

# Tinkering Before Millions

How to grow hobby  
hacking into a company

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# Don't Think Big

- Step I: Make something useful & simple.
- Step II: Put it in front of people and use their feedback to make it better.
- Step III: Use user loops to help users spread the word-of-mouth in their own words.
- Step IV: Worry about scale on an as-needed basis.

# Step I: Tinkering / Itch-Scratching

- Make note of annoyances, repetitive tasks
- Sketch out how to fix them!
- Be “lazy” & use existing tools & platforms
  - Don’t try to reinvent the wheel for fun
    - (e.g. writing your own OS, language, DB, etc.)
  - Focus: write out on paper what you want to do.
- A journey of a thousand miles...

# Also Step I: Usability

- Make it as simple as possible.
- PBwiki 1.0 was designed as a joke to see how minimalist I could make the UI!
- People don't read text. They should be able to do the right thing by instinct.

# Step II: Early Feedback

- As soon as it could be possibly useful to anybody, share it.
- Do not worry about having your IP stolen.
- Do not worry about the edges being rough.
- Eat your own dogfood & listen to users.
- Keep making it better.
- **Don't optimize.**
- **Don't make it fancy.**

# Also Step II: Building Community

- Reach out to your users.
- Find their blog posts (Technorati, Google)
- Centralize their feedback (GetSatisfaction, PHPBB)
- Keep them posted (Twitter, Wordpress)
- Keep documentation fresh (PBwiki)

# Step III: Spreading

- Your product is your best marketing.
- Google didn't pay for advertising for years.
- 95% of PBwiki's growth is from word of mouth.
- If you have a consumer-style app, consider virality / "user loops"
  - Modelling: visitors => signups => inviters \*  
num\_invited => new signups
- Engage your community
- Pick core metrics, dig into usage.

# Step IV: Scaling

- Worry about optimization last!
- Horizontal partitioning: divide & conquer
- Leverage cloud hosting (App Engine, EC2, KiteDance)
- Always hire great coders, but bring on board a secretary fast if your work is piling up.

# Have Fun!

- Build something really useful for a lot of people.