

YARO PODCAST

Chris Barnes - Text Transcript

School Teacher Turned Game Creator
Explains How He Launched A Million
Dollar Escape Room Board Game
Online Subscription Business



Yaro

PODCAST



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YARO: Hi, this is Yaro, and thanks for joining me on the podcast today. I have a guest that I'm unusually excited about because his business is very unique, something I've never really come across before, a combination of different elements and very cutting edge in some ways and very old in other ways. He came to my attention through also a first time experience. My guest today actually is a current customer of my inbox done company, which you might know myself and Claire as a co-founder, we started that helping people with their email, and my guest approached us to become a client. During that process of learning about him and his business, I was like, "I've got to get this guy on the podcast because his story is so unique." So you're in for a treat today. I'd like to welcome Chris Barnes to the show. Hello, Chris.

CHRIS: Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

YARO: So I'd like to, and I was deliberately vague about what your business is because I think you will do a better job of explaining the combination of elements that go into this business. So what exactly are you in charge of at the moment, Chris?

CHRIS: I am the owner and the founder of Escape the Crate subscription box adventure, which is a play at home escape room. There's a subscription box that you can play with your friends and family at home, and I bring us all the fun of an escape room right to your dining room table.

YARO: So, for those who want to follow along because I know Chris is going to talk about his business quite a lot, if you go to www.escape-the-crate.com or just Google Escape the Crate, that's what I did to find it.

CHRIS: It should pop up. Yeah.

YARO: Yeah, it was in the top there. So-

CHRIS: good.

YARO: Yeah, good work.

CHRIS: I would like to hear that.

YARO: You can check out at some of his games. What I love about them is they're a very historical, lot of history involved. There's the Colosseum, there's dinosaurs, there's the Trials of Houdini, lots of cool games. What makes this story extra special is Chris actually made all of these games himself. So I just want to clarify because I think, really, we need to highlight this. So this is a subscription online business where people come to Chris's website, they sign up for the subscription, he sends them a box, a crate with a game inside it that they unpack with their friends and family. It's like an escape room. We have to solve puzzles to escape. They learn about history, get some education, and then they get these delivered, I think it's every two months, right, Chris? They get-

CHRIS: It's correct. Yes. Every other month. So you skip a month in there. You don't want to overload. You have too many escape rooms.

YARO: Right. You made all these games yourself in terms of the physical pieces, the ideas in the game itself. It's 100% the Chris Barnes show, right?

CHRIS: It sure is. I have the dark circles under my eyes to prove it, but yeah, it is. So I designed the games. I get all of the different... I manufacturer all the different products and go inside of it and design the outer cartons, create the websites and then get it out to the customers by shipping it out. So it was entirely my business, which has its own rewards, and it's also frustrating at times, but I'm sure we'll get into that.

YARO: Yeah. And it's not just the startup really. As you've told me off air, you've just passed \$1 million in sales of your games.

CHRIS: We sure did.

YARO: That's, as a one-man show, in some ways, your seven-figure individual entrepreneur. So I feel like I have to warn you. You might start getting asked for more interviews after this first podcast, so you might be starting something here. So I'd love to go back in time, Chris and talk about how this all started because obviously there's a unique combination of internet business skills here, gaming skills, historical skills. I'd love to know, were you ever an entrepreneur in your past as a kid, as a teenager, or were you just a gamer or a history nerd? What's your past like?

CHRIS: Well, all of the above, especially the history nerd. That definitely is true. No. When I was a kid, I loved playing games. I was always that kid that would call up all of his friends and say, "Hey, come to my house." They'd expect to play basketball or football or something, but instead, I'd bring them down to the basement where there was a big pile of games to play, most of which are still in shrink wrap that I'll get to someday and things like that. But I've always loved playing games, and I always loved teaching history. So when I was a kid I thought I would want to be an author. I thought I wanted to create these big dramatic stories, and I wrote an actual full novel, which I read back now, and I'm thinking, "What was I thinking?" But I was very proud of it then.

CHRIS: But then it was about middle school, late middle school. I realized that I didn't know if I wanted to be an actual writer or an author of writing books. So then I was thinking about what sort of jobs to get into or what to go into. I chose to keep the creative part and keep the writing part, but not with myself. I chose to become a teacher. So I chose to teach writing and reading to middle school students. So I thought that way I could still have the best of all possible worlds. I can help encourage other people to show their creativity. So I spent seven years as a fifth-grade teacher in a public school district, and I taught reading and writing. So I got to keep on with encouraging people of creativity and using it. Then also, I was the social studies and history teacher as well, and I sort of discovered my love of history even more through teaching it.

CHRIS: So I thought, "Well, I'll just be a teacher, and it'd be fantastic." But the more I taught, the more I began to kind of wish I got to be a little bit more creative. I loved teaching, but there were those times when I pulled out the book and went, everybody, turn to page 375, and I was thinking, "Gee, I wish I was teaching this book instead." So I began to kind of think, "What if I want to do a little bit more with that?" That kind of led to the entrepreneurial spirit eventually.

YARO: I guess we should clarify this one element we're missing here is the escape room part of your business, which is I guess the most current aspect because it's kind of like a fairly new trend, right? So-

CHRIS: Right, exactly. It's been-

YARO: So how did you get into escape rooms?

CHRIS: Well, escape rooms have been growing more and more over the last few years. When I first discovered them, it was about five years ago. There was an escape room that opened up in the city near where I lived. I liked the idea of being able to play a video game in a room with all the props around you and trying to solve a murder mystery. So I thought, "This sounds really cool." So I dragged one of my friends with me. I don't even know if the place is still open now, but it was a very plain room. It had a desk in the corner locked up, a billion padlocks on it and two shabby pictures on the wall. But we played the escape room. We didn't make it out the first escape room, which it kills me inside that say that I lost my first escape room. But we got done with it, and I remember stepping outside, and I looked at my bud, and I was like, "I've got to do another one of these right now."

CHRIS: So, that night, we booked another escape room at the same place and went back to it again. Since then, I've just become completely hooked to escape rooms. I have played over 120 escape rooms in the country. Whenever I go to a new city, I try to play at least one if not two or three escape rooms while I'm there. So I began to play these all the time, and the more I played them, the more this kept getting my creative juices going, where I'm thinking, "Oh, I would love to make my own, one of these." I don't

know if I'm getting ahead of myself, but I chose to actually create one in my classroom.

YARO: Okay. Before we dive into that story, I just want to check one thing. No entrepreneurial experience with any other business before this, or was there something else you used to run?

CHRIS: There were no other businesses before this. However, through my school and through a couple of other schools, I did run after school, or I should say summer school events, where I did do it to make money, but it's sort of having a game that someone bought. It was more of an experience that people signed up for that I made the profits from myself. So, for example, I did a week where students could come to a magic school. So they learned about Greek mythology, and they learned about magical mystical creatures, and they learned how to do spells and do magical games kind of along the Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Harry Potter, sort of the style. So I did that, and I actually made up a few escape rooms as well under that summer school program, but that was it. I didn't have any products that were launched. It was just people paying to come do an experience I was running.

YARO: So, while you were running those summer programs, was there anything in your mind about there's a product here I could sell, or were you just kind of happy making a bit of extra cash in summer, or were you thinking maybe I can roll this whole summer experience out across all of America? What were you thinking at the time?

CHRIS: At that stage, it was just focused on the summer because this always happened right after the school year. As any teacher can tell you, as soon as the school year is over, you feel like just falling on the couch and sleeping for the entire summer. So I would do this, and it was a lot of fun, but I didn't see at that stage how it could be mass-produced and brought out to people because when I did an escape room, it was literally taking a gigantic library and filling it up with locked safes. I had huge props in there of mummies and statues, and I had a greenhouse full of fake snakes people will reach into and grab stuff out of. So, at that stage, I was thinking of a physical escape room, and I was thinking, "There's no way you could ever send this stuff out

because it would cost so much money to send all the supplies out and take so much training for someone to get it set up. It could never work. So, at that stage, I hadn't kind of thought of doing anything as a product itself.

YARO: Do you know that the history of escape rooms, how they got started?

CHRIS: So people argue back and forth about where escape came from. So you could say they came from Europe. Some people say they came from Asia. Basically, the idea that started was people wanted to have a real life video game experience. So the first ones where people were locked in a room with a character, and it was almost like they were inside of a living play, and so they're sitting in a seat and watching a play going on. You were suddenly in the room with the secret agent, and they're trying to defuse the bomb, and you get to help out by looking around the room for things the bad guy left and entering codes in. There were a lot of these point and click games that began appearing, where on your cell phone or back in the old PC, where you'd have a temple to get into, and you had to get to click certain stones to get you in to create these combinations.

CHRIS: So eventually, people kind of emerged those two ideas together and created the escape room we know today, where you go into a room, there's a timer on the wall, you have an hour, and you have to solve all the puzzles and riddles to get out of it. I know certain cities in Europe, they are very common. I have a subscriber who was saying that where he lives, there is an escape from on almost every single corner, which blows my mind.

YARO: It's crazy.

CHRIS: It really does. I want to go visit. I want to go find out where this is. So I mean, about 2015, they came to America, and I mean, if you look at the trends there, appearing in shopping malls and next to Disney World and things like that, they're showing up everywhere now.

YARO: It must be a profitable business if they're doing so well. I guess you set up a room, and then you just have to get new people in all the time.

CHRIS: Right. Exactly. To have an actual physical escape room, yet to have very high investment, create a good room. You don't want to be that person that goes to Ikea, spends 70 bucks, put some furniture in the room and then says, "You're done." Because most of the escape rooms that are succeeding now, they have budgets of 50, 60, some have over \$100,000 per room budget with huge technical innovations inside of it. But once they build the room, you basically had to hire a game master to watch the room and the fixed broken props. Besides that, it's pure profit. You can run the same room 10 times a day. So people that run escape rooms, if you do it correctly, you can make a lot of money.

YARO: I think it's safe to say that when an escape from appeared on Big Bang theory, that was the day they went mainstream as well.

CHRIS: Yes, I loved that episode. It was great, with a Zombie in the corner. I'll tell you, in that room, having Sheldon Cooper do a room, that's terrifying. I don't want Sheldon Cooper to do my room at all because he flows through my puzzles in 10 minutes. I'm going to be very upset, so-

YARO: So probably would. Okay. So what I love then, you've taken a physical business, which like you said, could be \$100,000 per room to set up. So it's pretty big sunk costs to start that kind of business, and you've gone and made it online with far, I'm guessing, less upfront costs. But I'm guessing you weren't thinking like, "Oh my God, this is going to be this seven-figure business," like you have now, this million dollar sales business when you first got started.

CHRIS: No.

YARO: So you can maybe tell us how you did the very first version of your, I don't want to call it a digital escape room, but your play at home escape room.

CHRIS: Well, to create the play at home or the digital escape room, I had to first find out what did not work with the regular escape room. Because I was a teacher at that stage, I decided I was going to do an escape room with my class, my fifth graders. We'd been reading a book, and right before the test, I

thought, "Let's do a review. I'm going to create an escape room in my classroom." So, since I'd only been to real escape rooms, I set up a safe in the room and stuff hidden all around. I called the principal out of the room because he was so proud that kids were going to solve this escape room. It was going to be great, and it was a disaster. Students began to throw desks around, and they were emptying the trashcan, and you had a student crying in the corner that they didn't have the black light.

CHRIS: I thought, "Okay, this is not going to work out. There's something wrong with it." But I didn't want to give up on doing an escape room in my classroom. So I thought, "How can I do this without all that chaos?" So I thought, "What if I have the students sitting in groups?" Because they already had reading groups that they were put in together, small groups they were sitting in. What if I were to take the entire room and shrink it down to one pizza box size escape room that I could put down on the table for each group to solve. Instead of having giant safes to unlock, there'll be a website. When students found the answer to a puzzle, they would type the answer and on the website, and it would say, yes, you opened up the safe, or nope, wrong, try again.

CHRIS: So I tried this out with my classroom. It was such a huge difference from that first chaotic mess of an escape room I did. For the second one where I could see every student was participating and everyone was helping each other out, and I could listen to their thinking, and I thought, "This is pretty cool. So Christmas break came, and I thought, "I'm going to make up one of these for my friends and family." So I made up one for friends and family, and the first thing they said when they played it was, "Chris, you've got to sell this. This is awesome."

YARO: What was it? Chris, what was that first one for your friends and family?

CHRIS: The first one that I sold was called Escape the Confederate Spy Mistress. I am obsessed with history. I love history in any way, shape, and form, but I especially love the Civil War. There's a civil war spy that I am obsessed with. My house has an entire library dedicated to the spy. She ran a

spy network in Washington DC, as I thought, a spy, Washington DC, I'll make up one on her. So I made up this whole escape room based on historical person and historical events that happened using a real historical code that that person used.

YARO: Oh, Wow.

CHRIS: So when I get done with it-

YARO: What's her name, just for the-

CHRIS: Her name is Rose O'Neill Greenhill. Okay. She was a Confederate spy in Washington. She was said to have notes about Lincoln's cabinet that Lincoln doesn't even have. So she was pretty successful for a short period of time. So I had her code. I was like, "Let's try this out." My friends and family liked it. So the next thing I knew, I was trying to figure out how to start an online business which-

YARO: Now, yeah, that's the next step, right? It's a big step. Can you tell me that first version of the game because I've seen sort of your more recent ones based on the website? Again, if people want to check it out, escape-the-crate.com. You have physical pieces of gaming materials that go with each of these escape rooms. I know you're a one-man show basically until we came along and helped you with some of the email customer service, but you design the games, you come up with the actual puzzles to solve as well as the physical pieces. What about your first version though? I can imagine as a test because I know with someone with the coaching I do, I teach the students to create a minimal viable product or a minimal viable service, like a basic version. You had this great-

CHRIS: It's a beta test.

YARO: Yeah. You had a proving ground in your school, which is really fun. Your kids were your first test customers in some ways.

CHRIS: Oh, and they are brutally honest [inaudible 00:16:59]. Kids are way more honest than adults are about things.

YARO: Exactly. Then you switch to your friends and family, and they're adults, so it's a little different. I mean, you could have gone after the children's market, I guess, but you-

CHRIS: I do. I actually have a box for the children's market as well, so.

YARO: Okay. That's fantastic. But the first version of your game, I don't even think... Did you go to your local game shop and buy props? What do you do to make a game?

CHRIS: I wanted to buy props, but I knew right away that if I was going to be selling something to people, to other customers, I couldn't just go to hobby lobby, grab a whole bunch of a toy or something and throw them in a box. I had to do something that could be very consistent because when you're playing a game where people are looking for clues, every box has to be completely identical. So, for the first boxes, not that way now, but for the first boxes, I handmade everything. So I had pieces of cloth that were cut in certain situations. At that stage, not now, but that stage, everything was printed off of my desktop printer. So I had pieces of paper in there. There were things just being copied and printed out. It did not look very good. I'll admit that.

CHRIS: The first version of the game was a bunch of envelopes with stickers on them, pieces of paper with writing a code on it, but at the same stage, you got to do a lot with that, because if you've got a piece of paper, you could find out as a part of a puzzle, if you cut certain places on the piece of paper, a code will be revealed, or if you hold the piece of cloth up to a light, hidden code will appear magically. So it took a lot of effort to figure that out. Now, there's no way, even with the people I have helping produce now in a distribution center, there's no way I can view some of those things now. It just isn't viable to do from the first box.

YARO: Well, you wouldn't have been able to do that for very long. I mean, it's the minute you reach a hundred orders, you're ready creating-

CHRIS: I kept up that level of detail until I got to about a thousand orders, and then by that stage-

YARO: Oh my God.

CHRIS: Because I was still teaching every day. So I would get to school about 6:30. I'd get out of school about 4:30. I then would work on the business from 4:30 until about 1:30 in the morning, and then I would get about four or five hours sleep and then restart the next day. So it was literally just all my friends knew if they wanted to come over, I'd be sitting there stuffing envelopes and working on boxes for awhile there.

YARO: Can you take us from the first game you made for your friends and family to the first sale of a product?

CHRIS: Sure. So I realized I had to simplify things already from that stage. The biggest thing I had to go to with selling the product was to take something that had a very simple website and have an elaborate website that would go along with the game because first off, from the landing homepage, you can sell the game to people, but then all the game needs to be played off of the website as well because half the story is told through audio on the website, video on the website. Then that's how you check your codes. So I actually had to-

YARO: Do you make the audio in the video?

CHRIS: I do. I make the audio in the video and I create-

YARO: Your voice?

CHRIS: Yes, with my voice. I have some other people that help out with voice acting sometimes, but it was funny, the one box I didn't have my voice in it, and I had people going, "Oh my gosh, were you okay? What happened to the guy who did the normal voice? Was he fired?" I'm thinking, "No, no, he was not fired. He's still here. Hi, it's me." But yeah, no, so I had to create a website, finished from the ground up. So I had very little website, the experience. So I kind of learned on the job because in my opinion, if you're going to be an entrepreneur, I mean, yes, pass off some things when you can't handle them anymore, but you need to learn everything that you're doing. That way, you can be there to help out. You don't have to worry about calling other people.

CHRIS: I'm very much a hands-on, a little bit of a control freak, I guess you could say. I want to make sure that I know how to do everything. So it was getting that website ready to be launched and of course learning things. I was ready to launch it. Then I realized I don't have a privacy policy on the website or terms and conditions and all that fun stuff and having to call lawyers and figure out how they get everything set up. But I realized that if I had one game I was selling, that was great, and I could make a one time purchase and very wonderful.

CHRIS: But I wanted to create an escape room that continued one week or one box after another, kind of like a TV series. So I thought, what if I were to take this idea I have of selling this one escape room box I created, and I turn it into a subscription, kind of like bark box or one of those other loot crate that you get something sent to you in the mail every month? So I thought, what if I do an escape room, where when you finish an escape room, it's a clear ending, you've solved that problem., but you get a clue as to how the story continues in a future box? People would have hung on and stayed with you on a subscription basis, and they can cancel at any time, but as long as they want to stay with you, the story unfolds and gets bigger and grander, kind of like a TV series.

CHRIS: So that's where I chose the subscription model, which it has its advantages and disadvantages. I knew right away that it was to be great because you have a customer, it's a purchase, and if they like it, that customer will automatically make the purchase the next months. This is a subscription, and they hang on there with you. So when renewal time comes, I'll have that recurring income coming in. But it also has the problem though with the fact that you better make sure you have enough ideas to make it every month or in my case every other month because if not, you're going to hold people down when they're ready for your box, and you have writer's block. You can't afford to have writer's block in that situation.

YARO: So did you make that decision from day one, that first time you sold this first game, there was already a subscription in place, and you had the pressure to make a second game coming up in two months? Is that right?

CHRIS: Yes. Right after I made that decision before I make it go live and put it on a subscription box market place, I better have three, four games designed. So I sat down, and I literally designed the next two games. So I had three games ready to go at that stage and then maybe a little bit of a start that way because life gets in the way sometimes. You have vacations and weddings and things like that. You can't always be getting a box ready. You had to be a little bit ahead. But yeah, I had that idea in mind from the beginning, but I knew that you can have too much of a good thing, and getting a box every month in the mail, suddenly you have 12 boxes a year coming. I love escape rooms, and I do them way more than most people, but I know I wouldn't have time to play 12 boxes over the course of a year.

CHRIS: So I chose to go bimonthly. That way people get a box every other month from me, and that way, six boxes a year is a little bit easier to manage. You might not be able to get your friends together for a game night every single month, but I'm betting every other month, you can. So that's one of those decisions that I made.

YARO: Yeah. I mean, you might have people want to buy all 12 at once and just sit down over a weekend and just-

CHRIS: Oh, we've had that. Yes. I've had some people I think that they literally just ate, slept, drank, everything, this game is straight, which is really cool. I love it. I really do. But you'd go crazy doing all in a row after each other, just a little bit.

YARO: I love the idea, though, of the continuity between games. I can imagine it's a bit like a Doctor Who episode where-

CHRIS: Very much.

YARO: ... yeah, you're time traveling. So your woman that you're with the Confederate Spy Mistress, then you're in the Roman Colosseum, and there's some sort of underlying thread between these mysteries that connects them. But they're obviously in their very separate, standalone time periods and episodes.

CHRIS: Exactly. Every box has a beginning, middle, and an end and a problem. So if you get gifted a box, and you just have one box to play, you're happy with the entire thing. But if you play it in order, you can actually see the whole storyline develop, and you get to know the characters and their weaknesses and their flaws and get to know the villain of the escape room and see how the master plan is. So it was kind of cool and also is need to sneak in some Easter eggs in future boxes, the stuff that happened previously, throw a prop they've seen before. It's kind of like a nod, or when I did a movie game, I'm making the movie posters about previous boxes, which is kind of cool. Kind of keeps customers on their toes and gives me a little bit of creative freedom there.

YARO: Yeah. It must be so fun because you've probably got these super fans who are looking for everything that connects the stories, and you're kind of like a screenwriter with the Easter eggs and keeping maybe one character, showing up in certain places. It's just kind of-

CHRIS: Exactly.

YARO: You're creating your own cannon almost for an entire world you've created within this context of escape room games. So it's very unique.

CHRIS: It's very cool when that happens, especially when people start asking about a character. Hey, we haven't seen this character show up in a few boxes. What's going on? There are some times that's been on purpose, and the other times I've thought, "Oh, well, I guess I forgot to put them in. Oops, sorry." But there is kind of a fan community based on it where it's kind of funny. They will scour through the games, and they'll look for secret messages I've hidden that aren't part of the game, that are larger codes. I've done that before. I've hidden little things inside of it. But I love how sometimes they find clues that aren't really clues. They'll go, "Oh, there's no period in the third sentence on clue number seven. I bet you that's a clue." They're circling it, and they're sharing stuff online. I'm thinking, "Wow, I wish I had enough time to create massive conspiracy theories like that." So-

YARO: You need a writer's room so you guys can sit there, 12 of you, planning -

CHRIS: Yes. That would be nice. That would be really nice.

YARO: I've kind of gotten lost in the game a bit here, Chris. So can we just go take a step back? We didn't even say, when did you make the first sale? because you said you prepared three, and then you were going to list the game... Well, I want to get this right. You have a website that you created yourself that was very much part of the game because they have to kind of like solve a puzzle in the game, go on the website, listen to an audio, which helps them with the next clue and so on. So it's very interactive, very digital, as well as physical. But when you first launched that website, launched the first game, was that the Confederate Spy Mistress that was the first?

CHRIS: It was, yes.

YARO: Okay, and you had the second and third one ready to go for-

CHRIS: I had the second and third one ready with this regular envelopes with labels on them sitting in my coffee table. They weren't ready to officially go out, but all the thought had been done. All the puzzles had been done. Yeah, that was-

YARO: How many versions of the first one was printed or made because I'm assuming that some point you-

CHRIS: There were two versions of it that officially came plus about 80 billion versions of each puzzle because I designed them puzzle at a time and then kind of fit them together like a massive jigsaw. So the puzzles are made-

YARO: But I mean-

CHRIS: Sure.

YARO: I mean, you're going to turn on a website where you sell the game one.

CHRIS: Right. There is only one version of that.

YARO: Do you expect one sale? No. No, but I mean like 10 sales, a hundred sales. Because you're making these games by hand. So you have to kind of like, well, how much inventory do you need?

CHRIS: I told my mother at that stage because she was very supportive of me, but she also was kind of, "Hey, this may not work out. Manage your expectations." I told her I'd be happy if I made 15 sales that first month. I knew that, a way, very easily with that. So I thought-

YARO: So did you make 15 versions of the game?

CHRIS: Well, for the [inaudible 00:28:20] I made 15-

YARO: Copies, I should say.

CHRIS: ... copies of the game then. Yeah. So I was hoping to, but by the end of the first month though, I had 70 or 80 that went out. So I had to make 70 or 80 identical copies of that first game, which especially because the game itself is a box and inside the box are a series of envelopes, that first game had 13 different envelopes inside of its open. Each one had different objects inside of the envelope. So I mean, you do the math. When I started in 13 envelopes tie in 70, that's a lot of envelopes to be stuffing and stickering and black light messages to be writing and paper to be cutting and writtens to be trimming. So it was a lot of work.

YARO: 910 envelopes to make, not one.

CHRIS: There we go. I'll tell you what, it felt like a million at that stage. So now, when I'm stuffing thousands, it doesn't feel as bad anymore though. My fingers are used to it, I guess.

YARO: Yeah. Training. How did you make 70 sales in your first month?

CHRIS: Well, I'll tell you, it was a little bit of luck, to be entirely honest with you. I found a subscription box market place that I was able to help out with... They were able to help market my box, and they sold it on their own store. So

that was good to get some exposure, especially when I didn't have much marketing budget. I chose to take from my personal savings, \$500 to start the business, and I repaid that \$500 to me within month one, which I was really happy about. But I did some Facebook ads, and then, even more, I marketed to my fan base. There were actually Facebook groups and websites devoted to escape room enthusiasts, people who have done hundreds and thousands of escape rooms. One of my subscribers has done over a thousand escape rooms, which I mean is incredible. I mean, I believe that they are one of the Guinness Book of World Record Holders for number of escape rooms played in a day for that one. I don't think they did the total, but it was number in a day.

YARO: I thought you did a hundred was already like a record, but a thousand. Wow.

CHRIS: Yeah. Oh, no. There were some people that are like, "Oh yes, this box reminds me of a game I played in Amsterdam." I'm thinking, "Well, it wasn't me. I didn't go there." So yeah, I marketed it to them.

YARO: Did you know about all this community prior to launching the business? Were you just part of this world?

CHRIS: I knew about it, but I wasn't part of the world as much. I'm glad that I joined the world because now, that's my favorite Facebook group to check every day is seeing what new rooms opened up someplace in America or a new puzzle someone solved. I didn't know it was quite as big of a fan community. I was kind of shocked about that. So in my own research, I was shocked how many people liked it, and then when I started having reviewers ask me to play the game, that kind of got out a little bit more because now you have these reviewers that had their built-in fan bases as well who are hearing their honest reviews, and blogs.

YARO: Like youtube or a bloggers or-

CHRIS: These were more bloggers and podcasters that did this. I have some YouTubers that have done reviews. However, I don't have too many because

they want to show the entire game all the way through. Usually, I don't like the-

YARO: That's ruins it.

CHRIS: ... entire game being... Exactly. Because, I mean, I have a few people that want to show puzzle by puzzle, and I'm thinking, "Well, that's great, but no one's going to buy the game if you show puzzle by puzzle all the way through." But yeah, so they get very honest feedback. And I, of course, listen to the feedback because when you're going to be dealing people who are that big of experts about the escape rooms, you had to kind of go with the flow when you listen to their expert advice and you make changes to the product. So, although there was only one version of Escape the Confederate Spy Mistress, the advantage is the future games coming, I can make changes for those future games and get them so that the materials are higher quality and so that as you play the game, there are multiple puzzles that could be worked on at once, not having to solve a puzzle A to get to puzzle B. It's not linear. You can do multiple paths. Exactly.

YARO: Okay. Yeah, interesting.

CHRIS: So things like that that I learned as I went. So that makes it more successful that way.

YARO: So I can understand the marketing of month one. You've got this box club membership type site that promotes you. You've got Facebook groups full of escape room fans that you can sort of interact with and mentioned you've created a game, and you've got a podcast people and bloggers who will do reviews. So that's how you can reach potential customers. A couple of other questions. I'm sorry if this seems a little bit basic, but people love hearing this. How did you decide on a price for your product?

CHRIS: I went, and this is probably not the correct way to do it, so yeah, I totally take the blame for this, but I went at it a different way than most people would have, which is I looked at the average price for an escape room for one ticket, which is usually 29.99. There are some rooms that charge more. There are some that charge less, but I thought it'd be a good marketing

tool to say, bring the entire game and all four or five of your friends can play for the cost of one ticket to an escape room. So I originally started out with that price itself. The cost of goods is far lower than that, but it does take a lot of costs to-

YARO: Your time.

CHRIS: ... secure the artwork because you can't just pick random images and copy and paste onto there, get to buy artwork and buy all sorts of stuff like that. It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to do this, not to mention the labor it costs. So I kind of stuck with the 29.99 for a box because that's the price of one ticket for an escape room. You can have your entire family pay for the price of one.

YARO: Or maybe the price of a dinner meal or even like buying a board game. These are kind of like -

CHRIS: Yeah, buying monopoly anymore to be even more than 29.99.

YARO: Yeah, that's true. Probably way more than that now. Okay. Last sort of basic question. In terms of the technical aspect of this, you've got shipping. You've got taking a payment online. Can you just describe how you did that during the start?

CHRIS: Luckily, as a start, and I can't say the name of them, unfortunately, but that subscription box market place that I worked with was very good with helping me get set up. They knew that most people that started up subscription boxes were newbies. So I immediately what a payment processor was. People can't just mail you a check in the mail and go, "Ta-da!" They can't obviously email you credit card stuff. So suddenly, I have this payment processor in place that can get it set up. I had a community, a Facebook community of other subscription box entrepreneurs who I can kind of follow and that could give advice to. So I was able to scour that, learn what worked, what didn't work, talk to my advisor from that company. I spelled that same advisor today, which is kind of cool because I'm actually now working with them to help out other people who are starting up subscription boxes.

YARO: It is cool.

CHRIS: So that was a big start for me, was using that.

YARO: So they kind of like an all in one transaction management tool.

CHRIS: Exactly. Yes.

YARO: But you're no longer with them, or are you still with them?

CHRIS: I am still with them. Yes.

YARO: Okay. What about delivery of the actual product?

CHRIS: Well, the delivery of the actual product started out with everything being shipped out of my local post office. I lived at that stage in a very small town in Ohio. So I would ship all these boxes out of the United States Postal Service post office, which was great when I had 70 boxes, although I get a lot of drones from them going in there. But eventually, when I had 2000, 3000, 5,000 boxes going out, when I was pulling back to the loading dock, you would see everybody at the back dock start to scatter. They would see me coming. It was like, "Red alert. We got the boxes coming in." I'd stack it up. Eventually, I started getting all these excuses. Sorry, we can't take any boxes today and things like that. So I eventually had to go to a fulfillment centers, which I'll talk about a little bit later. But yeah, so I initially did start it off with just mailing everything United States Postal Service using stamps.com to figure out the prices and getting the labels made and shipping them out.

YARO: All right. So we can kind of sum up month one. You made the games. You shipped the games. You use this subscription platform to sell the game and make some sales, take the money. You pay back your initial investment of \$500, and you've probably worked your butt off to make all the games and fulfill everything. So tell us how you go from 70 sales to a thousand sales and then to a million dollars in sales. What happened over the coming months?

CHRIS: The biggest thing was honestly to retain the customers that you had. In the subscription box industry, there's something called a churn rate. The churn rate is the number of subscribers, the percentage of subscribers that

leave you every month. So a lot of times they say that if you are able to have only 10% of your subscribers from a month to leave you, you're doing fantastic. Average is about 15 to 20% of your subscribers will leave you. I've averaged at about between 2 and 6% of churn rate. So I don't lose a lot of customers because when people start playing the game and they like escape rooms or they like puzzles and they realize that mine isn't a bunch of cardboard Sudoku puzzles in there. These are actual like serious escape room puzzles they're playing. They like to stay with me and get longer terms.

CHRIS: So you start keeping the customers you currently have and just adding more to it. I marketed a bit more on Facebook. Although I will be honest with you, Facebook marketing did not do as well as I'd hoped it would. It was very expensive for a startup to be using Facebook marketing. So I sort of went to I guess you could say guerrilla-style marketing of having my subscribers more or less market the game themselves. The word of mouth made this spread a lot faster than anything else, where subscribers would tell each other. They'd play the game. They'd post pictures of them after playing the game with their time and share it with them. All of my games can be reset when you finish them so you can pass off the game to a friend.

CHRIS: So people would play the game, pass up the game to a friend, the friend will go, "That's fantastic. I want to play this myself," and they'll subscribe. So right now, I will be entirely honest with you. I have a marketing budget of \$0 today, and I've had a marketing budget is \$0 for over a year and a half now. I just let it grow organically. I keep the subscribers I have. I do join lots of sales and free promotions around major holidays, like Mother's Day, Christmas, but I let the business itself keep people and run itself.

YARO: Do you maintain an email database or anything like that?

CHRIS: I do. Yeah. I keep every single email of everybody's ever purchased the box, but then we also have a website newsletter that is growing. I mean, we have thousands of people on the website newsletter list, and so I'll send out monthly puzzles and deals and things like that. But that's entirely a free method of getting people to go using that email system, which is wonderful.

YARO: So I'm guessing a lot of sales come from the subscribers, the list who haven't bought the product or haven't subscribed yet. What have you done though to encourage this growth? Because I'm assuming A, great product, so people then share it just organically like you said. Is that it? Is that have been enough to get from 70 sales to 5,000 sales of a product?

CHRIS: It is. However, also finding the right social media influencers who will do it for free is a big thing. Now, once you start a business, especially when you're in the public eye as much as mine has been, you start having people daily, and my email manager, in Inbox Done can attest to this, that will email you this. Hi, I'm so and so. I have a YouTube channel with 5 million followers. You actually look at it, and they're like three people. Please send me a copy of the box, and that won't do it. But eventually, I was able to pick up some big name people who have played the game, for example, actually, a day time CBS game show has featured my box as prizes on there, and every time that's happened, we've gotten lots of sales afterwards. We recently were -

YARO: How did that happen first? Did you ask for that, or that just happened organically?

CHRIS: A little bit of both. I asked actually for a different game show that was on there. I had actually tried talking to them, and although that fell through, the other game show was like, "Hey, I heard you wanted to talk to them. Hey, we can use you." That was kind of a cool like, "Oh, nice." Right. I wasn't thinking about that. So that kind of happened by accident, I guess I can say. We were recently the USA Today 10 best list for the... We were on the 10 best subscription boxes for 2019 list. So after getting all of that, I mean, that has been marketed everywhere. That's been able to help us out with growing. But most of it is seriously just keeping the people that have and letting people share it themselves because I'm finding that spending that amount of money in advertising does not bring me back the conversion I thought it would.

YARO: Yeah, the ROI. One question about this retaining members. So I understand what you're doing with the serialization of the gaming, which keeps people interested and connecting the stories. That to me, though,

clarify, if I joined now, do I start at chapter one, right? So you've actually got X number of months of already made games that can go out to me. So you don't have to stay ahead of me, but you still have to stay ahead of the people who are on subscription month 20 or 24.

CHRIS: There are some murder mystery subscription boxes that do that, that take everybody back and start at month one. But we actually do things very differently than most other companies do, which is the fact that right, now we are on box, oh goodness, 15 that's about ready to come out very soon. You will actually start with box 15. You'll get a little bit of a summary of what the story is, and you just jump right into the story because the advantage is of the story is that you really don't need to play the games before to get the idea, the story. You just need to keep hold of what you have to get you into the future games. The advantages is that if you really liked the game you played and you want to play the previous ones, you can buy the previous ones on the website as retired games as standalone games.

CHRIS: So although, if you start subscribing, you don't get the story right from chapter one, you get from chapter 15, if you want to, you can go back and purchase games six or seven or nine or do things like that [inaudible 00:43:14]-

YARO: Same price?

CHRIS: They are actually \$10 more for the retired boxes because with the fact that the number of... I had to go out with retired boxes. In fact, we just had a retired box shipment that went out Monday. We're looking at thousands of retired boxes going out, and each one has to be remade. With the current boxes, we can get a whole bunch made and have some back as leftover inventory in a warehouse. But with some of the earlier games, when I was only designing them with 70 or 80 people in mind, now suddenly having hundreds of people every month at once then, it's hard to keep up the demand for that. So it takes a little bit of extra time to recreate some of those games. So we charge \$10 more.

YARO: Right. So you learned what the difference is to manufacture for 70 versus 5,000 because certain pieces of the game are hard to mass produce. So you kind of had to learn on the fly as you developed new games. That's interesting.

CHRIS: Exactly. I also learned because I wanted to originally do the idea wherever we started in a box one. Think about it though. If you had just played because your friend who had been having a party and they had box one they were playing, and you're like, "Oh, this sounds cool. I want to play the game. I'm going to subscribe." You don't want the same box you already played with your friends. You want a different box. So this way, it ensures if you subscribed, you always have a different box from somebody else.

YARO: Yeah. Okay. That's cool.

CHRIS: So you can play a game with somebody else, and you can just go back and choose all our cart what you want to play.

YARO: Correct me if I'm wrong, though. That means you have a perpetual stress point in your life where you always have to produce a new game every two months because everyone is starting at that point.

CHRIS: That is very true. That is very true. Well, I have gray hairs, and I'm 30 years old, so yes.

YARO: Well, it must be keeping your creative juices flowing. That's for sure.

CHRIS: I love it. You can't take me to a department store about me stopping and going, "Oh my gosh, look at that cabinet over there. That'd be a good puzzle." I'm taking pictures of it and thinking, "What can I do?" But it does give a certain amount of stress, especially, there are those months where things are crazy, life is crazy. And then suddenly thinking, I have to produce a game, and people have very high expectations for it. If I dropped the ball on this one, I'm going to lose a bunch of subscribers to it. Even more, when you have thousands of boxes, some things I still have to manufacture myself at the house, and I have to make sure I have time to actually produce that so it doesn't go out late.

YARO: Well, that leads me to my next question. So maybe you can take us forward how you went from this sort of 70 copies of a game production and delivery to what your system looks like today. How do you produce a game? How do you distribute it? You said you have a fulfillment center now. Did you eventually quit your job too? Are you still a teacher or not?

CHRIS: Well, I was a teacher for... I was a teacher for two years, and at the end of last school year, I made the really tough decision to leave teaching. That was the hardest thing I've ever had to do because I loved teaching. I loved my students, but it reached the stage where most nights, I was lucky to get an hour or two asleep, and it was really showing on me. My family were worried about me. My significant other was like, "Hey, you need to make a choice right now." So I reached a stage where I kind of bowed out of teaching. That was really tough, but it was nice because I could actually put my entire self into the business right away. So originally, when I started doing it, was sitting on the couch while watching TV, and the form of the object you open up on my game are envelopes. You have to solve a puzzle. When you get permission on the website, you can open up the envelope and get the next puzzle or the next piece of the puzzle inside the envelope.

CHRIS: I still have that system in place. It's just, instead of having 13 envelopes like the first box did, each of which will have one or two things inside of it, now I have four or five envelopes that you play with. Each has a little bit more inside of it. So the game is made in two pieces now. The smaller envelopes that we have inside of the game that you open up to kind of make the solution to puzzle seven, it's an envelope, I still make at my house. I have a new house. I moved away from the smaller city into a bigger city, and luckily, I was able to get a house that had a large office space inside of it.

CHRIS: So I have a mini assembly line build up in my house. On a good night, when there is no real distraction, I can get through a thousand, two thousand envelopes with stuffing and sealing them myself just by listening to a podcast or watching TV while I'm doing it, talking on the phone during that. So that part is done by me. And then luckily, I had a really good deal with the box company that I can do graphic design on the boxes, the inside and the outside of the physical boxes that are shipped out to people. So I'm actually

able to take some of the puzzles that would have been done in envelopes and on pieces of paper instead of the original one. They're actually printed on the box itself now. So when you open up the box, it looks like a real escape room. You can see a door, and you can see a floor and pictures and puzzle pieces all over the box. So that saves time.

CHRIS: Then the final piece of putting all the little envelopes into the larger envelopes and into the box and seal it, I now have doing out with a film at center. That started after Christmas time this past year because even though I wasn't teaching anymore, after having a very successful Black Friday and Cyber Monday and successful Christmas season, it got to the stage where it was all hands on deck with my friends and family helping stuff these boxes, and I thought, "I can't keep doing thousands and thousands of boxes." My post office was really freaking out at that stage. So I chose to go to a fulfillment center, which was the best decision I've ever made. If you end up having a company that sells things and the amount of volume of thousands a month, it's very hard to do it from your house.

CHRIS: I've talked to other subscription box owners who are in very similar situations, and all of them have turned to the fulfillment center. It's tough because it eats away a little bit of your profit. The place I go to charges an assembly line startup fee, and then it charges for 3 cents for every item that they put inside of every box. So if you start doing the math for that, it can chew away a little bit of it, but having that time back in my life is so much worth it. I can actually sleep seven hours a night now. It's amazing.

YARO: It's fantastic.

CHRIS: It's like the lights from heaven come on. So go into there. But it's hard because I had to give up control of it a little bit, and I have not had any issues yet with my fulfillment center. I love them, and I'm actually giving up more control and having them start some of the smaller envelopes this upcoming month. But if you have that personality like I do, which is that you want to have your fingers and everything, eventually, you have to give up on some of it. I said earlier, you have to learn everything. That's fine. You'd still be

involved in everything, but you have to learn how to delegate it out sometime, or else you're going to run yourself down.

YARO: I love the iteration process here in your journey, and it's only a couple of years where you've been this guy who liked history and gaming and escape rooms and a teacher who then uses his classroom to test this idea out and then takes it to his friends and makes his first game and sells it to 70 people, and then it scales up through word of mouth, and you start hitting thousands, and you're learning to hand over fulfillment. It's just like iterating, okay, how do I make this more efficient? How do I even move to a better house? I can use some of my profits from my company. It all helps. It all works together. Now, I'd be remiss to not ask, when does Inbox Done come into this process. You handed over email to us. So when did you make that decision?

CHRIS: I'll be very obvious... I'll be very clear with that. I was drowning in emails at Christmas time because when you're selling a product like this, and you have, I mean, literally thousands of people a week signing up like I did at Christmas time, people are bound to have questions and say, "Oh my gosh, I need to change an address." Or someone buys it three seconds ago and they're upset it's not on their doorstep tomorrow. I'm thinking, "Amazon can't even get it to you that fast." So it began to get to the stage where every day I would work for 10 hours on creating the boxes. I would open up my inbox and inside would be 100, 200, 300 emails sitting in there. Especially people get very impatient around Christmas time, rightfully so because they are worried about when their box comes. I'll have an email from one person at 9:00 AM, then at 3:00 PM, and then at 7:00 PM getting more and more angry that I have not answered their email right away.

CHRIS: I was thinking, I need some way to manage this. So I had some friends who were helping answering emails, but they all have full-time jobs, and I wanted to make sure that they were not employees. So I mean, they were doing to help me out. They wanted to help me out because they were good people. I needed to actually have somebody that could devote their time to watching my inbox. Right before Christmas, I logged in, and it said 1032 emails in my inbox, and that was not a very pleasant Christmas. I said some not very nice words. I mean, I threw my computer across the couch. It

wasn't very nice. I felt a bit like Krampus. So, at that stage, in early January, I was like, "I need to have somebody else take over the emails." Although we're not getting a thousand emails a day now, thank goodness, I mean, still we're getting 30 or 40 emails a day, which it's amazing how much time answering emails takes up out of your life.

CHRIS: For me myself, it is honestly the psyching up process before answering emails that's harder than anything else because I know that I'm out to deal with re-sending five boxes to this person or dealing with the post office that literally dropped a box into a fountain, which was a real problem that happened, where they literally threw a box into somebody's fountain. So instead, of course, the subscriber is upset that why did I throw the box in their fountain? That sort of thing. So, by the time I psych myself up and then spending a minute or two per email, I mean, you're talking about another two hours of your night devoted to emails. So I found Inbox Done, and I talked to you, and then I talked to Claire, and eventually, I found my Inbox Done manager.

CHRIS: It was amazing because they were able to organize the entire system of emails I had because I wasn't doing any organization. I just had the inbox, and I just answered the emails as they came in. Suddenly, I came in my inbox a couple of days after I was done with the training with my manager, and they were like 15 different folders to the side, and everything was color coded, and everything was all in its right nice place, and there were notes along the side of the screen for me, and there were automatic responses, and my mind was just blown away with this. It's interesting because my Inbox Done manager or account manager, she did not know anything about escape rooms going into it or this business. She didn't know much about subscription boxes. But as we went, she learned it along with me. She now knows as much about subscription boxes as anyone else. I actually sent her a copy of my game. She's played it. She knows how to do stuff.

CHRIS: So now, she is daily answering the emails for me. The ones that she doesn't know how to answer are the ones she thinks I should see you. She puts in a special place. She'll contact me once or twice a day and give me updates of what's going on. It's pretty amazing, and it gives me back that hour

or two hours a day, which that email time that I would have been spending the answer the emails, I can actually use that as personal time. When everyone thinks I'm working, but I'm actually like watching Big Bang theory on TV or I'm eating popcorn, it's amazing, and everyone's like, "Oh yeah, Chris is at work." No, this is actually Chris's private time, not at work.

CHRIS: So it's amazing getting that back in. The more my manager has gotten to know my inbox, the more she's able to suggest things for me to do and suggest the next step and try to get customers back that ask the question but never made a purchase, trying to get them back. So I loved it. But it's a necessity. When you get to the business this size, you can't manage the emails all yourself. There's no way.

YARO: I totally agree, Chris. I love to hear that story. So I'm glad we're working together, and I'm glad it's made such a positive impact on your time. It sounds like you really, really needed some time. You still sound like you needed some time with all that.

CHRIS: I still do, but I'll tell you Christmas, that was not a pleasant Christmas. I will say that. A couple of Christmas were never pleasant.

YARO: Yeah. How many units did you ship in Christmas, do you think?

CHRIS: Oh, I had the number somewhere, but it was probably about eight or 9,000 just for Christmas, not including the people who had already been... These are just new orders, eight or 9,000 new orders at that stage, not counting the renewing once. So-

YARO: And that's just coming from word of mouth and organic growth.

CHRIS: Word of mouth and that I was also included with a lot of BuzzFeed lists, which is very nice. Once you grow to a certain amount, people that are making lists of things will find you on their own and free of charge will do advertisement for you.

YARO: Your story is great. It's a unique kind of game, I think so. That's fantastic.

CHRIS: There are murder mystery boxes out there, but nothing like this with an escape room.

YARO: So in the last sort of five, 10 minutes here, what's the future hold for this? How do you see this rolling out over the next few years?

CHRIS: Well, the next thing I really need to work on is the fact that now that I am not teaching anymore and I actually have some free time, and now that I'm giving up some more responsibility, I do want to get all of the retired boxes back so they're always constantly in stock and they can ship out two days after ordering. Right now, if you order retired box, it ships out the same day, or it ships out in a set date, just like a subscription box. Things I'll ship out in one set date. I'd like to get that out so I can be more of an e-commerce one-time business as well as selling the subscription. I also am well into the ways of trying to get my educational programs going. I have one box that is designed... is not in the subscription, is a one time box, that's designed for schoolkids, and it's actually about the Inca, Mayan, Aztec for teachers who teach fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade to use in their classroom. It is aligned to national learning standards.

CHRIS: So I really want to get that out there. So I've already spoken at several states conferences about how to use escape rooms in the classroom. I hope to kind of bump this back into education and help teachers use this as a teaching aid now because I kind of want to give back as much. As I love doing the entrepreneurial stuff, I've loved being a teacher, and I love to kind of bridge those two together now and be able to sell my products to teachers or help teachers use escape rooms in their classrooms. I kind of want to go back that way a little bit.

YARO: I love it.

CHRIS: I plan to keep using this as a fulfillment center too because the more it grows and the more it can handle, the more I can start maybe focusing on marketing my product again on my own now that I have this and get even more subscribers.

YARO: I love that you... Because it sounds like giving up teaching was in some ways not 100% what you want to do because you're missing out on the interaction with children and directly teaching so that this allows you to step back in that world. I could see, yeah, a whole almost like a second branch of this company education within the school system, where you're providing the materials for teachers to run the escape rooms on whatever topic, I mean, puzzle games, whatever they call it for teachers. So that's very, very cool. Where's this going long term, or do you not think about that? Do you think maybe one day you might sell this company, or do you think about that sort of thing?

CHRIS: I think about that all the time, and I go back and forth on it. I would love to sell the company, the fact that it would give me back some free time again. There are other projects, other subscription boxes I would love to start. I have a subscription box that literally, I have the website created. I'm literally ready to click the go button, but I'm just afraid I don't have the time to manage it right now. I have other products I want to go to. That would be great if I were to sell this business. But at the same stage, I don't know if I want to, it's kind of like my baby at this stage. I've created these characters. I've created each of these puzzles. After a while, I think if I were to sell the company and give up that control, it'd be almost like I'm abandoning these babies I've created.

YARO: Yeah, your characters.

CHRIS: I'd be like, "No, what am I going to do with these characters and things like that?" I'd almost have to-

YARO: You're like George Lucas selling Star Wars.

CHRIS: Yes, yes. Exactly. Exactly. Except I'd be afraid that Jar Jar Binks would come in for the next pre, would all be Jar Jar. So I don't know. It would have to be a very good offer for me to sell the business. But I do know if I've learned anything since I started the business is the fact that you have to adapt. If I think that that is the best situation, I'll have to roll with the punches, and maybe I can use my creativity for something a little bit different.

YARO: Last question, Chris, before we end this interview. For those listening who are totally excited now, totally jazzed about doing their own subscription box of some sorts, what kind of advice would you recommend, especially for them at the very first starting phase because obviously, that was a while ago for you now? I'm sure you do things a little bit differently. How would you advise someone to start?

CHRIS: If you're going to start a subscription box of any type, and I mean, even if you want to start like a candle or a coffee subscription box, the first thing you have to do is you have to plan things out before you even make your first sale. I wish I had done this a little bit more, get a year's worth of boxes planned out, make a nice spreadsheet of where you want to be in every month. So you don't have to do that last minute rush of, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?" Also, find those sources to get your product. If you're selling a candle, make sure you have multiple places that you can get your product from, whether it's an Etsy store, or if you're going to go through wholesale, through China. Make sure you have several places that you can go through so you're not stuck at that last-minute where you're ready to ship out the box and someone messages you, "Hey, I'm behind. I'm going to be two months behind in getting this to you." It messes up your entire box.

CHRIS: Have everything planned out and ready to go far in advance of selling your first box, takes a little bit of extra startup, but I swear it will be a lot easier to you in the long run. Also, once you start getting to that stage where you feel like you are spending more time than is probably physically safe for you to be spending on a business, that's when you should start thinking about giving up the reins, which I wish I had done a little bit earlier. Eventually, I reached the stage where I did it, but I wish maybe I had done that six months earlier. I'd given up the reins a little bit on my business. The first thing-

YARO: Do you mean fulfillment, or what do you mean?

CHRIS: Fulfillment, marketing, email, things like that. If you find that you're spending so much time on your business that your personal life is suffering because of it, start making some changes to help your personal life out. Make

sure you recharge yourself because that you'll able to do better in the business if you treat yourself right first. So once you get to that stage you think you need fulfillment, look into it. Don't [inaudible 01:02:27] it and say, "Oh, I'll look at it next month, in the next month, in the next month." Do it right away. You'll thank yourself.

YARO: Good advice. Chris, where can people find more about you besides obviously Escape the Crate?

CHRIS: Well, that is pretty much the place I am right now. Escape the Crate Facebook group. If you have any questions or want to talk to me some more, the email that I have is the escapethecrategame@gmail.com. We use Gmail for our actual account because it's actually gets fewer bounce backs from other emails sites coming in.

YARO: Are you on social? Is it worth following? I guess

CHRIS: I am not. I am not.

YARO: You have no time, of course.

CHRIS: If you follow my social, we have lot of pictures of my dog. So if you want follow me, Chris Barnes, which is my dog wearing a sailor hat and my dog running through the yard, sure, go ahead. But unless you're a dog fan, probably not.

YARO: Okay. Awesome. Well, I definitely recommend people check out Escape the Crate. It's not complicated. I think the real secret sauce here is Chris's creativity in creating a great product. So that's your real skill here, Chris. So congratulations. Great job.

CHRIS: Well, thank you very much. Thank you.

YARO: Seven-figure business [crosstalk 01:03:36] and [crosstalk 01:03:36]-

CHRIS: I appreciate it. Also, if you happen to use, if you want to try Escape the Crate out, if you use the code podcast, it could be 25% off your first purchase.

YARO: Awesome. Thank you for that. We'll put that in the show notes so that everyone will get the links and get the code and check out everything. Chris, any last minute words, otherwise I will say goodbye and thank you.

CHRIS: Well, no. Just good luck everybody and try out an escape room in your own town some time. I mean, it's a lot of fun. It is better to get them locked in a room with your friends, but not your family. You don't want to get locked in a room with your family. It's not fun.

YARO: No. Yeah, yeah. All right. Awesome. Enjoy the escape rooms everyone, and thank you, Chris. We'll talk to you soon.

CHRIS: All right. Thanks.



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