse from that software house CEO was finally broken. Someone asked the right questions and recognized my value.

Sadly, my startup career didn't last long due to financing problems on their end. But it marked a major turning point and I'm glad it happened. I felt the sun above me was finally kind enough to go out from behind the clouds.

[Jump to part 3 of the story »](#)

How to change your life with Twitch and StarCraft (vol. 3)

In case it wasn't obvious from the previous parts ([first](#), [second](#)), the story of my side project is in fact a story of my job hunting. Yes, It started with a video game I loved and a desire to bring something of value to its community, but the true goal was to impress a very limited number of powerful people. Everything else was an optional objective.

Looking back at the whole story, I'm convinced it wasn't exactly about growing my technical skills. Getting into the right frame of mind and regaining self-confidence was the game changer.

Somewhere at the beginning of 2022 I had a technical interview with another developer. He was one of few interviewers who took time to read my resume carefully and ask deep questions about it. At some point we started discussing my Twitch extension. When I explained the technical side of it, he noticed I was a front-end developer and I still managed to build a backend of my project on my own and use a database to store data. 'To me this screams you're good enough for us', he said.

A few weeks later that company offered me a job. I happily accepted. A few months later I submitted my termination because they didn't pay me well enough. That's not something I'd imagine doing back in 2020 or 2021.

But let's get back to the project.

2022

2022 marked four years since I released the first version of the extension. Not only my job situation changed. Everything else changed as well.

I stopped playing StarCraft II altogether and I gradually lost interest in watching it on Twitch. I switched to a MacBook and retired my old gaming peripherals. I picked up Nintendo Switch and my interest in PC gaming declined dramatically. Even if I wanted to come back, my PC started showing signs of age and I didn't want to buy a new one yet.

My morale as a developer of a thing revolving around StarCraft II wasn't great either. At some point StarCraft II was marked by Blizzard as a 'legacy' game, with no new content being added and maintenance effort limited to bare minimum. At a roughly similar time Activision-Blizzard was surfing between one controversy and another, with poor work conditions, accusations of sexual harrassment, Diablo: Immortal and many, many others. All that negativity got into my head and I started to ask myself uncomfortable questions.

Also, the Twitch extension was suffering a lot due to lack of necessary maintenance. Blizzard APIs were often timing out, resulting in incomplete responses. I didn't know how to handle those cases. The backend was riddled with edge cases that would cause the extension to show 'No StarCraft II profiles found!' error nearly all the time.

When I finally sat down to triage all the problems, I quickly realized I was no longer capable of getting the project to start on my own computer. I couldn't upgrade dependencies or reproduce most burning issues. My own code became legacy code with all the horror of that fact.

But I still wanted to bring it back to life.

Version 3, here we go

In the meantime, I completed a course on NestJS, a neat backend framework for Node.js. Within a few weeks I ported two main microservices to NestJS and I started rewriting the backend. Even though the scope of the whole endeavor was quite wide (upgrading the backend, getting frontend to work, modernizing the deployment process with Docker and Compose files), everything looked bright.

After February 2022 seemingly unrelated yet unexpected things started happening. War in Ukraine and the economic situation in my country led to a massive inflation. My mortgage increased by nearly 100% compared to the previous year. While I do consider myself privileged to earn a very comfortable living with unimaginable job security, even I eventually started cutting costs from my budget.

The extension was generating costs while bringing no income. In good times that was fine. In worse times, when some months would require me to burn savings, it started to raise questions.

And I was still not done with version 3. Lots of work had to be done to materialize it.

Let's be honest. As of 2022 the project fulfilled its purpose. I was in a completely different place than in 2017. I no longer needed any side project to prove my technical competency. I was still hungry and eager to build new things in the evenings, but I wanted to build bigger things. Most importantly, I wanted to build things that would be attractive products rather than some non-commercial fan content targeted at a small group of people.

So in August 2022 my Twitch extension for StarCraft II finally went down. The era ended.

I was left with plenty of server space and a massive feeling of void in my life. But I still considered it a happy end.

The time has finally come to look back at my 2017 self and say 'heh'.

Heh.

0:00



How much did it all cost?

I suspect it might be an interesting question to answer. Yes, there was plenty of room for optimization in this department. Yes, it can be done much, much cheaper, but that wasn't always the point.

1. **Server.** The extension was running on a single Debian VPS - the cheapest one from OVH. I typically buy servers for extended periods of time and I often look for sales, so this cost may not be super accurate. Typically it was between 3 and 5 Euro a month. To me that was the least painful position in the project budget because I always need a server or two to build stuff.
2. **MongoDB database.** My extension was a typical full-stack application and I wanted to avoid the additional complexity of

maintaining my own database. I used MongoDB Atlas. About 12 euro a month for a production-ready plan with high availability. Much more than I really needed. In 2022, when I finally figured out how to use Docker, I'd rather host my own instance.

3. **Web domain.** This cost was absolutely optional and served mostly as a convenience. Having a separate domain gives plenty of flexibility and independence of other projects of mine. A neat landing page makes a slightly better impression than a plain old link to GitHub. Around 7 euro a year for the .eu domain.
4. **Graphic design.** Lex designed two versions of the extension as well as accompanying assets. To her I was just another paying customer. For various reasons I'm not comfortable disclosing the exact sum paid in this department. But the price was fair and the quality of service was outstanding.
5. **Development time.** Lots of beer, lots of watched streams, lots of conversations with the community. I was coding in the evenings, so I had to find my own intrinsic motivation to keep going, as well as make it a little more fun so that it didn't feel like work. I typically don't do commercial work in the evenings, but if I did, my working hours would cost a lot. Sadly, I didn't track time.

While I don't regret any minute or any money spent on the extension, in 2022 I no longer have time and space for building projects this small on such a complex infrastructure. I don't mind building things that take a lot of time to finalize, but I expect them to solve much bigger problems.

Yes, it was an overkill to pay this much money to fund a project like that. But as I said earlier, the primary purpose of it was to help me land a better job. My future employers will cover all of these costs without knowing.

Things that never happened

1. **Translations.** Looking at statistics, Russian, Spanish and Korean were first candidates. I have numerous friends from various countries as well as access to Crowdin, so it was perfectly doable.
2. **Overlay version of the extension.** Graphic design was ready. It was supposed to reuse the same backend.

3. **Transition to configuration service provided by Twitch.** When the extension first came out, Twitch didn't offer such feature yet. Offloading configuration object storage to Twitch would have eliminated MongoDB from the picture, thus saving a lot of money.
4. **Getting [featured by Twitch in their showcase](#).** The extension was never as successful as many other projects. Well, I was operating in a very specific niche and there wasn't much I could do.
5. **Forks of the project ported to other games.** I identified one more popular game and I even reached out to its developer to confirm they're okay with a project like that (they were). I won't say which one it was, but the catalog of games that expose data of their users via APIs is rather limited. Take it as your homework.
6. **Monetization.** It could have saved the project from going down, even if maintenance costs weren't covered in full. The sole existence of some sort of financial support would have turned things around. However, I found it highly inappropriate to ask for money for a thing that was a nice and totally optional toy for a limited target group. Also, game companies typically prohibit monetizing fan-made content directly, so it would definitely have been a gray area. That doesn't mean I'm not a fan of asking the community for money. I want to offer something useful first.
7. **Userbase feedback.** I sent thank-you emails that to big streamers that were using the extension but I never received any replies. I was aware of a few big names that knew the project existed, but that didn't lead anywhere. I also neglected the most numerous portion of the userbase - small streamers. Hearing back from them would have moved the project in new directions.

Interesting numbers

- **80** - number of active streamers on a single day that used the extension as of August 2020.
- **1582** - confirmed installations on the day of closing the extension.
- **4 GB** - the highest amount of transferred data I've ever seen on a single day. About 80% of this traffic was generated by viewers of one streamer.

Not bad.

This is where the story of my Twitch extension ends for good. Bonus part is coming soon.

Getting into TikTok the hard way, busy human edition

Okay, uhm... yeah. I guess we have to talk about TikTok. I can do that on easy mode and turn this article into a litany of ways TikTok is worse than Facebook and Instagram combined. But I could also try spending my keystrokes on something constructive. And so it happens that I figured out a hard yet somewhat productive way of extracting value out of TikTok and I feel like sharing it here.

For full transparency - yup, I don't like TikTok. Listing the reasons why I find this app universally bad could have taken thousands of words. But I am just a random guy on the internet and my opinion doesn't matter.

Don't get me wrong, TikTok is interesting in many ways. It's still growing, just like Facebook in the early 2010s. Fascinating things happen on this platform right here, right now. I like observing projects in this particular phase of growth.

Once the phase of organic growth ends, platforms are just a few days away from becoming annoying at the price of more aggressive growth. That's where unpaid organic traffic declines in favor of sponsored content and more ads in unexpected places. I saw numerous platforms going through the same cycle over and over again. TikTok is no exception.

However, I cannot stand TikTok entirely in its current iteration. There are political and psychological implications that make this app scary. Their mobile client is a pathetic collection of all dark patterns you can put inside a smartphone app. The algorithm, apart from making big creators even bigger, is heavily overhyped.

TikTok is just another video platform with a disgusting frontend, built by a very untrustworthy entity.

Call me an old man yelling at clouds, but don't say I never tried getting to know what I despise.

But we're not here for a cheap hatefest. There are ways TikTok can be made usable, more interesting and less disrespectful to human brain. But the problem is, all of them are counterintuitive and require effort, which is far from what the app promotes. We live in stupid times when even a stupid entertainment app has to be treated like a ticking bomb or it starts sucking the air out of society.

So if you're a nerd like me and you want to catch up with your younger cousins while still maintaining your sanity, try the following. Be wary though, this isn't a proven list of battle-tested hacks. At its current form TikTok is broken by design and you can only do as much to alleviate its pain points. And I'm cynical enough to assume it won't get any better.

Anyway, here goes.

Consider using a VPN before signing up

TikTok treats every signal as a meaningful signal. Even worse, TikTok uses all of the signals it receives to make assumptions about you. The problem is, your tools to challenge those assumptions are very limited. Think cleaning your toilet with a dry toothbrush.

Anyway, one of TikTok's assumptions is that being located in Poland I'll be interested in seeing content made in Poland. And I'm one of few non-English speakers on the internet that produces tons of content in English and barely uses their native language at all. Very little first-party knowledge of significance is produced in my native language. Whenever I can, I escape the Polish internet to learn new things before anyone thinks of translating them. Knowing things sooner than others is a competitive advantage.

Sadly, it works in a similar fashion from the creator's side. I can have international friends liking my videos but the statistics make it clear: my videos struggle to leave my country. It's always the same mix: 90% of my viewership is my fellows and 10% is an arbitrary list of other countries that often don't speak the language of the content I produce. Viewership numbers are empty metrics that could as well be generated at random.

Knowing all of the above I should have signed up for TikTok via a VPN server from some English speaking country. While it wouldn't magically solve all of my problems, it would definitely trip the TikTok algorithm to waste less of my scrolling time.

If you'd like to escape the hell of low-quality content made by your fellows, or for any reason don't want TikTok to assume anything based on your location, consider using a VPN before signing up. Maybe keep VPN on every time you use TikTok at all.

Give only as much privilege as needed

Let me repeat - TikTok treats everything as a meaningful signal. Including your app settings and any data you provide.

You aren't under any obligation to provide any of the data TikTok asks for. If you don't want notifications, don't turn them on. If you don't want to upload your contact list, don't do it.

Be warned that the app gets annoying any time you dare having your own opinion. You will see prompts to upload your contact list even though you already said 'no'. If you want to disable app notifications, the app will insult your intelligence by making you answer 'maybe later' instead of good old "no".

I'm not even saying you should maintain some standards about your own online privacy (narrator: yes, you should). But you want TikTok to be a little better at serving you interesting content. Starving it off data points to make assumptions about you can be a way to go.

...and assume TikTok already knows you exist

You can go to any length to minimize the smell of yours you leave on TikTok, but let me remind you that it might not matter at all. Just like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and many other social media sites, TikTok nags every user to upload their contact list. Assume someone you know already did that.

As of now I'm not aware of any way of restricting your data from being uploaded by others. But you should be aware it's a thing.

Bring a specific interest and use search function

That is the most important hint on this list.

If you arrive on TikTok with no specific idea what you want to see there, the algorithm will present you with tons of random stuff in hope something eventually catches your eye. You are supposed to scroll through hundreds of videos, hit 'like' on some of them, and the algorithm should present you with more tailored content over time.

TikTok has an option called 'Not interested in this content', which is obviously hidden from plain sight (tap and hold on the video to reveal it). But using it still doesn't guarantee anything. We are dealing with a machine that isn't optimized for viewer satisfaction but for increasing viewership time in any way possible.

Don't use the 'For you' page if you don't know what you want to watch. Have a specific interest on your mind and use the search function to find relevant videos to interact with.

Yes, the search engine on TikTok isn't great. Its non-prominent place in the app is no coincidence. But it's the only area in the whole app that offers some sort of control over the experience.

If you ever decide to waste time on the 'For you' page, you'll at least have fed the algorithm with legitimately useful data points about what you want to watch. Sadly, one can only hope it actually makes the scrolling experience any better.

Use TikTok on the desktop if at all. Seriously.

Thank goodness, TikTok is not a mobile-only app. They offer a plain ol' browser-based client as well.

Most surprisingly, the desktop version of TikTok is... boring. And that's a positive. Its user interface is simple. If you ever used YouTube, Twitch or Twitter, TikTok on your computer will look very familiar.

And most importantly, having a web browser at your disposal, you can strip the app off certain undesirable behaviors, such as autoplaying each and every video within your sight. Not to mention that you have a choice on where you run your web browser - it could be your personal computer, virtual machine or a separate isolated environment if you're this kind of paranoid.

Have friends that share videos with you

Well, that's self-explanatory enough. Thank your friends for doing the hard work of scrolling and curating the content for you. Every time someone drops something in your inbox, you save time by not having to search for it yourself or scroll the 'For you' page to find it. Love your friends.

Follow a lot of accounts

Follow enough accounts so that you always have something to watch without having to check the 'For you' page. If you need 500 accounts to achieve that, follow 500 accounts. If you're deemed to waste time on TikTok, at least waste it on your own terms and watch stuff that is legitimately interesting to you.

That is not a typical way I use social media, but in case of TikTok and their aversion to users having control over what they want to see, this is the way to go.

And if you scroll that damn 'For you' page, maintain standards

Look, I am not trying to tell you how to live your life and what you should or should not do with your time. But hear me out.

Whenever I would scroll through the 'For you' page, I gave full attention to videos below certain number of likes / followers. My general belief is that it is small passionate creators who deserve all the love and attention online. I do not apply this exclusively to TikTok. I follow this principle on YouTube, Twitch and anywhere else as well.

I would skip each and any video that was already swimming in likes and comments because I didn't want the algorithm to feed me with more of all that popular bullshit recycling the same ideas. I tried to notice trends and avoid interacting with them as soon as I saw them. Sadly, the side effect of that policy was that I would hit the 'bottom' of the video feed - the app would need a few seconds to fetch more videos.

I'm generally allergic to seeing the same type of content over and over again and that applies to every platform (exceptions are rare, but do happen). Any time I saw TikTok throwing the same dumb meme in front of

my eyeballs, I'd want to let the algorithm know I was not interested in it. Scroll, scroll, scroll.

You don't have to follow anything I said above. But develop some standards on your own. Be picky about your likes, because TikTok can and will utilize them in the future. You don't eat chocolate for breakfast, lunch and supper. TikTok might feed you with same types of content over and over again if you let them know it works for you.

Go beyond likes. Interact with creators, not content

In the grand scheme of things, contrary to what TikTok wants you to believe, hitting 'like' on any content is a lazy and mostly meaningless way of interacting with it. It isn't even clear how much influence a single like has on the algorithm compared to other behaviors. While getting a like is definitely better than getting no likes, as a creator I see no value in receiving likes from empty accounts that will never see me again. Any fool can post anything on this platform and get a droplet of recognition.

As a viewer, I did it my way.

If I stopped at a specific video, I tried to go beyond a simple like. I would try to drop a comment and check if the creator exists outside of TikTok. It is usually possible with artists of any kind (they use TikTok like another content distribution channel) and virtually impossible with people who don't produce anything outside TikTok. The thing is, I seek interactions with people rather than content because content isn't produced out of thin air. There is a human behind it.

That doesn't mean I would comment and follow each and every creator. I tried my best to make my interactions with TikTok videos deliberate and meaningful, and most importantly, I'd try to get to know the human behind them. After all, TikTok would be worthless without people who do it for pure fun rather than profit. Someone has to be poor if someone else is supposed to be rich.

Aaaand... profit?

Maybe. Maybe not.

I'll be honest with you. Following the advice above made TikTok feel more like other platforms I am used to. But it never solved any problems I had with it.

For a lightweight entertainment app, TikTok offers too little control over the experience. And I have too much attention span to waste it on 5-second videos. That is not my type of entertainment.

I could ignore the fact it's a nicely designed Chinese spyware and all the political implications of it. But I cannot ignore everything else, from addiction-fuelling psychological tricks to the pure annoyance of the whole experience on mobile.

But I tried. And if you're feeling adventurous, well, you're a reasonable human being. You know best what to do with your life. I wish you luck.

Summing up 2022

Without further ado, like a year ago, let's conclude 2022 with a personal summary. There is quite a lot to cover, and it was generally quite a bleak year. But some positive stuff happened too.

Work / personal development

I am thrilled to announce that 2022 was a long-awaited breakthrough year in my professional career. Finally, after a few years of struggles and mild symptoms of depression, I successfully found a new position that is way more in sync with my current skillset, with satisfying pay and a great team of people.

That means I can finally shift my priorities about growth and personal development. I no longer feel I have to prove my worth to anyone. My level of self-esteem and confidence grew to levels not seen since 2010s.

What is also worth mentioning is that after a decade of front-end work, I switched to a full-stack position. I perceive it as a natural consequence of trying various hats and learning stuff outside my usual scope of interest within the last few years. I am grateful for a position that provides me with challenges across multiple domains.

A considerable part of my effort toward revolutionizing my professional life was building things and coding after hours, and I didn't stop doing that. But I approach after-hour coding with a slightly different mindset. I no longer build stuff to impress others (yup, I used to).

Nowadays, if I start developing something outside of work, it is usually a solution to my own problem or an improvement to some mundane process in my life. And I'm not audacious enough to think my struggles are unique only to me and nobody else in the world. I try to produce artifacts others can pick up and use, whether a fully-fledged product or a hacky open-source script on my GitHub.

At the time of writing, I have four project ideas to explore in 2023. I'm not promising to complete any or all of them by the end of next year. The journey itself will be exciting enough.

Not work, but still techy

Speaking of side projects, in August 2022 I closed [my Twitch Extension for StarCraft II](#). Looking back, it was a much more impactful decision than I initially thought, as it triggered several other events I will discuss later.

Closing this project marks another shift in my thinking about product development: I am no longer interested in building stuff locked so tightly to some other platform. Don't get me wrong; Twitch extensions are fun. But from now on, I want to build bigger and more independent things.

If anyone from my StarCraft-loving gang from Twitter is reading this, I see you. I love you. Thank you for being here with me.

Death to social media, long live social media

I made an [unexpected and unsuccessful attempt at getting into TikTok](#). I have no plans on trying again for now. I find TikTok disingenuous and legitimately harmful.

Closing my Twitch-related side project meant I lost interest in Twitch. At some point, I was one click away from deleting my account. These days I still use Twitch as my provider of background noise but I'm no longer as engaged as I used to be. I struggle to find new exciting niches to follow.

Oh, oh, oh. We have to discuss Twitter.

At some point in 2022 I noticed I was getting increasingly bored with Twitter. Whenever I posted anything that mattered to me, it felt like talking to a brick wall. It felt like people would only follow me for bad jokes and care little about anything else.

Since 2021 I've been playing around with Mastodon, including [self-hosting my instance](#). Slowly but steadily I was shifting my attention towards the fediverse.

Then the plot twist happened. Its name was, obviously, Elon Musk. With another wave of user migration I closed my Mastodon instance, migrated to a public server and purged my Twitter account.

My jaw dropped multiple times when I saw people with large followings deleting their Twitter accounts and going all-in on Mastodon. What used

to be an interesting curiosity to me suddenly became a vibrant platform that felt like nothing I had seen before.

After years of boredom and frustration with every social media site I used, fediverse finally managed to achieve the impossible: it made social media exciting to me again. On fediverse I see things other social media weren't eager to show me. I interact with people I wouldn't have encountered anywhere else. I learn hard lessons on diversity, empathy, equal opportunity and discrimination. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Mastodon single-handedly made me a better human by forcing me to rethink many of my stances.

Fediverse is not perfect. It's not a direct replacement for any social media site and never will be. It has cultural and technical issues that aren't always easy to fix. A lot can be said about Mastodon and the way it's governed. However, something significant has happened in 2022: a considerable chunk of intelligent and influential voices is now on fediverse (most likely on Mastodon) even if they keep their Twitter profiles open. It's an exciting time to be there and there is still more to come.

Geopolitics

With great sadness I acknowledge 2022 as the year I started getting interested in geopolitics. No surprise given that war is raging a few hundred kilometers from my country.

To me, some random European from a country that has been living in relative peace since the end of World War II, war in Ukraine was a piece of terrifying news. Until then I would look at the whole notion of war in one of two ways: (1) something that happened long ago, (2) something that is happening right now but it's far away from my home. For a few months I had periods of compulsive doomscrolling, frequently checking if [the president was still 'tut'](#) and looking at violent images of dying civilians or burning cities.

War deepened my interest in local and global politics, and I consider it a net positive, even if it can get mentally exhausting. I no longer look at it catastrophically. It added another factor to consider while evaluating any risk or opportunity that impacts my life, money or long-term future. There's no way back to 'good old times'.

Gaming

Finally, 2022 was a year of unilateral domination of Nintendo Switch as my primary gaming hardware. I completed many games including [Breath of the Wild](#), Metroid Dread and dozens of indie titles. The role of gaming in my life declined a lot, but I still tremendously enjoy doing that.

At the moment of writing this I'm considering buying an Xbox. There are many good reasons for getting one instead of upgrading my old PC. No decision has been made yet though.

Other

I failed to address some issues I mentioned in my 2021 summary, including sleep quality and physical activity and I don't feel well about that.

It was a slightly better year for my book reading, but I'm still not where I want to be.

I still keep my interest in video and photography alive, but I can't tell what happens next about them. There's plenty to do in this department and not enough time or strong will to morph them from shallow interest into a passion.

And...

...that's it. Once again, no need for fancy closers here. Happy new year.

The quest for purging my bookmarks

I started 2023 with a major purge in my digital corner. After moving my password vault from LastPass to Bitwarden, removing hundreds of dead entries and switching authentication from Authy to my Yubikeys wherever possible, my eyes rested on my browser bookmarks tab. I realized I had a problem.

Spending so much time online and working in a field that involves computers, I see lots of content. I search forums and GitHub, browse Hacker News and Reddit, scroll through Twitter (I mean, these days it's Mastodon), and more. I can't say it's 100% time well spent. But sometimes, I find stuff I want to save for further reading or taking action.

Over two decades I tested many solutions for bookmarking content, but I struggled to stick to any for more than a few weeks. Sooner or later I would miss features or encounter paywalls, and I had doubts throwing money at a problem was a way to go.

I stuck with the simplest, most accessible solution: the bookmarks bar in my browser. I quickly developed muscle memory of dragging and dropping anything I found interesting to my bookmarks bar.

And I have been living that way for more than eight years.

In January 2023 I woke up to my browser bar containing dozens, if not hundreds, of unsorted links I never touched again.

I hate looking at a mess I create myself. The problem is I get used to it too quickly. I can go on just fine for some time, but operating in a clean distraction-free environment awakes my creativity. Only one day of slacking is what I need to create a new pile of shame somewhere around me. And I won't even notice until it grows substantially.

I could wipe all my bookmarks without reading. But my past self saved those links on purpose. It felt wrong to nullify years of my effort just like that.

Sheesh. What to do. What to do.

But first, the curious case of YouTube

There's more content than a lifetime to consume. To effectively manage streams of information coming my way, I must curate a lot and ignore even more. I'll shamelessly say I'm relatively good at this, but it requires effort and creativity.

Let's talk YouTube.

I exclusively use the subscriptions tab and 'Watch later' folder to save interesting stuff. I also have watch history turned off. Also, I ignore videos below a certain length, no matter the topic, and I do not watch Shorts. That's my personal preference.

I'm very picky about subscribing to YouTube channels. Whenever I do it, I will try to watch all the content this channel has produced since its start. I give each video one watch. When I'm done with one video, I hide it from my subscriptions tab. I do the same to uninteresting videos. Catchy title, but the content fails to keep me hooked? Hide it. Video looks boring right from the title? Hide it.

If I encounter an interesting video on a channel I'm not subscribed to, I add it to 'Watch later' folder. From now on, it's a race against time. Videos go private or get deleted all the time, but dead links stay in my 'Watch later' folder. Therefore, I'm motivated to keep this folder tidy so that nothing sits there for too long. And since I try to be very particular about what I watch, the stuff I save for later is usually valuable.

That system sounds like lots of work because YouTube is obnoxious with its algorithms. It's impossible to keep anything organized without external tools. But I wanted something simple and device-agnostic that relies more on my muscle memory than fancy features in one specific browser or app. I always have something interesting to see, even when none of my subscribed channels posts anything new.

Years of keeping YouTube manageable taught me how to maintain chaos. So I can do something about the chaos in my bookmarks, right?

Easy picks

I had to start somewhere. And the best start is to get some small successes.

I deleted all Stack Overflow threads, forum posts, GitHub issue links and documentation pages. Most of those were very specific to situations I had in the past, so I should have deleted them long ago.

As for documentation - it will always be there for as long as the tool it covers does exist. No point in hoarding it.

GitHub projects: use stars and lists

We're not done with GitHub yet. I noticed GitHub introduced lists as a beta feature. So it's now easy to organize starred projects.

I wasn't eager to star projects on GitHub because it would effectively create another pile of shame. GitHub stars don't pay developers' bills anyway. But now, it's a slightly different story. I think twice before giving stars on GitHub if I can't put it on a list of mine. [My lists on GitHub](#) are still work in progress, but they look very neat and relatively easy to browse.

Articles with code: steal code, save links

Numerous links in my bookmarks covered some specific tidbits and included reusable pieces of code, such as project templates, file boilerplates or CSS starting points. I created repositories on my GitHub profile to archive code samples and keep reference links in the readme files.

If the post's author had made a GitHub repository themselves - awesome! I no longer had to do that myself.

Tech specifications: can I action on this?

Another category of links was tools and specifications of various emerging standards, such as [JSON Resume](#) or [security.txt](#). Those I can't easily keep on GitHub without losing track of them.

My answer was: implement or forget. So I added security.txt files in some of my sites even though I don't need them. It required little time and

effort. And JSON resume is something I'm going to explore at some point. Until then, I moved it to a GitHub issue on my homepage repository.

If I have no interest in implementing any specific spec or tech, either now or someday, then it's easy to delete it with no regrets.

But what about the rest?

Are we done yet? Not even close. The journey barely even started.

What's left can be classified into a few groups:

- **opinion pieces or journalism** that requires dedicated time chunks to read,
- **links to interesting tools** that aren't on GitHub or can't be starred easily (and I don't find following organizations on GitHub useful),
- **blog posts**. But I'm rarely interested in just one post. I often check what else the author has to say. Sometimes I end up with a desire to binge-read whole blog archives,
- **small chunks of non-technical knowledge** that spark my curiosity.

Those are tough nuts to crack, and I haven't found reliable ways to tackle them. But here are some of the ideas I'm exploring.

Posting on social media

I started my own tag on Mastodon, called [#purgingMyBookmarks](#). Each day I post 2-3 links with a short commentary of mine. To keep it interesting, I follow a rule: I don't post stuff I didn't read or have nothing to say.

Repurposing my Kindle

I own a few devices I can use to read. And one of them is Kindle Paperwhite. I don't use it often because I have too many unread paper books around. However, Kindle has a simplistic web browser and can receive external files, such as PDFs. Maybe that's the way to go.

The component I'm missing here is a simple way to convert whole blog archives into something more resembling an ebook than a webpage.

Bring RSS back

I remember Google Reader. To this day I'm annoyed they killed it. But that was when I had a single computer, and my phone had a postage-stamp-sized screen. These days I consume more content on my 12-inch tablet than anywhere else.

The problem with RSS these days is that I need a solution that will work across all of my devices (okay, at least two of them). Some readers look promising, and I just have to explore them more. Feedly looks the most appealing of them all.

And uhm, I don't know. Newsletter?

Another idea I'm exercising is creating a newsletter.

The problem with posting links on social media is that I keep the volume low not to overwhelm my followers if they haven't filtered out my hashtag. In case of the newsletter, I could speed up the cleaning process since it's perfectly fine to post more links in a single publication.

But I have never created a newsletter before. I'm a little scared of all the unknown unknowns around this.

I guess I have a new 2023 resolution?

And that's where I am. I unintentionally created a new journey for myself, and I'll have to get it done someday. Wish me luck?

New year, new me, new blog

I changed the design of my blog for the third time since its start in 2020. In normal circumstances that isn't that much of a news. However, if a quick and straightforward redesign takes two weeks and generates 80 tasks on the GitHub kanban board, we need to discuss this.

Where it all started

Until recently, I used [Chirpy Eleventy template](#) by René Winkelmeier. It's a very aesthetic theme with interesting features. I loved it at the very first sight.

However, one day I woke up and realized this was not the kind of design I liked to see on other blogs.

I like simple, minimalistic designs with solid typography, preferably using a single column to present content. Chirpy, with its wide text column and two sidebars, didn't feel right for larger chunks of text.

But why do I have this kind of preference? Because that's what seems to be prevailing in the part of the web I see around. And what I see around is variations around typographic-heavy styling as seen on Medium, Substack or dev.to.

Creative design that intentionally breaks the rules isn't dead. I enjoy looking at sites that reflect crazy personalities of their owners. But that is not something I wanted to do, as I wasn't sure if I would have executed it well. I'm okay with my blog looking like another Substack without the benefits of being on Substack. I want this blog to compete on content rather than design.

This new theme may not look like much, but it has more personal touch than it seems on the surface. Let's see behind the scenes.

First and foremost, a love letter to Eleventy

[Eleventy](#) is a JavaScript static site generator that powers this site. I discovered it in 2019 when I contributed a Polish translation of [Katie](#)

[Sylor's Git troubleshooting site.](#)

In 2023 I run a few other Eleventy-powered websites, I still have plans for more and I'm slowly getting into [developing Eleventy plugins](#). It is currently on top of my favorite tech things unrelated to daily work that I enjoy.

Eleventy reminds me a lot of my early days with WordPress back in 2000s and 2010s. Unlike WordPress, it's free of the annoyance of databases, security or the craziness of the programming language doubling as a template engine. In my mind, Eleventy resides on the verge of two worlds: websites as a bunch of HTML files that have to be diligently maintained and edited by hand, as well as fully-fledged content management systems that combine a lot of different concerns in a single package.

When I was releasing this article, version 2.0.0 of Eleventy landed just a few weeks earlier. With my new theme, I used some new features, such as [new base plugin](#).

SCSS, CSS variables, semantic HTML

This redesign is my first project in a very long time that uses modern web features and isn't a React application or a project based on a popular CSS library.

I've been in the industry long enough to remember constant struggles with Internet Explorer, CSS hacks and other suboptimal techniques for fixing trivial layout problems. In 2023 the situation is different. Nothing stops me from using CSS variables, flexbox, relative units or HSL color palette. And there are more features on the way, like native CSS nesting, container queries, and many more.

I refused the temptation of using Tailwind CSS, as the idea of it feels very strange to me for many reasons. I may revisit it someday, but for now I keep using SASS. I like splitting my stylesheets into small component-scoped chunks that merge into one during the build process.

Design rules and typography

While I was building the theme, Anthony Hobday released an excellent [rundown of design rules that are safe to follow every time](#). It was a tremendous help for a guy like me - a passionate developer hopeless at

design. Never before have I built anything in such a slow and deliberate way, focusing on *why* rather than *how*.

Also, this is the first time in this decade I felt comfortable using a serif typeface for text in a while. Old-fashioned Georgia typeface looks gorgeous on contemporary displays. Using a typeface that is present on many operating systems saved me from analysis paralysis while trying to choose a custom typeface. And I don't have to struggle with [FOUT problem](#), which is something I never manage to get right.

EPUB and PDF

If you're reading this article from a PDF or EPUB file, this is the moment it started.

Back in 2010s I stumbled upon [Rachel Kroll's blog](#). I found it a very entertaining read but as a latecomer I was greeted with a vast archive of texts that wasn't super convenient to read in a single sitting on any computer (I didn't have a tablet back then). Conveniently, Rachel published some of her older writing as [ebooks available on Amazon](#). I distinctly remember how different it felt to read her blog archive on Kindle. It didn't feel like a blog at all. It felt like a book with short chapters. Easy to digest in small chunks.

I encounter interesting blogs all the time. But if they have hundreds of texts in the archives, I struggle to read them all, even though I'd love to. The web would be much better if more blog owners repackaged their archives as ebooks or PDF files.

I practice what I preach. You can jump to [Read offline section](#) and read this blog on your Kindle or anything that opens PDF files. My archive is yet to grow, but I intend this project to last.

As for how I repackage my content into PDF and EPUB files - I'll get back to it in a different article. Meanwhile, you can check [the Git repository](#) for implementation details.

Accessibility

Having been a [heavy tooter in the fediverse](#) I think a lot about accessibility. Years ago I read 'Dive into Accessibility' by Mark Pilgrim. In 2010s I was implementing accessibility fixes on a giant legacy website

that was legally obliged to provide them for their visitors. So much fun implementing contrast switchers on subpages that were using inline styles and !important clauses.

As for the theme, I don't have enough audacity to claim compliance with existing accessibility standards, but I tried to get close to it. I made friends with VoiceOver on MacOS and I tried to navigate the new theme with my keyboard. I installed browser extensions for measuring color contrast. I am a little better at recognizing WCAG-AAA-compliant color combos than I used to. Some areas of the site aren't perfect, but that's fine for now.

Polish translations of wise words

I accidentally discovered I enjoy reading and translating valuable articles written by other people, especially those coming from entirely different backgrounds than me. It is an occasion for me to dive deeper into what I read and sharpen my saw in the foreign language department. But most importantly, I take this as an opportunity to amplify voices of people I deeply respect.

All of the texts I wrote in Polish and my translations of texts by other people are now easily accessible on a [separate section of the site](#).

I do not publish translated texts in EPUB / PDF files and I have no plans to change that. Doing so would introduce licensing nuances and makes it more difficult for original authors to exercise their ownership rights.

Sharing is caring

Finally, I am confident about what I built here, so I made this theme available as an Eleventy starter template for others to download and use.

The reusable version of this template is called **Bliss** and it's [available as an Eleventy starter](#). It is not on 100% feature parity with what you can see on this blog. I can't effectively release and maintain certain features in a community-focused project. But as I mentioned before, the repository of this blog is [publicly available](#) and you can port anything you fancy into Bliss.

The fun begins again

A new blog theme certainly wasn't a part of my agenda for 2023, but it reignited my interest in numerous things I wasn't paying attention to and I am happy with that. It feels different from what I do at work these days and therefore refreshing.

Expect more stuff happening here, maybe very soon.

We once lived in a happy world

Disclaimer: I originally published this article on one of my previous blogs back in 2014. In 2023 I edited it again and now I'm republishing it for nostalgia reasons.

There's a particular category of devices used by majority of world's population. Invented many decades ago, they quickly became so widespread that we hardly remember how we managed to live without them.

At first, those devices had very simple form and limited set of features. People needed some strength and patience to use them.

Further iterations became more compact and easier to use, but they started to use parts of limited lifespan. It wasn't much of a problem though.

Did your device's power unit stop working? Some other part got wonky? Get it replaced or try fixing it on your own. If successful, your device would remain perfectly usable for many more years without fuss.

Time was passing by. Millions of people used their devices for years and years and manufacturers didn't like that. They noticed they had a serious problem. Once you bought your device, you were lost for good and the manufacturer wouldn't get your money any more. After all, you had bought a device that was so affordable to maintain that you would never need to buy another one (unless you broke the one you had been using).

And it all went to...

All devices used to work in exact same way, even if manufactured by different companies. But manufacturers started investing heavy loads of money to develop features which wouldn't add much to device's usability, but were heavily advertised as a core reason to replace your old model with a new one. You got a bigger screen, more advanced processing unit and even more features.

Worse, any newer iteration of the device rarely resembled a similar model produced a generation or two ago. If your old device was still alive and kicking, it had been produced in a way it was nearly invulnerable.

However, if you decided to buy a new one, you were doomed. And if you broke it (and your warranty expired), forget about fixing it yourself. Spare parts were difficult to come by and expensive to buy. Nobody could repair their own devices any more, so heavily customized and non-standardized they became.

Up to this day manufacturers deny any accusations of planned obsolescence of their products. And we get new generations of devices every single year.

We once lived in a happy world...

...when you didn't have to make hard choices between usability and durability of your device.

We once lived in a happy world in which everyone could buy just one device for their whole life and pass it to their children. Since there were less devices manufactured and sold, there was no need to optimize costs of manufacturing. The devices were built to be durable. No cheap plastic or irreplaceable parts.

And it all went to shit.

I'm obviously talking about washing machines.

Shallow intro to Nostr (and maybe fediverse)

I've been a happy user of various fediverse services (mostly Mastodon) for 2 years now and they are on a short list of things that make the rotten idea of social media exciting to me. But I still have a lot of natural curiosity about new things. What recently popped on my radar is Nostr - another take on decentralized social media.

I decided to note down my thoughts and try to explain this place to my other self in some alternate timeline where Twitter is alive and kicking and Mastodon is still a niche curiosity.

While I won't avoid diving into technicalities or comparing Nostr to the fediverse, I'll try to keep this summary as accessible as possible. Architectural choices made by both platforms heavily affect their culture and we cannot avoid discussing them.

And honestly, I find it mind-blowing how two different ecosystems try to solve exact same problems in so radically different ways, effectively attracting radically different groups of people.

First things first: what is the fediverse? What is Mastodon? What is the meaning of life?

Fediverse is a decentralized platform for building social media applications that can talk to each other via ActivityPub or OStatus protocol.

Yes, I know. I don't understand that statement either. Let's try again.

Imagine a world where we all happily use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Twitch, YouTube and whatnot. But in this world, all of those services work slightly differently.

You can easily see what your friends do on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube or Twitch without leaving your Facebook wall. You can comment on your

friend's YouTube video directly from your Facebook wall. Your friend will see your comment under their video as if you visited YouTube to post it (but you didn't!).

The same goes another way: your friends from Twitter can see your Facebook posts and respond to them from the comfort of their Twitter timelines.

In the 'real' world, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others are walled gardens that interact with each other rather sparsely. Yes, you could embed a YouTube video or post a screenshot of some tweet on your Facebook, but that's about it. Everything else that makes YouTube YouTube - like the comment section - doesn't magically come to your Facebook wall. At some point you'll inevitably visit YouTube to see something you couldn't see on Facebook.

Also, for computers, our Twitter followers, YouTube subscribers and Facebook friends are separate lists of entities that can't talk to each other. We can have the same people on all those lists, but those are still unique records in computer memory. That results in various deficiencies, like having to use 'link in bio' services to keep that mess at bay.

Let's go back to our 'different' world.

Now, imagine there's *more than one* Facebook.

More than one Twitter.

More than one YouTube.

More than one Instagram.

And all those Facebooks, Twitters, YouTubes and Instagrams are run by ordinary people who maintain them as they see fit, either for themselves, their families or friends.

In our 'real' world, that is close to how telephones work. To call or text someone, you had to get a phone number from an existing provider. Different providers worldwide can operate in various ways, but that doesn't change the fact that you can freely call or text anyone worldwide, even if they use a provider you never heard the name of.

And that's how the fediverse works.

But instead of Twitter, we have Mastodon.

Instead of Instagram, we have Pixelfed.

Instead of YouTube, we have Peertube.
Instead of Facebook, we have Friendica.
Instead of WordPress, we have WriteFreely.
And so on.

To be on Mastodon, you must get an account on some server. Once you get one, you can follow and talk to anyone who uses Mastodon, but also to anyone who uses Pixelfed, Peertube, Friendica - or one of a dozen other platforms.

To follow each other, you use an address that resembles your email. My address is @lukem@masto.ai. Yours can be, for example, `@YourSuperFancyUsername@mastodon.online`.

Mastodon is particularly popular among people disappointed with whatever nonsense is happening to Twitter lately, but the history of Mastodon reaches way back, as far as 2016. It has a lot to do with how other social platforms were designed and how they mistreated certain groups of people long before you and I heard of Elon Musk.

That's the briefest introduction to Mastodon and fediverse I can give you right now. And believe me, [there's a lot more to it](#). But this is one way *decentralized social media* can (and does) work. And that's not the only one.

Let's have a look at Nostr.

What is Nostr?

NOSTR is an abbreviation for Notes and Other Stuff Transmitted by Relays.

Let's imagine another completely different world. There's no Facebook or Twitter, no Instagram or YouTube. Instead, we have an infinite supply of blank postcards and pens.

To talk to each other, we agree to write our messages on the postcards. Under each message, we put our signature. Our signature is always unique to us because our style of writing and the pen we use unambiguously communicates it was really *us* who signed the message.

Now, we need a place to put those postcards so that *someone* can receive and read them.

Conveniently, the whole world is full of mailboxes placed on each street corner. Everyone can set up their own mailbox as it's relatively uncomplicated - and that's what people do. Some mailboxes are free; others charge a fee. Some allow everyone to read the postcards but not to send them.

All those mailboxes have one specific feature: except for a few, most of them are open and available for anyone to send their postcards. Everyone can check each mailbox and see postcards written by other people.

Since we put our signatures on postcards, and our signatures are unique (no one can easily fake ours unless they steal our pen and try very hard), our friends *always* know which postcard comes from us. So to exchange postcards, we must agree to use the same mailboxes.

For convenience, we can write the same postcard multiple times and send it to as many mailboxes as we want. Fortunately, the technology has advanced enough so that we don't have to spend time copying the same postcard for each mailbox - it happens effortlessly and automatically.

Sending our postcards to multiple mailboxes has one advantage: more people will read them. But nothing stops us from sticking to just one mailbox. That one special mailbox available only to our close group of friends.

In Nostr, we send notes (postcards) to relays (mailboxes). We sign each note with a cryptographic key that is private to us (that's us signing our postcards with our favorite pen). Our followers know how to find us because they know our public key (they can see what our signature on a postcard looks like).

Unfortunately, our signatures on Nostr don't look overly neat. Mine looks like this:

```
npub16dqhd5h9rdfpvv8yzxejq8v9t52l2398s6p9298mu65c785fk8usd6m0ar
```

Or, if you prefer hexPubKey format:

```
d34176d2e51b521630e411b3201d855d15f544a786825514fbe6a98f1e89b1f9
```

Not convenient, but we can rely on copy-pasting or browser extensions to store the keys for us.

So, how does Nostr compare to Mastodon?

Mastodon and Nostr utilize the concept of relays. Relay is effectively somebody else's computer that does *stuff*.

In both Mastodon and Nostr, relays do very similar things - they accept and broadcast messages sent to them. In most cases, anyone can publish or subscribe to any relay they wish.

However, relays on Mastodon are merely an additional tool to work around the decentralized nature of the fediverse (how do I get to see *things* if I run my own single-person server?). Mastodon can do just fine without relays because direct person-to-person interactions are effective enough at turning a chaotic bunch of computers into an interconnected network.

Relays in Nostr are its building block. They are the primary source of truth about every person that posted at least one note. Effective 1-to-1 communication on Nostr cannot happen without at least one relay that knows *something* about both people talking to each other.

Also, Mastodon and Nostr handle user identity in slightly different ways. In the fediverse - just like email - our identity is directly tied to the server we use. And that makes us somewhat reliant on the party that maintains our server.

Nostr uses asymmetric cryptography to identify people on the network. Our identity is a pair of keys, one of which we keep secret and the other we share with anyone who wants to talk to us. However, the keys themselves don't store any data; it's relays' job to know what we've been up to and share that info with anyone who wants to know.

How do I start?

To access Nostr, you need an application to generate your private and public keys.

A good client will do that automatically for you and plug you into a few predefined relays so that you can immediately post your 'Just setting up my Nostr' message and see *something* on your timeline.

I tried a few clients. The ones I liked were [Iris.to](https://iris.to/) (web application) and [Amethyst](https://amethyst.app/) (Android).

For additional convenience, especially on computers, it's worth installing a browser extension so that you don't have to worry about copying and pasting your Nostr signature. I tried nos2x and Flamingo.

How do I verify myself? How do I convince others that I'm the person I claim to be?

Unfortunately, the process is technical and requires owning an internet domain you can control.

Short answer: [use a NIP-05 identifier](#) with an internet domain you own.

I'm verified on nostr as lukem@lukem.eu, because I put lukem@lukem.eu as my NIP-05 identifier on my profile. Lukem.eu is a domain I own and it contains a [nostr.json](#) file with my Nostr public key inside a JSON object. That's an established convention used by Nostr clients and it's the closest we can get to have a neat verified checkmark on our profile.

Another way of verifying ourselves is adding our key to [nostr.directory](#) and confirming ownership of accounts on other platforms (e.g. Mastodon, Twitter or GitHub). Here is [my profile](#).

Personal notes

As a 'seasoned' citizen of the fediverse I could ramble a lot on how Nostr is filled with "cryptobros" and how gross that culture is to me. And "cryptobros" are within their right to declare the fediverse incompatible with what they want. But that's not the point. We've been discussing technical stuff and we'll keep doing that.

The cynic inside me keeps asking, why does Nostr have to be 'censorship-resistant' and whose censorship it is fighting against?

At the same time, another cynic inside me badly wants to know how one sets up and maintains a censorship-resistant Nostr relay in, let's say, Russia or North Korea.

And if that is happening right now, the third cynic inside me wants to know what's so unique about Nostr that makes it *more* resistant to state censorship than any other social network.

And finally - what happens if each and every network provider in the world refuses to handle traffic between servers known for hosting Nostr relays?

Oh, I almost forgot. To use Nostr effectively and securely, I have to own my cryptographic keys AND trust at least one relay to handle my content. The relay, just like a Mastodon server, is still somebody else's computer that someone runs for *reasons* and they are within their power to do *anything* on their computer. Nostr doesn't bring anything particularly new or exciting to the table in this department except fancy technical lingo.

So how do I establish my Nostr presence without trust issues?

Well, I have to set up my own relay exclusively for my content. Other relays can be used as fallbacks at best.

And I'm not gonna lie, persuading me to set up my own Nostr relay is quite a lot to ask and it has nothing to do with my technical skills - [I once ran my own Mastodon instance](#) after all.

I simply don't want to buy a cow to pour some milk to my morning coffee.

Designing features === designing cultures

I'm not an 'old' or 'veteran' citizen of the fediverse even though I was here before Twitter started to crumble. But I quickly internalized one somewhat important lesson:

Design choices shape cultures.

Whole communities are built around certain features (or lack thereof). The behavior the tool permits is the behavior the tool *encourages*. If something works in a highly specific way, it works that way *for purpose*.

Mastodon is designed in a highly specific way because it aims to encourage healthy conversations and protect vulnerable groups of people, even at the cost of missing features. It's not a perfect platform and has its share of cultural problems. Entering the fediverse, you're making a political statement even if all you want is to look at cat pictures all day.

Nostr is designed in a highly specific way because it aims to attract a completely different group of people and build a completely different

culture. I'm not gonna lie - I don't belong to that group and that's not my culture. I acknowledge its existence. But for now, that's about it.

So, should I care?

If technical gimmicks or chaotic nature of Nostr protocol doesn't scare you away, go for it. But do it in a responsible way and either host your relay or get to know whoever hosts the relay you publish to.

If you don't have trust issues about relying on somebody else's relays to transmit your content - whatever. Any existing social platform will be fine for you.

No Luke, I asked about Mastodon

Of course. Come to us. We are weird but we have the best cat pics.