

A TALE OF TWO WORLDS: Life in a Future Created by Authentic Passions

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, ..., it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness.” To Charles Dickens, this was life in the 18th century’s French Revolution, when two conflicting classes coexisted: one in despair, one in hope. Centuries later, there is little difference. This is life amidst the 2020 Global Pandemic and Passion Economy Revolution, when humanity has two new worlds of possibilities: one for businesses, one for individual creators. In both, we are presented with two choices: create a future of light or one of darkness?

The Passion Economy is a revolutionary, hopeful response to widespread job losses amidst the pandemic and prolonged lockdowns. In this futuristic era, “work” is rooted in passionate creation. Two years after leaving my stable corporate job to be an entrepreneur in the Passion Economy, I witnessed that in this “Future of Work,” humanity is at a crossroads: do we take the road towards a healthy, inclusive workspace, or do we ruthlessly exploit identities for growth?

ACT I: A TALE OF THE SMALL BUSINESS WORLD

It was the worst of times...

By end-2019, I left my dream job as the manager of Procter & Gamble Philippines’ biggest brand to pursue entrepreneurship. My Thailand-based college professor and I felt we struck gold when we chanced upon an undiscovered, promising product: Trizie- a delicious, natural fiber and antioxidant-rich drink that gives a smooth detox.

In the Philippines, there is a whitespace to make the health and wellness industry more delightful and approachable. Few relatable voices have spoken up about their wellness journey, with the industry itself preaching torturous perfection and associating “healthy” with numbers on the weighing scale. Also, gut issues were common for Filipino women, with 25% of Filipino women suffering from constipation vs. a global average of 12%.¹ However, detox incumbents created harsh, unappetizing products that made “good gut health” complex and elusive.

Bearing a customer-first mindset, we invested in research group discussions with wellness-conscious Filipinas who tried the product for a week. We truly hit gold as the product posed a fantastic fit: Filipinas loved the fruity flavors, the potent natural ingredients, and the “hassle-free experience.” We immediately shared the good news with our Thai principals, BFF Bangkok, with whom we partnered to launch Trizie in the Philippines.

¹(“12 People Globally Suffer Constipation”)

All that was left was to launch in May 2020. But the pandemic struck and the odds were stacked against us: the Malaysian factory for our fiber blends shut down; big retailers scrambled to survive amidst their store shutdown; and famous celebrities ignored us because they only wanted to be associated with big brands. Moreover, we had personal existential crises due to a raging virus.

One of the worst days I had prior to the launch was hearing that the product, for which I left my stable career and uprooted my life in the Philippines, would not be produced in the next four months. During this time, one of the BFF Bangkok Directors even harshly criticized my ability to launch at the height of global uncertainty, as I was “too young,” “inexperienced,” and “not well-connected” at 24 years old.

We were forced to postpone our launch from summer, the peak season for fitness, to an unideal time: October, when Filipinos begin the Christmas festivities with big buffets. It was also the start of Megasale season, the loudest month for consumer goods juggernauts.

...And then it was the best of times.

Being first-time, bootstrapped young entrepreneurs during a pandemic was a nightmare, but my team and I were resourceful dreamers. Forced to shift our lives online, we bet on the power of digital. Whereas drug & pharmacy giants ignored us, we connected with E-Commerce account managers who believed in us. Whereas big celebrities would not even listen to our pitch, “smaller” creators generously tried our product.

Our “small-time” creators with our “small-time” product pulled through with the sheer power of authentic passion. Small wellness creators, to whom we sent our product, loved Trizie so much that they honestly reviewed it and opened up about fitness struggles. We began a movement of normalizing “taboo” conversations on gut health and demanding potent natural solutions.

This was just the beginning. Within two weeks, we were discovered by Rei Germar, who was an emerging macro influencer known for the #ReiMadeMeBuyIt effect as her shopping curations led to strong conversion. After discovering Trizie online, she sent shockwaves by sharing her digestion issues and how our natural fiber drink boosted her fitness efforts without pain or guilt.

In a week, we delivered our first million pesos of revenue. In a month, we became part of the Top 10 health brands of Philippines’ biggest E-Commerce retailers. In 12 months, we delivered our first million dollars of revenue, five product awards, and over 10,000 reviews, despite starting from merely shared passions and customer focus.

It was the season of light.

This is the magic of the Passion Economy: SMEs go from zero-to-hero when real individuals create stories around the authentic experiences from empathic businesses. Creators can catapult a small business' product into a cult-classic holy grail, loved by niche communities who view the brand as not a profiteering identity but a community-inspired solution.

Businesses that marry their passions for products with the creators' passions can unlock powerful actions. I think of it as a **Passion Effect for MSMEs** in our hybrid world, guided by learnings from Peter Drucker, father of Modern Management.

1. **Passion for Innovative, Inclusive Products:** Launch a superior and powerful solution that fills a gap in terms of what shoppers need.² Advocate the democratization of what was once unattainable to be attainable, so the brand transcends from “seller” into a “partner.”

In *The Discipline of Innovation*, Peter Drucker shared, “successful entrepreneurs have a commitment to systematic innovation. Innovation requires knowledge, ingenuity, and, above all, focus.³ Careful analysis of the needs and capabilities of the intended user is essential.” Innovation sources, including new knowledge, require agile listening to trends and new market gaps.

2. **Passion for Authentic Narratives:** Empower creator partners to unleash their authentic voices through autonomy. It is critical to partner with influencers whose strengths and values align with the brand, and then empower them to contribute to a brand's narrative with their own voices and perspectives. Involve creators during product development, as true brand advocates.

Though business leaders do not employ content creators, successful business leaders manage content creators effectively by partnering with those whose values and talents align with the brand. As Peter Drucker shared in *Effective Executive*, “The task of an executive is not to change human beings... the task is to multiply the performance capacity of the whole by putting to use whatever strength, whatever health, whatever aspiration there is in individuals.”⁴ Just like the Passion Economy, “Modern organization is the specific instrument to make human strengths redound to performance while weakness is neutralized and largely rendered harmless.”

3. **Passion for Co-creation with Shoppers:** Build a business model that enables shoppers to engage in the conversation on product creation. Listen to the honest feedback of both creators and their audiences in developing new items.

²(Jepsen)

³(Drucker 6-8)

⁴(Drucker 75, 99)

After all, Peter Drucker shared in *The Practice of Management*, “There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer. The customer is the foundation of a business and keeps it in existence.”⁵ The Passion Economy enables hybrid touchpoints for empathic customer interaction. Thriving brands recognize that digital engagement *is* the new currency and leverage digital creations to connect on what matters to their communities.

...and hopefully it does not become the season of darkness (again).

As Trizie continues to grow, the significance of the creator economy in our business model also poses multiple challenges to our ability to scale. First, to keep growing, a trendy creator-backed brand must be hyper-aware of the new relevant opinion leaders, especially in the fleeting nature of influence. Businesses, who cannot keep up with the speed or cut through the noise online, risk dying. According to Forbes, “New market entrants will create a greater need to innovate and iterate their products to match the offerings of new competitors.”⁶

Second, we, like many creator-backed brands, face tensions of expert information vs. personal experiences. We are challenged to foster trust rooted in science and education, while staying relatable. The creator economy is so accessible that *anyone* can create. To go from “trendy” to “trusted,” we need to leverage well-informed expertise too.

Third, for SMEs especially in third world countries, the passion economy serves as a launchpad, but navigating its ever-changing tech platforms is key to sustainable growth. How do we scale our awareness efforts when we must adapt to algorithm changes and internet personalities? How do we continue battling incumbents who are now pouring investments into digital?

For a sustainable Passion Economy revolution, businesses that sprung from it must be reliable creators and relevant innovators themselves. Thus, I took on the challenge to be a creator myself.

ACT II: A TALE OF THE SMALL CREATOR WORLD

It was the worst of times.

In January 2020, I moved to Bangkok for mentorship from our Thai Chairman about the beauty industry and for close coordination with her team and factories. This move was a dream-come-true at 24 years old as I had longed for a new life outside my home, the Philippines. But I also failed to realize that moving by myself to a foreign, country would mean *being mostly alone* during tough, uncertain times. When Thailand locked down, I hadn’t fully adjusted, but I stayed, thinking “normal” life would quickly resume.

⁵(Hess)

⁶(Vaughan)

This life-changing decision brought me to both heaven and hell: heaven in retaining independence and adventure, and hell in loneliness. I lived life on my terms, but I dealt with issues on security, navigation, survival, and heartbreak, mostly by myself too.

Eventually, I realized that I didn't have to be lonely when I'm alone, and found happiness within. I took up self-care rituals, self-growth hobbies, and challenges to discover fun places solo. But I still craved connection to share with others my passion for self-care and independence. In 2021, I downloaded Tiktok, the "Gen Z platform," initially to understand how to use it for my business, but I ended up using Tiktok to personally heal and be motivated.

And then it was the best of times.

Tiktok's inclusivity and right level of anonymity excited me to go from passive lurker to active creator in my interests on self-care. Two things make Tiktok addicting: the algorithm and the video-editing features. For a lurker, its algorithm only serves what you want to see. For an amateur creator, you don't have to be a video expert to succeed. In five minutes, you can publish: just select videos, music, and "autosync." Without any fans, you can be discovered.

At the height of Tiktok addiction, I created roughly three videos daily for an unparalleled serotonin boost and achievement from organic views and comments. Then, I took on a crazy challenge: my college professor challenged me to hit 100,000 Tiktok followers for prize money. Within months, my unexpected content went viral: a video on a plane set to a new sad song, a series about must-watch Netflix films, and a series on living alone tips.

Though I'm based in Thailand, my living alone tips reached nearly 1M views from USA and UK in a week. Never did I expect that a *nobody* like me would get hundreds of comments from open strangers saying things like, "I'm just living alone for the first time. You're an encouragement."

It was the season of light...

I realized first-hand that the beauty of the passion economy is that it aims to democratize dialogues by enabling everyone to have a meaningful voice. What was once "unattainable"-reaching a global audience by being yourself - is now accessible. Ideally, "small names" enter and thrive by creating things based on passion, not paid attention.

This economy emphasizes Peter Drucker's theory in *Managing Oneself*: "Most of us do not even know that different people work and perform differently. They therefore work in ways that are not their ways, and that guarantees nonperformance. How one performs is *individual*. It is *personality*."⁷ The ideal passion economy celebrates the individual strengths, personalities, and passions to let everyone thrive by liberating people from viewing success as a homogenous image (i.e. big salary from big institutions). Success is defined by thriving with your personality.

This is key to uplifting individuals especially in third world countries, such as the Philippines, where the huge class divide trickles down to education and employment. This is inclusive entrepreneurship: you simply need an internet connection, a digital platform, and an interesting perspective. When *you* are the product, your priceless thoughts are the capital.

We are just at the beginning of potentially sustainable success for all. There is a call to solidify followers as advocates. Signalfire shares, "Creators have to be incredible storytellers, relentless hustlers, and community leaders," as only 3% of the 1 Billion Instagram accounts have 50,000+ followers, and only 38% of the 31 Million Youtube channels have 10,000+ subscribers.⁸

There is an opportunity to further leverage **the Passion Effect to develop the business of self**:

1. **Passion For Platform** - Early-stage creators are challenged to build an audience in a platform of choice and learn that platform inside and out, ushering in the rise of "algorithm coaches" and pushing creators to harness data analytics for guidance.
2. **Passion for Collaborations** - Once creators establish their initial fans, they are challenged to monetize their influence to scale. This is usually through paid collaborations at the cost of authenticity, so creators must collaborate meaningfully.
3. **Passion for Community** - Rising creators that are able to sustain their influence expand their personal brand by becoming less dependent on the platforms they exist in. Ideally, they transition into a platform-agnostic product, where they gain clients on speaking engagements, coaching, consulting, and fan engagement.

...but hopefully it does not become the season of darkness.

Today, we are at the cross-roads of what could be a beautiful or a scary future of work. In the ideal future, all small creators enter and grow healthily. In the chaotic future, hopeful individuals are exploited without fair compensation. It risks turning the person into a product, in which there are dangerously blurred lines between a creator's public, digital life and her private, offline life.

⁷(Drucker, 4)

⁸(Constine)

This is unsustainable for mental health. First, without any regulation in the tech platforms, creators are prone to severe burnout due to adapting their personalities to the algorithms' and sponsors' demands. I eventually felt "creator fatigue" as a content machine, making three Tiktoks daily for virality. The happy challenge turned into a draining 24/7 hustle.

Several full-time creators experienced burnout as creation devolved into unfulfilling money-making. Emma Chamberlain, a 20-year-old Youtuber who became famous at 15 years old for her daily vlogs, shared, "I got to such a dark place in this hamster wheel of being a Youtuber. My whole identity was being a Youtuber that I didn't have time to develop hobbies outside."⁹

Second, creators open themselves to shame from anonymous hatred and "cancel culture." I received encouraging comments, but I also saw harsh comments like, "Your tips don't work. You will be eternally lonely," and "Your video transitions give me cancer." Audiences can be ruthless in seeing personalities as inhuman products. How do you preserve autonomy and authenticity, while experiencing public scrutiny?

The biggest risk of all is that a creator could never get paid despite offering her life as content. Interestingly, I have never earned a single peso for Tiktok posts. There are unclear standards on "fair compensation" in this nascent economy. Quartz shares, "Being a social media 'influencer,' is the new unpaid internship, and it is just as exploitative. Super influencers often have existing capital and connections."¹⁰ There is a "myth of digital meritocracy," where instant high returns from creative work is an illusion. Anyone can be a creator, but not all creators are equal.

ACT III: WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

In Peter Drucker's *Managing Oneself*, he predicted "The Future of Society" involving a revolution of managing oneself as humans now outlive their organizations and risk boredom in careers as they age. He challenges workers to prepare for the "second half of their life" by finding outside opportunities early, "any other chance for being respected, for being a leader."¹¹

The Passion Economy expands such outside opportunities to successfully manage the second half - or even both halves - of lives, if society pushes for an inclusive, healthy space. Will we have an economy where technology enables democratized success? Will we have an economy where humans sell their privacy for just a day of fame? We need a healthy synergy among brands, platforms, creators, and shoppers for a sustainable Passion Economy.

Brands are called to be passionate about relevant product development and authentic partnerships with discerning creators. At Trizie, we are prioritizing genuine individual shopper and creator conversations to build a community that champions meaningful advocacies.

⁹(Chamberlain)

¹⁰(Kessler et al.)

¹¹(Drucker, 9)

Creators are called to place healthy boundaries between their public and private lives, and more importantly, to stay honest to their audience that values meaningful connection. Personally, I am committing to taking mental health breaks from my screen to preserve my creativity.

Platforms are called to see creators as actual humans with mental states that must be cared for, not just as exploitable products. For digital audiences and shoppers, this is a call to know that behind the camera is a fellow human being who just wants to succeed by being wholly herself.

According to Peter Drucker, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”¹² The good news is that while we are at the beginning of a new era, we still have the power to design the Passion Economy in such a way that we can harness its ideal state as an inclusive, diverse future of work.

¹²(“Predict the Future By Creating It”)

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