

Who Pays Stays

Name the Trap: The Platform Economy

Workbook and challenge questions

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How to use this workbook

Each lesson below follows the slides in the Genially course for this lesson: the cover slide sets what you will learn, the teaching slide carries the idea, the activity slide is the work, and the quiz is a quick check. This workbook goes deeper than the slides and ends each lesson with questions that challenge you to apply the idea to your own business.

LESSON 1

Who Controls What Gets Seen

In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Name the three things every algorithmic platform runs on.
- Identify who controls the algorithm and data on each platform you use.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides establish the basic machinery. Every algorithmic platform runs on three things: attention, interaction, and engagement. The algorithm is not a mystery, it is a calculation made from data gathered from the people who use the platform. That data is the fuel, and the owners, companies like Meta, Oracle, ByteDance, and Alibaba, control three layers: the algorithm itself, the infrastructure it runs on, and the extraction of the data that feeds it. The point the slides drive at is that you do not control what gets seen. The owners do, and they manage the economics through that control while you supply the raw material for free. This is not a reason to despair, it is a reason to see clearly. Once you know what the machine runs on and who owns each layer, you can stop treating reach as something you earn and start treating it as something the owners allocate. That shift changes every decision that follows in this course, because it tells you that your reach is borrowed, and borrowed reach can be recalled.

WORK IT THROUGH

Map who controls your reach.

1. List the platforms you depend on.
2. For each, write who controls the algorithm.
3. Write what data they extract from you and your audience.

Outcome: You can see exactly whose rules you are playing by.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- List the platforms you depend on. For each, name who controls the algorithm and what data they extract from you.
- If your reach is allocated, not earned, which of your current habits assume the opposite?
- What would you do differently this quarter if you fully accepted that your platform reach can be recalled?
- Which layer, algorithm, infrastructure, or data, are you most exposed to, and why?

LESSON 2

Creators Who Built Before Social Media

In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Distinguish what you own from what you only rent.
- Identify the off-platform asset you are missing.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides point at a pattern among creators who can walk away from any platform. MrBeast, Gary Vaynerchuk, and Country Wayne built businesses before social media made them visible, and they use platforms as distribution rather than as the foundation of what they own. The difference is ownership. They control their own email lists, their communities, and their monetization, so a platform is a channel, not a landlord. The deeper idea is magnitude built off platform. When the thing you own is large enough, leaving a platform causes a dent, not a disappearance. Most creators have it backwards: the platform owns the audience, and the creator rents access to people who, on paper, follow them. For you, the move is to inventory what would survive if every platform vanished tomorrow. Whatever survives is what you actually own. Whatever does not is what you only rent. The gap between those two lists is the most important thing this course asks you to close.

WORK IT THROUGH

Find what you would keep.

1. Imagine every platform disappears tomorrow.
2. Write what you would still own: email list, community, product.
3. Mark the biggest gap and make it your first project.

Outcome: You know what you own versus what you only rent.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- If every platform disappeared tomorrow, what would you still own? Write the list, honestly.
- What is the single biggest gap between what you own and what you rent?
- Which platform are you treating as a foundation when it should be a channel?
- What is the first off-platform asset you will build, and when?

LESSON 3

Everything Has Become Content

In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Explain the mirror problem and the limits of AI detection.
- Decide whether your website is a destination or an archive.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides explain why everything is turning into content: AI needs human data to improve, so it pulls more and more of your activity into a form it can collect. Your website used to be a destination or a point of sale. Now it is also data that systems retrieve from, which is what Generative Engine Optimization is about. Social platforms themselves are becoming content for the machine. The slides name the mirror problem: AI detects AI using the same technology that creates it, so detection is unreliable, with accuracy quoted between 60 and 84 percent. The owners depend on AI to function, yet AI floods their platforms with low-quality material they cannot stop. For you, the practical reading is to look hard at your own website and ask whether it is still a destination or has quietly become an archive others scrape. The work of this course is to make your platform a place people come to and stay, not just a source others extract from.

WORK IT THROUGH

Audit your website's role.

1. Open your website with fresh eyes.
2. Decide: is it a destination, or content others retrieve from?
3. Write one way to make it a place people reside again.

Outcome: You can see your own platform as a destination, not an archive.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Open your website with fresh eyes. Is it a destination or an archive? What is one change that would make it a destination again?
- Where is your own work becoming content for a machine rather than value for a person?
- If detection is unreliable, what do you stop relying on, and what do you rely on instead?
- What would make someone reside on your platform rather than pass through it?

LESSON 4

AI Accelerates Enshittification

In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Describe the three stages of platform decay.
- Locate where a platform you use sits on that curve.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides describe a predictable arc. Platforms start good for users, to attract them. Then they tilt good for business, to monetize. Then they become bad for everyone as the owner extracts all remaining value. That is enshittification, and Meta, TikTok, and YouTube have all walked the same path from open and generous to extractive. AI speeds the decay up by flooding platforms with cheap surface content, which crowds out your work and pushes your monetization down. You are competing against content that costs almost nothing to produce, on a system designed to pay you less over time. The slides are blunt about the consequence: this is why you build your own. Knowing the three stages lets you locate any platform you use on its curve and act before the next tilt arrives. The mistake is to assume today's terms are permanent. They are a stage, not a settlement, and the direction of travel is set.

WORK IT THROUGH

Stage your platform.

1. Pick one platform you use.
2. Map it against the three stages of enshittification.
3. Note what has changed for you in the last year.

Outcome: You can name where each platform sits on its decay curve.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Map one platform you use against the three stages. Where does it sit now?
- What has changed for you on that platform in the last year? What does that change predict?
- If you are competing with content that costs nothing, what makes yours worth paying for?
- What would you move off-platform first if you assumed the next tilt is coming?

LESSON 5

Control, Illusion, and the Counter-Move

In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Explain why platform owners are losing control to AI.
- Write your off-platform counter-move in one sentence.

THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides separate the illusion from the reality and then give the move. Control is not held by one party, it is distributed across owners, creators, consumers, advertisers, investors, and regulators. The illusion is that owners control everything. The reality is that AI is reducing their need for creators, consumers, and advertisers, and is even loosening the owners' own grip on their platforms. Into that shifting picture, the counter-move is clear: build off-platform ecosystems, use platforms as distribution, and put your deep work behind paywalls. The slides name the chained elephant: many creators believe they can never leave because they tried once and it failed, so they stay tied to a stake they could pull. You leave the moment you turn platforms into distribution channels instead of homes. For you, this lesson is where the diagnosis becomes a decision. The rest of the series is the build. This is the sentence that points you toward it.

WORK IT THROUGH

Write your counter-move.

1. Name the off-platform home you will build.
2. Name the deep work that goes behind a paywall.
3. Write it as one clear sentence you can act on.

Outcome: You have a one-sentence counter-move to the flattening.

QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Write your off-platform counter-move in one sentence: the home you will build and the deep work that goes behind a paywall.
- Where are you the chained elephant, staying tied to a stake you could pull?
- Which distributed party, besides the owner, has more power over your reach than you assumed?
- If the owners are losing control too, what does that open up for you in the next year?

Build your economy. Who pays stays.