



SPI 324

From College Nerd to Wildly Successful Personal Brand with Thomas Frank

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Thomas Frank: If you can put a little reference in there, and it's a little familiar, people are going to pay more attention. There's also that little bit of exclusivity, where people are like, "I get that reference, yeah. I know that reference." So that, plus it's a little-

Pat Flynn: That's one of the several tactics and strategies that Thomas Frank, our special guest today, uses to help grow his brand. He's a massively successful YouTuber. He's got a big brand over at collegeinfo geek.com, and we've been friends for quite a while. So this has been a long time coming. I'm happy to have him on the show. We talk about how he built his brand, some of the strategies that he used to make money right at the start, including Amazon affiliates and all that stuff, and what he's doing to make money now. And a little bit more into the weeds of video and how important that is, and how to get started, as well. So, let's dive right in. Let's do it.

Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast, where it's all about working hard now, so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host, he was once known for being a world-class procrastinator, Pat Flynn.

Pat Flynn: What's up, everybody? Pat Flynn here. Thank you so much for joining me in session 324 of the Smart Passive Income Podcast. I'm here to help you make more money, save more time, and help more people, too. Today we got Thomas Frank on the show with us today, and we're just going to dive right in because we got a lot of great stuff to talk about. So sit back, relax, enjoy. Thomas, what's up man? Welcome to the SPI Podcast. Thanks for being here, bro.

Thomas Frank: Thanks for having me on the show, man. I think it's been actually five years since you were on my show. I don't know if it's to the day, but it's really close.

Pat Flynn: Five years? Gee whiz, that's a long time, and we even knew each other before then, right?

Thomas Frank: Yeah. I've known you since BlogWorld 2012, I think, was the first time I ever met you in person.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, we have this weird picture of us looking super young after one of my talks, and we'll post that up on the show notes because it's just like that's ... We've known each other for a while. I've done my thing, and then I kind of saw you do your thing for a while. Then all of a sudden, I start hearing more about you from my videographer Caleb because he's in the YouTube scene and you know him pretty well.

I remember him saying, "Dude, have you checked out Thomas's YouTube channel in a while? He's crazy growing right now." Right now, as we are speaking, you're at 1.04 million subscribers on YouTube, which is just insane. Because I think when we met, you were just starting out on YouTube and had like 20,000 subscribers, or something.

Thomas Frank: Well, when we met, I wasn't really a YouTuber at all.

Pat Flynn: Oh, you weren't even doing YouTube at the time.

Thomas Frank: No. I've had my YouTube channel since 2006 when my brother and I were using it to post ninja fight videos and just stupid things like that. But I didn't get serious until 2014, so when I met you I think I had like 80 subscribers and they were just friends from high school.

Pat Flynn: That's crazy.

Thomas Frank: It was a dumping ground for old high school videos.

Pat Flynn: Are those ninja videos still there?

Thomas Frank: They are unlisted, but they do exist.

Pat Flynn: Okay.

Thomas Frank: I can send you them if you really want to cringe.

Pat Flynn: I'll see if I can have a link for all of you out there, I don't know, I can't promise that. Okay, let's go back to 2012. What were you doing

then? I mean, was that College Info Geek, and that was your thing at that point?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, 2012 I was still in college. I literally turned 21 on the plane to BlogWorld. It was a red-eye flight, so I didn't get to drink.

Pat Flynn: Which was in Vegas.

Thomas Frank: No, it was in New York city at that time.

Pat Flynn: Oh, that wasn't the Vegas one. Oh, that's too bad.

Thomas Frank: No. I've never been to Vegas, so I never got to go to NMX or anything like that. But I flew to New York City for BlogWorld, kind of to see you and a few other people I really wanted to see, like Lewis Howes, and I think ... Oh, Syahrini was there as well. I knew Syahrini from a previous trip so I wanted to go. I was still in college so I had been running College Info Geek for, I believe, two years at that point. I was going into my senior year of college so I was also wondering, "Do I need to quit it or not?" Because I'm going to become this old man who's no longer a student. What do I do?

Pat Flynn: Yeah, which I do want to get into because a lot of people start sites for 30 year olds and it has, for 30 year olds in the domain and then they turn 40 and they're like, "What do you do?" I do want to talk about that in a little bit, but tell me about the origin story of how you got online and started College Info Geek in the first place?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, so I think this was right after my freshman year of college ended, I got a job on campus as what they called at my school the Cyclone Aides. These are people who gave campus tours because we were the Cyclones.

Pat Flynn: Gotcha.

Thomas Frank: I'm not a big sports fan so I don't really consider myself like a super, hardcore cyclone, but I was a Cyclone Aide. In fact, I remember going into college before being a freshman, getting to go on tours

with these people and I looked up to them so much and I wanted to be one so I applied as soon as I could, when I got into college, and I got the job. This required learning basically everything there was to know about the university, as well as all the kind of questions students were going to ask. So, how do I do homework? How do I deal with homesickness? All this kind of stuff.

I learned all that and at the same time was following this blog called Hack College, which at the time was run by college students. As I was training to get into the swing of things for the summer job, they posted something on their blog saying, “Hey, we’re hiring more writers and you can apply if you want. You have to be a student. We’re kicking out all of our students that are graduating.” I spent all night, like it’s one of the few all nighters of my life writing this awesome, at least in my estimation at the time, awesome blog post.

I sent it in with my LinkedIn and my resume, and I thought it was a killer application, but they rejected it. So, I had a lot of free time when I wasn’t working at that job and I thought, “Well, I don’t want that post to go to waste.” I’d been just sort of blogging, like a journal blogging, like, “Hey, we went and did this and that today.” Kind of like a holdover from my Xanga days.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, I was about to say Xanga. Xanga was my first blogging experience.

Thomas Frank: I never had a MySpace, but I had Xanga. I figured out WordPress and I just had been posting fun little personal updates, and I had this post and I thought, “Well, if I can’t write for them, why not just make my own blog?” I was going to call it College Beat and that was taken, and I thought, “Well, I’m an Information Systems major so College Info Geek.” In five minutes came up with that domain, purchased it, and put up my first blog post.

Pat Flynn: You put up your first blog post, what did you do immediately after you hit publish?

Thomas Frank: Probably went to work.

Pat Flynn: You just left?

Thomas Frank: Or I went down ... Yeah, I didn't do anything with it, seriously. I probably went down to the bottom of the dorm and learned how to juggle with my friend, Rob. It was the most casual thing you could think of when I began. I had zero intentions to make it a business. I had zero intentions to become like a professional blogger or anything like that. I didn't know about you until probably a year after I started.

Pat Flynn: Now, up until you found me, had you done anything new on that website? Had there ever been more injection of energy into it?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, absolutely. I think I posted between two to four times a month for the first year.

Pat Flynn: Oh, okay. Not too often.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, it was fairly consistent, but it wasn't like I was going hard core on it every, single day. I think two months into it, a friend of mine who I worked with at the campus IT center had asked me, "Hey, I saw you have a blog. I want to make a blog on Android development and Linux tips." I said, "Well, why not just join forces with me?" He kind of became my partner and for a year the blog was me writing about college tips and him writing about exclusively Linux and Android tips. It was a bunch of posts way back in the archive about, "Here's how to get dual monitors on your Linux box," and stuff like that.

Pat Flynn: That's crazy.

Thomas Frank: His interest drifted off, mine stayed, and the real first injection of success or first breakthrough was I got a guest post on Hack College, which brought in 90 visitors in one day.

Pat Flynn: Crazy.

Thomas Frank: I was so excited because it was more than five. Two months

later, I think this was the very beginning of influencer marketing, Adobe reached out and they said, “Hey, we see you have a blog for students. Want to give away a free copy of the Adobe Master Suite? By the way, we’ll give you your own copy as well.” My mind was blown because people who remember, before Creative Cloud came out, the Master Suite was \$2,600, which was infinity money for a college student. Getting the opportunity to get a free copy of PhotoShop, and Illustrator, and all that kind of stuff, I jumped at it. That was the first sort of realization that, “Oh, this could maybe be like a legitimate project, not just like a fun side thing that no one would care about.”

Pat Flynn: That’s cool. You were still in college at this time?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, that would have been the end of my sophomore year.

Pat Flynn: Okay. Okay, so you got the Adobe opportunity, which is pretty cool. If you have an audience of any kind, those opportunities exist and it’s really cool that they kind of found you.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: Still the same amount of post frequency? When did you really start to get serious about this?

Thomas Frank: Then. It was when the Adobe thing happened, Yeah.

Pat Flynn: What did you do different after that?

Thomas Frank: I was like, “Oh, this is something that I need to really go hard core on.” I did a few things. I started blogging incredibly frequently to the point where ... I was just going into my Summer internship at a big Fortune 500 company. I worked as hard as I could at that company to get my work done in half the time and then spent my other 20 hours per week on the blog. Luckily, I was in the IT department so they never really said anything about it. Then, I would come home. They had flex time. I would do four, ten hour days at the company. I would ride my bike 15 miles to work every day, I would come home,

and then from six to maybe 1:00 a.m. I would work on the blog, or read articles, or try to grow social media. You know, floundering about doing all the things that-

Pat Flynn: You got the bug.

Thomas Frank: You think you're supposed to do. You can look in the archives, I think June, July, and August of that year, there's like 30 posts so it's probably once a day. The other thing I thought I had to do was grow a team. I started recruiting people at my internship or other students, or I put up notices on the blog, "Hey, if you want to write, come write." I eventually had a team of 10 writers. That didn't last too long, and that was around the time that I started reading like Nerd Fitness and your blog. I started realizing that long-form, highly edited, very intentful content does better than these little, fluffy, 500 word articles. Everyone sort of organically quit or lost interest and I didn't really pursue them. I decided to really buckle down and focus on long-form instead.

Pat Flynn: Nice, and at that point had there been any other opportunities for you to kind of start turning it into a business? When did you make your first dollar from that website, I'm wondering?

Thomas Frank: Good question. Okay, so my first dollar ... I love my first dollar story. It wasn't from the website, but it was from learning online marketing. There's like this really scammy website called The Warrior Forum, where everyone's trying to scam each other. I didn't know anything about online marketing so I was just browsing every website that looked like it was going to help me build my blog. Somebody on that website in the Web Dev help forum said, "I will pay somebody to help me with this web bug." So, I said, "Sure, I can help you out." He was like, "I will PayPal you \$20 if you can fix this thing."

I figured it would take me a few hours. Turns out, he just didn't close his table tag in HTML so I literally typed "slash bracket" and fixed his website for him. It was like some Stop Smoking niche site or something and he PayPal'ed me 20 bucks. That was like the light bulb moment like, "Oh my gosh, you can make so much money in

so little amount of time doing this. That was kind of like the bug for making money.

Pat Flynn: Yeah.

Thomas Frank: Some other cool things happened, like Adobe flew me out to go to their MAX Conference and cover it, which was my first real experience with video. I think my first actual dollar through the website came through Amazon affiliates just like everyone else.

Pat Flynn: Right, when you're starting out.

Thomas Frank: That was the easy one to sign up for and I made some Best Headphones for Students guides and stuff like that.

Pat Flynn: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Your website now is taken off collegeinfo geek.com. You talk about the early days and getting five, maybe 90 visitors a day. How many visitors a day now do you get on your website?

Thomas Frank: Good question. I think it's like average 8,000 a day.

Pat Flynn: On your YouTube channel, how many views are you getting per day?

Thomas Frank: Between 60,000 to 100,000 on an average day.

Pat Flynn: Per day?

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: That's insane.

Thomas Frank: If I publish a video, it usually is higher.

Pat Flynn: That's crazy. Your video channel's really, I feel, and correct me if I'm wrong, essentially the key with everything.

Thomas Frank: Absolutely.

Pat Flynn: That's how you've grown most of your business. When in this journey did you start really focusing down on the video aspect? You said you went to Adobe and I think you said that's when you first got interested in it, but what were your first videos about? How did you know what to create videos on?

Thomas Frank: The real serious video work started in August of 2014.

Pat Flynn: Okay.

Thomas Frank: I remember the catalysts for this were, number one, Fizzle. This was actually the sort of like easy introduction to YouTube. I never had the intention to be a YouTuber, per se. I was a huge fan of Fizzle and I was a member so I had watched some of their video courses ... Paid video courses you had to go in and subscribe to watch. But, one day, I saw that Chase posted a three minute clip from his productivity course as a blog post. He had written in the blog post, "Hey guys, we're going to try adding some video content to the blog, just to spice things up." I thought, "Hey, that would be a really cool way to spice up my blog."

I've got a podcast, I've got written content, but I don't have video. Why don't we just do some videos and I'll host them on YouTube because I have this 10 year old YouTube channel just sitting there with ninja videos on it. Why not just host the videos there? I don't have any intention of getting views on YouTube, but they'll be on my blog and I can embed them and all that. Also, my friend Sean McCabe, which people probably know better as Sean Wes, was also posting daily videos at that point. I thought, "Alright, it's time that I start doing this." Because I was such a big fan of video game reviewers like JonTron and Peanut Butter Gamer, I took a lot of inspiration from them and that's why my early videos had like a very overt video game reference kind of feel to them, but within my niche, which is student success.

Pat Flynn: I really like that because you're taking some interest that you have elsewhere and kind of putting your own style on top of videos that are related to ... I mean, who is your target audience here on your

YouTube channel?

Thomas Frank: Right now? It's students of all ages and anyone who wants to become more productive.

Pat Flynn: Students.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: You have since graduated, right?

Thomas Frank: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Pat Flynn: So, I want to back to this question of, why do you think people are still following you, despite you not being in college anymore?

Thomas Frank: There's two big reasons for that. The first was something that I put into action over two years ago I think at this point, I stopped putting College Info Geek branding on my channel at all. I may link to an article or resource on my website if there's something really relevant in a video, but College Info Geek is not in a header art anymore. My YouTube channel name is Thomas Frank, there's no end card with the logo.

You would have to go to the website to know that College Info Geek is my business if you just found me on YouTube. A lot of my videos aren't even for students exclusively, like a lot of them are just productivity videos. Anybody of any age could use those, they're probably going to find them if they Google how do I stop procrastinating or best to do list app, or something like that. I think a lot of professional people will find that, and they would have to go get my free eBook to realize, "Oh, this guys got the word college in his domain name." The other thing is something that GaryVee talks about a lot.

Where you could have a core business, and then you could also have a separate personal brand. Your personal brand could be supported by your business, but eventually it may outgrow your

business, and it will work to support your business while also giving you additional opportunities elsewhere. That's really what I've been focusing on; build my name as a personal brand, and then use that to support the business that serves students first and foremost.

Pat Flynn: I love that, because I can see students and professionals making great use of these videos. Such as, your latest one here at the time of this recording is the method Elon Musk uses to manage his time.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: We're all interested in Elon Musk, and you do a great job of taking things that are popular right now in the world, and creating great content that is helpful about those things. You're riding the Elon Musk wave, but also teaching, and this is a really popular video, I mean it was only posted four days ago, has nearly 200,000 views at this point. Then really interesting factual type episodes and videos, like does coffee dehydrate you, or the truth about hydration. All this really useful stuff that I didn't know I needed to know about, until you told me I needed to know about it. Like a lot of memorization, and multi-tasking type things, morning routines. You can all hear that this isn't just necessarily for college kids, although when you started, obviously that's what your niche was.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: You come out with the really, really good quality videos, and I would recommend everybody go and subscribe, Thomas Frank on YouTube. Obviously we'll have links in the show notes, but can you go through your process of creating a video, because obviously efficiency and optimization with the work it takes to create a video is really important. You could work on a video for months, but the quality of your videos are fantastic. Like what is your workflow from idea, and the origin of that idea, to public publication?

Thomas Frank: Alright, this is going to be a process to explain, to breakdown.

Pat Flynn: That's okay.

- Thomas Frank: Also I can tell that you are also interested in Elon Musk, because I see the boring company hat.
- Pat Flynn: I am, yeah I'm wearing the boring company hat right now.
- Thomas Frank: Where did you get your hands on a boring company hat?
- Pat Flynn: For those of you who don't know, The Boring Company is another company that Elon created on top of SpaceX, on top of Tesla, and SolarCity, and it's his new company about digging. It's a digging company, hence boring. He one day would just tweeted randomly, "Oh, I hate the traffic here in LA, I wish we could just dig underground and create a highway system underground. I'd call it The Boring Company." Then two days later, there was a tweet from him that said, "Hey, you can get a Boring Company hat."
- Thomas Frank: Oh okay.
- Pat Flynn: I was just like, "I want that hat, because it's pretty cool." I actually had somebody at a café earlier today go, "What's The Boring Company like? Why would you even have that hat?" Then I get to explain it.
- Thomas Frank: Yeah.
- Pat Flynn: If it's for marketing or just for fun, which Elon often just does things randomly for fun, like his little flamethrower thing.
- Thomas Frank: I love that.
- Pat Flynn: Either way, it's working, but yeah that's where I got this hat. I don't know if he's still selling them. Anyway, back to you, what's your progression through a video?
- Thomas Frank: Okay, there's really, let me see here, there's five stages to a video. There is the planning and scripting, which I suppose research would go in there as well. There is the A-roll shooting, and I'll define what A-roll and B-roll are in a second here. Then there is, what I call first stage B-roll, which is gathering everything that is needed for B-roll,

and then doing B-roll in Premiere Pro. I use two editing programs, which I'll explain as well. Then finally there is the last B-roll stage, which I do in After Effects, which is where a lot of the spit and polish goes into my videos. Then there's obviously publishing.

With research and topic selection, the time investment in this stage really varies based on the actual topic. So the hydration video I did, that took probably 10 work hours of research to get right. I read tons of medical studies about hydration, tons of blog posts, Wikipedia articles, and then it took forever to bring all that information together, synthesize it, figure out what's actually important to talk about in the video, and how does it all fit together, and then write a full script for that thing. That took awhile, whereas a recent video like, eight things you should stop doing in the morning, that was just me brainstorming topics. I'm like, "Hey, people would probably really, really like that kind of a video." Everyone wants to know what they really should stop doing in the morning.

Pat Flynn: Quick question for you, on the one that took you 10 hours to research, at least what I'm seeing here. It has less than 100,000 views in two months.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: The one from three weeks ago, which is the morning habits one, has four times as many. In my head I'm like, "Why would I spend all that time doing all that research on something, versus the thing that people want to know about it which is, how to stop doing certain things in the morning." How do you address that? I mean, obviously I know now that I'm in YouTube land, you never know sometimes.

Thomas Frank: You really do.

Pat Flynn: Some of those videos that are well researched do very well, and other times they don't. I did a video about productivity, and it was really high quality, top down camera view of my apps on my phone. Caleb and I spent a lot of time with the setup, and the sequencing and all that stuff, and it doesn't even have 2,000 views. Whereas,

I just talk about passive income for a few minutes, and then boom there's 100,000 views. It's hard, how do you know what to do if you don't know what's going to happen?

Thomas Frank: You really don't, and this is a big thing with YouTube. The market's response to your work is not correlated with effort. Okay, I don't want to say that. There is a correlation with effort, in so far as effort is going to help you have a more polish camera presence, or a better script or something like that.

Pat Flynn: Sure.

Thomas Frank: Topic selection, what jives with the zeitgeist right now is so much more important than you spending 10 hours researching hydration. I guess first and foremost, if you're only doing this for the views, you're eventually going to burnout. This is something that you've talked about for years in this podcast, but you can't cynically sit around thinking, "What's going to get views?" And only make your YouTube channel based on that, because you're going to stop doing it. Though I do think very hard about how can I spin something that I'm interested to talk about into something that's really interesting.

The Elon Musk video, I had wanted to do a timeboxing video for a long time, because I think timeboxing is a very cool technique. No one's going to click on a video called, "How to timebox." Learning that Elon Musk and Bill Gates use timeboxing, it's like, "There's a connection, everyone wants to know how Elon Musk manages his schedule." So there's how you do the timeboxing video. Another great example, space repetition is in my opinion, one of the most effective learning techniques in the world. It's literally just a temporal hack instead of doing all of your learning right now, you space it out with increasingly bigger intervals.

I knew no one's going to be Googling or putting into YouTube search, "Space repetition." Nobody knows what that term is, and even if it pops up in suggested, fewer people are going to click that, then a title like, the most powerful way to remember what you study. What I always ask myself is, "What is the question that my

title and thumbnail put into the viewers head?” And, “How badly do they need that question answered once it’s there?” The stronger that question is, the more successful your video is going to be. Assuming that it does answer the question, and that it does keep them watching.

Pat Flynn: Right, and you know-

Thomas Frank: Those are just rules.

Pat Flynn: Those are great tips, and for the hydration one, although it doesn’t have a lot of views now, that’s something that I can see over time continuing to be a top video related to when people just have interest in the hydration.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: Versus, the eight things to stop doing when you wake up. Nobody’s typing in, what do I need to stop doing in the morning, but that has more of an interest when people see that in suggested videos or when people see it on their home, or browse. Then that’s very clickable, and that’s like, “Oh, I want to make sure I’m not doing one of those things.” For sure.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, and I will say my YouTube strategy was very optimized for search when I was smaller. Now that I’m a bigger creator, my YouTube strategy I would say is more balanced between a search strategy, and a suggested strategy.

Pat Flynn: Which you got gain.

Thomas Frank: My videos never get on trending, but they do well in suggestions.

Pat Flynn: Would you recommend that for a new YouTuber, to focus on search more than anything or what people are looking for?

Thomas Frank: I would say it depends on your niche. I would say that if you are working in an area, or your side project is something that is going to teach people something, help them in some way, educate them.

Then search is definitely something that should be apart of your strategy at least. I don't want to go as far as to say you should only be thinking about search, because I've seen many creators who are in total garage mode, blow up with one video that is clearly optimized for suggestions and not search.

It may not have been a super calculated thing, they might've just been really passionate about a topic. I had a friend who had this channel called Engineering Worth for a while, and it was how to be better Engineering student. He made this video called, This Is How Short Your Life Is, and the thumbnail's just this pie chart. With an arrow to the big slice showing, this is what your life is, and millions of people watched that video. I think it has over 2 million views at this point, and it just blew his channel up. He was getting five, six thousand subscribers a day for awhile from that video.

Pat Flynn: That's crazy.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, and so he actually changed the channels name and focus after that.

Pat Flynn: Wow.

Thomas Frank: Now it's more of like a video essay channel.

Pat Flynn: Very similar to Ben Sullins, who was featured here on the podcast not too long ago, who is the owner of Teslanomics. He's a analytical guy who just created a bunch of videos about excel and data. All kinds of random things, and then one day he posted one about Tesla, and then now all of his videos are about data related to Tesla, because like you said. Part of the lesson for me is, you just have to be patient and continue to post, and be consistent, but be patient and YouTube will tell you at some point what it is that people really want.

Thomas Frank: It's very true. There's a new creator that I met recently, his YouTube name is Chubbyemu, and for the longest times, like multiple years, he was making gaming videos that did alright, not that great. Then

a few months ago he just started posting these medical videos, because he's actually a medical student, or possibly a graduate at this point. He'll post videos like, A grandma ate nothing but peanuts for four weeks and here's what happened to her liver. Then the thumbnail's a x-ray of a liver, and millions of people watch these videos. Clearly YouTube told him, "This is what works for you," and he's pivoted to being now a medical explainer channel, and doesn't do any gaming content whatsoever.

Pat Flynn: That's crazy, that's awesome. That's a cool example.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, you just got to experiment.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, exactly, I mean that's the cool thing about YouTube. I mean, you can do whatever you want, and see what happens. We'll link to the timeboxing video now that I know people are interested in what the heck that is. We'll link to that in the show notes to. Going back to our plan here, sorry went a little bit on tangent, but in terms of scripting, I'm curious, this is a big question I always get. Do I script the videos? Do I use a teleprompter? Do I just outline and trust myself or do I just wing it completely? What do you do?

Thomas Frank: I do a combination of scripting and outlining. I did buy a teleprompter, but I don't ever use it.

Pat Flynn: Yeah same.

Thomas Frank: I use a teleprompter for the crash course project. I did a mini series for the channel Crash Course, and they forced me to use a teleprompter, but with that I was very far away from the camera in a long studio room so you can't tell that I'm reading. I came home, I bought a teleprompter thinking that it would help my workflow, but I stand very close to the camera when I film in my room. It was so obvious that I was reading, and I immediately ditched it. What I do is, I either outline my videos for things like the, eight things you should stop doing in the morning, or I full script for the complicated videos like the hydration one, or the, why you're always tired video.

If it is an outlined video, I can usually film it in a half an hour, I go off the outline, I ad lib a lot of things. I think it's actually more human, but for the really complicated videos I find that I need to script and usually I have to do it twice. I'll put the iPad up, I'll put the script, I'll memorize line, I'll say it to the camera as many times as possible, and I am not yet good enough an actor to deliver that script, to my standards, the first time.

Usually there's one film take, and I always intend for it to be the one film take, but half an hour into it, I'm only a quarter through the script, I hate myself, I hate the script, I think my YouTube channels going to crash and burn. I quit for the day, then I come back the next day, and because of the spacing effect, and because of a good night sleep, I deliver the script like a good actor should, and it's great.

Pat Flynn: Nice.

Thomas Frank: It's one of those two.

Pat Flynn: When you record, do you record bits and pieces at a time, and then do the bits and pieces over, over, over again before you move onto the next part of the video? Or do you go all the way through, and then like you said all the way through again?

Thomas Frank: It's one long take, but it's each line is said until it's right, and then I move onto the next line.

Pat Flynn: Got it okay, and then the magic comes in the editing right?

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: You always pick just the best one.

Thomas Frank: I'll actually edit backwards. I'll put everything into the timeline, and then I go to the end, because I know the last take of every line was the good one most likely. I'll just cut that, then I'll scroll back and I'll have to see myself flubbing a line over, and over, and over again

until I find the next one. I've been doing this long enough where I can tell the waveforms change shape when I start saying a new line, so I can skip over things. I know some people will snap after they do a bad take so they can just see all these pops in the waveforms.

Pat Flynn: I do a click, I go, (Pat clicks) like that.

Thomas Frank: There you go, yeah. I don't do that, it just messes with my workflow, but it can be helpful for people who are not use to reading waveforms.

Pat Flynn: That's a great-

Thomas Frank: It's like its own language.

Pat Flynn: It is.

Thomas Frank: So that's filming.

Pat Flynn: You learn faster as you keep doing this. When I edit my vlogs for example, it's a lot easier now than it was a year ago when I started. Okay so planning and scripting, and research right? A-roll, what is A-roll?

Thomas Frank: If you're doing a talking head video, like you do, and like I do, the A-roll is the person on screen talking. A more general definition of A-roll would be whatever the base layer of the video is. Some creators do not have an A-roll, because they are entirely voiceover based, and then they just do animation, or they'll do all clips and pictures. If you are filming a documentary, or you're filming a host-it-all, you're the host, that's the A-roll. By the time the A-roll cut, as they call it, is done, I have a fully, edited to length, talking head video. That could technically be posted, and it would be intelligible and watchable.

Pat Flynn: But you don't post that one, why?

Thomas Frank: No, because no one wants to stare at my face. Okay, I'll take that back. Maybe some people want to stare at my face talking for 12

minutes, but-

Pat Flynn: You do have a nice face.

Thomas Frank: I wouldn't want to stare at my face talking for 12 minutes. There are definitely people who can get away with talking to the camera for 12 minutes, and using almost no B-roll whatsoever. Philip DeFranco is a great example.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, I love Philip.

Thomas Frank: Uses very minimal B-roll in his episodes. Then there's this other guy Leo, I forget his ... Oh it's actualized.org, he posts, and I don't know how he does this, they're like 40 minute long videos, one take, no flubs. He's in one long take, he just talks to the camera for 40 minutes.

Pat Flynn: Oh, he's the bald dude right?

Thomas Frank: He's the bald dude who-

Pat Flynn: He ranks for passive income, like why can I not write this.

Thomas Frank: Really?

Pat Flynn: Yeah, he has this really cool thumbnail of him really close up to the video holding the number three, but not with the three middle fingers.

Thomas Frank: Oh, it's the French three, the European three.

Pat Flynn: The French three, for whatever reason it probably gets a ton of click throughs, and I'm just like, "Ugh that guy."

Thomas Frank: The three that would've saved the characters in Inglorious Bastards.

Pat Flynn: Yes, it's the one that gave him away.

Thomas Frank: That's actually the three that I use, because I find it harder to put my

ring finger up, so I do it that way.

Pat Flynn: Really? I usually do ... Anyway.

Thomas Frank: It's like a metal three right there, that's a good one. Maybe you should do a Passive Income video with your fingers like that, like metal with the thumb out, and people would easily click on that one instead.

Pat Flynn: Right, rock out, have a rock out to Passive Income.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, he was one of my first influences when I started YouTube, because back then his channel was very grounded in productivity. Nowadays, he keeps doing psychedelics, and having weird trips into the spiritual plane. I've kind of fallen out of love with his channel, but I am consistently impressed with his ability to talk about a topic with no flubs. He can get into the podcasting mindset talking to a camera. I can't do that.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, that's hard to do. I can't do that either, unless I'm with somebody and doing an interview like in the Tesla, or maybe when they did a DeLorean.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: We will see. Okay, so you film this whole A-roll thing, and that's like you said, your base layer. If you're thinking about when you're editing, that's one line, or one track if you will, and then the B-roll. What is B-roll and how do you know what to shoot?

Thomas Frank: B-roll is anything else. That could be little clips you film, and it could be images, it could be animations or quotes, or really anything else you throw on screen. The way that I handle B-roll, I often plan a little bit of it during the scripting process, especially if it is a fully scripted video. I'll often bring that video into Google Docs, and I'll use the little highlighting and note suggestions changing tool to write B-roll ideas.

Like have a picture of Elon Musk here, have a picture of Oscar the Grouch here. Usually what I'll do, is I'll watch through my A-roll cut in Premiere, and I'll just have a Google Docs bullet list open writing out B-roll ideas. So jokes, visual puns, things that need to be shown there. If I have a quote, I'm obviously going to show a quote animation, probably with a picture of the person or the book it's from. By the end of that watch through I've got this huge to do list at that point.

Pat Flynn: Do you have a rule for yourself, in terms of how much B-roll there should be or, "I should never go X amount of seconds before, of just my face only?"

Thomas Frank: No I don't, I use to, and I remember I created that rule for myself, because Chase Reeves told me, "I love your videos Honky, because it's 15 seconds before the next piece of B-roll, and I never get bored." For a while I was like, "15 seconds, okay."

Pat Flynn: That sounds just like Chase by the way.

Thomas Frank: I'm glad I got his voice down. Okay, now I'm going to start laughing like him. I observed a lot of my videos in the past, and I realized some of videos do incredibly well even if there are long stretches of me talking. Clearly my audience doesn't necessarily care if there is X amount of B-roll, or X amount of seconds between B-roll. It's more, "Is this video entertaining?" That's the question to me. If I'm watching through it and I'm getting bored, then the audience is probably going to get bored. I'm also a very creative person, so I probably put in way more B-roll than I need. I'll hear myself say a certain word, and I think, "Okay, there has to be a picture of Macho Man Randy Savage popping up, either wise I can't publish this video."

Pat Flynn: That goes a long with something I wanted to talk about real quick, is when I started on YouTube, at least to get serious in YouTube, not less than a year ago. You would give me some good feedback on one of my first videos that I was really trying to make great. It was very specific example, but it meant a lot to me, and I was very

thankful that you gave me this feedback. It was related to what you just talked about, there was a part in a video where I talked about how we're all coaches.

Parents are coaches, managers are coaches, and teachers are coaches, like we're all coaches so we need to learn how to be become better coaches. This was a video about my favorite business book of 2017 which was called, "The Coaching Habit." To go along with what you said earlier, if I had just put, "The Coaching Habit, by Michael Bungay." Nobody would click on that, but because I made the video, "My favorite book of 2017," and the thumbnail was me with a question mark on a book, people had messaged me saying, "If you gave me the title, I wouldn't have clicked on it.

It was because I was just so curious about what that book was, was the reason I clicked on it." Then you gave me some feedback, and you were like, from that specific example, "Pat, you lost a great opportunity there to just add a little bit more personality into it." You would say that, the example of parents, and teachers, and managers as coaches, always make the third example a fun random one that reflects your past or is a little bit of your personality. You had mentioned like, "Parents show a picture of parents, managers show a picture of a manager working with their team. Then for teachers show," who was it?

Thomas Frank: It was Mrs. Frizzle from The Magic School Bus.

Pat Flynn: Mrs. Frizzle, yeah, from Magic School Bus, right?

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: That just little tweak right there, made so much sense to me, and I wasn't thinking like that until you said that. Now, I've been a lot better at injecting my random nerdiness into that. You don't have to put nerdy things like that in there, you can't if you're a UFC fighter. You can have somebody teaching somebody UFC or something instead, it just reflects your personality a little bit, and people get to know you a little bit better without you actually having to say, "Oh

by the way guys, I put Mrs. Frizzle Here, because I used to watch this when I was a kid and I love science.” I don’t have to say that, the image does that for you.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: Can you talk a little bit more about why things like that are really important to do in your videos, or just in general?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, so those are like visual gags, or visual metaphors. I use them, number one again, it makes the video more entertaining for me. I’m excited and almost giddy to put up a joke like that if there’s a stupid joke about The Rock being in my video or something, I love it. I think familiarity is one of the core human drives, and it’s something that makes people love what they’re watching. People don’t want something that is 100% new, which is why a movie like Ready Player One is so friggin successful and compelling.

It’s so full of references from your childhood, and you’re like, “Oh my god, it’s King Kong, and here he is playing PacMan,” and all that kind of stuff. If you can put a little reference in there, and it’s a little familiar, people are going to pay more attention. There’s also that little bit of exclusivity where people are like, “I get that reference. Yeah, I know that reference.” That, plus it’s a little unexpected. I forget what the six elements are, but there are six elements in comedy, one of which is surprise.

If you can bring a little bit of surprise into your videos, you create a little bit of fun. Maybe not a laugh out loud moment, but is more fun than if you just had a stock photo of a teacher. The last thing I’ll say is, there’s something in video editing that they call, Lord Privy Seal. A Lord Privy Seal is when you put a visual on screen that adds no new information to what you have said. The example of putting just a stock photo of a teacher in a classroom when you say the word teacher, that’s a Lord Privy Seal, because you’re just creating a one to one visual representation of what you’re saying on camera.

Sometimes that can work, sometimes that’s necessary if the visual

actually provides more context or clarifies what you're saying. If it's just a stock photo, you're basically just saying, "Well, somebody told me I should have pictures over my video instead of my face, so I'm going to do it." Whereas a picture of Mrs. Frizzle is not a Lord Privy Seal, because it is a picture of a teacher, but it's also a reference to a TV show that a lot of your audience has probably seen, so then there's a fun element to it, that adds something.

Pat Flynn: Would you recommend not including just images that are stock images that match what you're saying. Is that a bad thing to do?

Thomas Frank: I use stock photos sometimes, but my rule for it is, does this make the video more entertaining to watch? On the Elon Musk video, I mentioned something about traffic, and I went and found this cool time lapse shot of traffic moving through a city. I was like, "That's aesthetically pleasing." I think the other thing is, there's a stocky quality to stock photos. They're lifeless and boring by default, and I don't know why they exist in many cases. I think they exist because corporations want to put pictures on their website maybe. A lot of times yeah, people will just go find stock photo of teacher in classroom. There's nothing exciting about it. If you have a cool drone shot of traffic at least that's visually appealing to look at.

Pat Flynn: Yeah the visually appealing thing works really well like you said. You do a lot of great B-roll where it's like, and I think this is true, you have a space in your office where you literally ... It's like a white box, and that's where you show things. If you're flipping through a book, you put this book in this white box with nice lighting, and then you actually film yourself flipping through the book. Maybe pointing at a passage, right?

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: Although I'm not going to pause the video and read what you're pointing to, it makes me feel like I'm there with you.

Thomas Frank: Right, yeah. That's a good point. I don't want people to be too hung up on Lord Privy Seals, because then they're going to start

asking themselves, “Is every piece of B-roll a Lord Privy Seal?” It’s just that if you catch yourself on iStock photo, googling trashcan on street corner, or something like that, and you’re only doing it because somebody told you put B-roll in a video, that’s when you want to ask. I love showing the books that I’m talking about with my overhead setup. If anyone wants to build an overhead setup, I built mine for really cheap. It’s just using galvanized steel pipes from Home Depot and shop lights with wax paper taped over them. Then you get a clamp arm for your camera, and I just have it clamped at the top of the pipe.

Pat Flynn: That’s filmed all after the face video right?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, I’m pretty bad at filming demonstrating things while filming. It’s one of those things I’m not very experienced in. It is something I want to get more into, and whenever I have a space where I have a camera person, and they have room to maneuver around, I may do more of that. But because I got limited space, and I just tend to work better by doing the A-roll first.

Pat Flynn: Well then finally in terms of video production, spit and polish, what are a few things that you do to polish up your videos after you have the A-roll, and the B-roll layered on top of that, and the audio’s great? Like what do you do?

Thomas Frank: Sound effects, and music. I use epidemicsound.com to find music, that I’m also starting to learn music production myself and I’ll be using my own beats in the background once I get some beats made.

Pat Flynn: Nice man. You said Epidemic Sound?

Thomas Frank: Epidemic Sound, yeah, that’s one-

Pat Flynn: That’s royalty free?

Thomas Frank: That’s royalty free, that one is 30 bucks a month. If you’re a creator who has 30 bucks a month to spare, that would be great, but there

are also lots of free sources. Kevin MacLeod, which I think his website is, Incompetech. YouTube audio library, SoundCloud has lots of creative commons, music that you can search for. There's tons of good stuff, but background music just adds a bit of energy, sort of livens up a dead sound. Then, I do a lot of work in After Effects. For people who don't know, Premiere Pro is Adobe's video editing program that I use, I don't know if Caleb uses it, many people out there use Final Cut as an alternative.

Then After Effects is a motion graphics design program. I started teaching myself After Effects a few years ago, and I use that for basically all pictures, all quote animations, anything like that. I can add what are called ease in curves to anything that I move. If I've got a picture that's coming from the left onto the screen, in Premiere, you can do ease in curves in Premiere but it's kind of difficult. Basically, a linear motion line would be just something moving onto the screen at a fixed rate of speed.

Whereas, an ease in curve would let it either start out slow and speed up, or start very fast and slow down, or some variation in between. That gives a much more lifelike pleasing motion to the eye. If you look up, Disney animation classes, and you look at how they hand draw things, there's a lot of easing, along with bouncing and things like that. I'm also able to do a lot more with motion blur, things like that. Virtual cameras, virtual lighting, so I just let my imagination run wild, and I try to present things in a really visually appealing way. Instead of just popping a graphic up onto the screen.

Pat Flynn: That's cool.

Thomas Frank: I never want something to come out of nowhere without some indication of how it got there.

Pat Flynn: I like that. Thank you for that rundown, fantastic. Lastly, I want to talk about, I know your business model, now that you have this large subscription base and fans really on YouTube, you also publish your podcast, both on obviously iTunes, but as a video too on a separate

YouTube channel, which is great. You have collegeinfo geek.com. What is the business model for you here? Are you just making money through ads now, because you have this large YouTube channel? What's the lay of the land there for you?

Thomas Frank: Right now the biggest source of income is sponsorships and brand deals on my channel, and the podcast.

Pat Flynn: Okay.

Thomas Frank: Almost every video right now has a sponsor at the end, and I actually turned the AdSense off of those videos for the first 30 days, because I want the sponsor to get as much of a, called action value, as possible. I don't want to be having them competing with an ad from YouTube. That is the biggest income driver, then there's also somebody from AdSense, and then of course I'm still very focused on growing the website. I've got a team whose entire job is making sure the website is still, not neglected, and is still the best source of information on the internet for how to be a more effective student. The website still brings an income through affiliate marketing as well, and then book sales too.

Pat Flynn: I would recommend everybody check out the resource page that Thomas has on College Info Geek. I don't know if you know this, but I reference it all the time, it's like a really, really good resource page.

Thomas Frank: Oh really?

Pat Flynn: You have this ultimate packing list for college that just lists literally everything a person in college will need to know. I would imagine that would perform very well, because once a person wants one thing, I mean you have all the things they need. They're going to get everything and you then you get, those things add up, and how you broke it down.

Thomas Frank: Yeah, and the books page to. People love the books page, everyone wants book recommendations.

- Pat Flynn: The books page?
- Thomas Frank: Yeah.
- Pat Flynn: We'll link to that in the show notes for sure.
- Thomas Frank: Then I know every single semester I send an email to my list saying, "Hey, if you're moving into a dorm, here's the packing list. If you need to save money on textbooks, here's my textbook guide." I make very little money off the textbook guide, but I want people to save money on textbooks, because they're ungodly expensive.
- Pat Flynn: Yeah.
- Thomas Frank: Then the big driver of people from the YouTube channel to the website, is the eBook that I wrote. Everyone says write an eBook right, so I set out to write an ebook back in 2014. This is actually really, really early on in the YouTube journey, and like everyone says on the internet, "You should write this short punchy guide that's easy to put together, and it just gives a few extra tips to your audience." I screwed up and accidentally wrote a 27,000 word book.
- Pat Flynn: A legit book.
- Thomas Frank: Legit book. It's over 100 pages, I still gave it away for free, because I said I was going to do it, and I wanted to stick to my word. That has grown an email list of over 200,000 people, and I then took my PDF, I learned how to format it as a real book, and that now does nearly \$1,000 a month in print sales every single month. My lit agent just sold the audio rights to a publisher, so we're going to have an actual publisher publish the audio book version of it this year.
- Pat Flynn: This is the Ten Steps To Earning Awesome Grades book?
- Thomas Frank: Yes, and because it's free, and I think I got this tip from you along time ago. You gave your free book to your audience, and then asked them to review something, like review your podcast, or if

it's on Amazon review it. I did that, and it is now easily the highest reviewed study skills book on Amazon ever.

Pat Flynn: Dude, sweet. That's awesome.

Thomas Frank: That's the power of giving things away for free. If you can give the majority of what you make away for free, you're going to build your audience so much faster, and I truly believe that.

Pat Flynn: Dude, well done, any tips for the creators out there? Whether it's YouTube creators, podcast creators, whatever. They're just getting started, they haven't reached that tipping point yet, what words of encouragement can you give them to keep going?

Thomas Frank: 1% better everyday, or everything you do, and publish frequently. There's this research study that was done, I can't remember where, where half the class was told to make the most perfect pot that they could. It was a pottery class. The other half was told they'd be graded on the amount of pots they made. Then when they went and objectively judged the quality of the pots, all of the best ones came from the quantity side of the class, because the perfectionists who were told they were going to be graded on one perfect pot, spent so much time on theory, and thinking about the design and everything.

Really, there's a zillion things out there you don't even know you could do, regardless of what your craft is. For me, it was I will publish once a week. That was my initial YouTube goal. With every single video I thought what can I make 1% better? Can I have fewer vocal pauses in my on camera presence? Can I make eye contact with the camera a little bit better? Can I work with virtual lights in After Effects this week? If you do that every single week, or every single whatever period of time you define, I think eventually something's going to strike a nerve. You're going to get yourself to that level of quality that's just above everyone else.

Pat Flynn: Dude, amazing tip, thank you so much Thomas. Congrats on all the success, and all your future success. I mean your channel's growing

so fast, congrats on a million subs, and your gold button which I saw you post the other day, which I'm super jealous about.

Thomas Frank: It's over there.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, it's so sweet, and it's the new one too.

Thomas Frank: It is the new one, yeah.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, they-

Thomas Frank: It's way lighter, I've been told the last one is like, I don't know, 20 or 30 pounds.

Pat Flynn: Oh yeah?

Thomas Frank: Yeah, this ones very light.

Pat Flynn: That's awesome.

Thomas Frank: I'll be looking forward to seeing it on your wall very soon as well.

Pat Flynn: The gold one, one of these days, but the silver one is coming. Silver you get a 100,000, Thomas has a gold one for over a million. Maybe we'll see that diamond one, that 10 million one day for you.

Thomas Frank: Yeah.

Pat Flynn: That'd be sweet.

Thomas Frank: Then I'll get a ruby brofist one for 50 million. It'd be pretty funny if the next person that hits 50 million, they just give them the PewDiePie one.

Pat Flynn: I know right.

Thomas Frank: Instead of custom making one for them.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, that'd be funny. Thomas thanks-

Thomas Frank: But yeah man, thanks for having me on the show, seriously.

Pat Flynn: Dude, thank you so much. Super inspirational, lot of great tips, and we'll talk to you again soon.

Thomas Frank: Absolutely.

Pat Flynn: Alright, I hope you enjoyed that episode with Thomas Frank. You can find him on YouTube, Thomas Frank, just look him up, and also College Info Geek. He's also one of the best resource pages on the web that I found for any brand really, that's doing very well for him. If you go to collegeinfo geek.com, check out his resource page, this is how I teach the people who are taking my affiliate marketing class how to create a resource page that actually helps. Especially because he has his college packing list and a checklist that you can download. All these things to really help with his commissions, but obviously just being incredibly helpful for anybody's whose going to college.

Check that out, and man Thomas, you're amazing. Thank you all so much for listening, and if you want to check out the links and the show notes, and everything that we talked about today, head over to my blog at smartpassiveincome.com/session324, again, smartpassiveincome.com/session324. We'll have all the links to all the good stuff, so hey, thank you again so much for listening and I appreciate you. Hey really quick, one thing that we're starting to do a lot more now are live trainings for those of you who want to learn about all kinds of things.

From affiliate marketing, to podcasting, to even how to get started, find your niche. All those things, we're doing live trainings every single month now. If you go to smartpassiveincome.com/trainings, you'll go to a page where you can quickly register for one of those, and you can watch me live and I'll teach you some stuff. Again, smartpassiveincome.com/trainings, and I look forward to seeing you there. Thanks so much, and chat soon, bye.

Announcer: Thanks for listening to the Smart Passive Income Podcast, at www.smartpassiveincome.com.



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