



HOW I BUILD
Income Streams
AS AN INDEPENDENT ARTIST

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Let's talk money!

Specifically, let's talk about building revenue streams as an independent artist. In this article I'm going to show you my current personal strategy for building revenue streams for diversifying my income as an artist.

The end goal being to make enough of a stable income to do artwork full time while living a comfortable life, but there are also some ideas you can take and use for your side hustle as well!

Now, I don't want to bullshit you, this isn't easy. Just reading an article like this isn't going to magically give you a bunch of passive income.

Building streams of income takes **time** and **effort**. But I **hope** that this article will help give you some perspective on how I do it and might inspire you to come up with your own plan and structure to start building revenue streams for your future as an independent artist!

If you haven't read my article on ["ways to make money online as an artist"](#), I recommend also popping over to that article since it gives more of an overview of some options that we have available for earning income online.

Standard disclaimer that I don't know everything, and the info that I include in this article comes from my own research and experience!

Revenue Sources

First let's just lay out a big list of revenue options! All of these are not created equal, but I think it's good to just know what our options are before I show you which ones I choose and how I organize them.

Custom Art

- Personal Commissions
- Commercial Commissions

Crowdfunding

- Patreon
- Ko-Fi
- Twitch
- Kickstarter
- Buy me a Coffee
- Other patreon alternatives (but I don't personally know how popular they are)

Goods

- Digital Content Stores (like Gumroad and Art Station)
- Your Independent Online Store
- Go-Between Sellers (like Etsy)
- 3rd Party Stores (Inprnt, Redbubble, Society6, Cafepress, Teepublic, etc)
- Licensing your Art to another seller/company
- Digital Courses
- Comic-Cons and Festivals

ADS

- Youtube ads
- Twitch ads
- Blog Ads

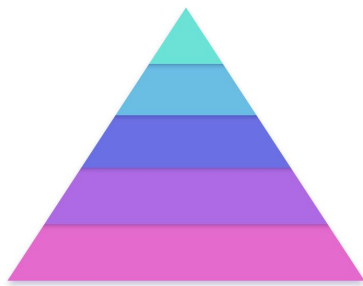
- Associate Links
- Sponsorships
- Paid/Sponsored Posts

Clearly there are lots of options! But the issue is, if I were to try and tackle every single option at once, I might get overwhelmed and not do any of them justice. Plus, we only have so much time in a day!

So here is how I choose and structure what income streams I focus on...

Build a Pyramid

No, not a pyramid scheme. Just a pyramid as a way to figure out what income sources are most important and how do they build up to make a whole.



To structure the pyramid and decide what is worth really focusing on first, I like to evaluate potential revenue streams with these questions!

- **How much money do I make from this source?**
If you already have been making some money from any of these options, this should be an easy answer. Just remember to factor in the costs!
- **How consistent is this source?**
Do you make about the same amount of money every month from the income source, or is it something that you sometimes make a lot and sometimes make very little? The more consistent, usually the better, unless it is an extremely well paying gig that happens every couple months.
- **How much do you enjoy creating content for or supporting this source?**

In the long term, this is the most important question. If you absolutely hate taking commissions, it might be worth it to pick up a side job while you focus on building a different foundation, rather than feeling like you have to take every commission to pay the bills.

- **What is the Growth Potential?**

This is another very important long term question! Can you see this revenue source growing much over time, or is going to reach it's max relatively quickly.

Something like a shop could have a near limitless growth potential if you continue making cool products, set up passive systems, and advertise.

On the other hand, commissions growth potential is very limited because they rely entirely on you and how much time you have in a day. You can really only work on so many commissions in a day before you run out of hours (not to mention your own creative drive).

Start with a foundation.

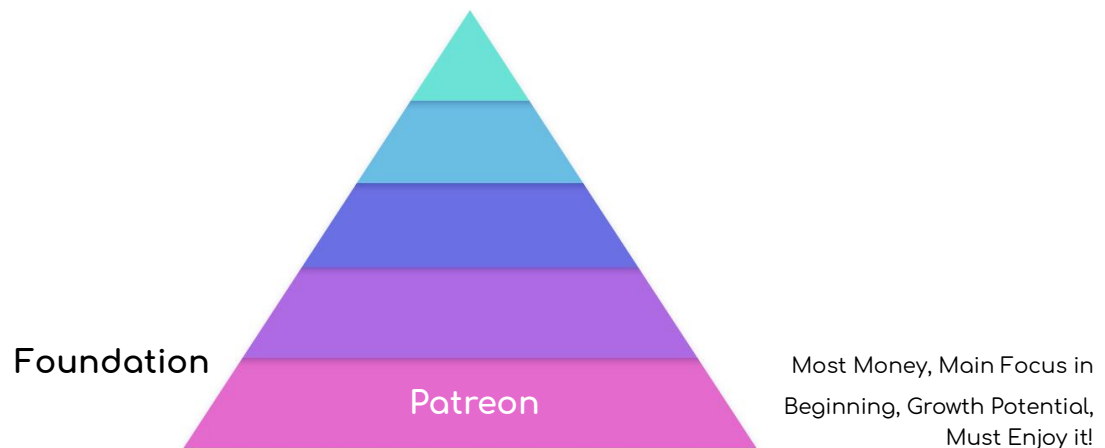
When you are starting from scratch, this foundation is what you will want to put most of your attention on building in the **beginning**.

For a lot of artists this is going to be commissions or their online shop. Or if you are an artist with a slightly larger audience this might be something else like Patreon or Youtube.

Keep in mind that as you grow your income streams down the road, you might be able to switch what is your foundation, or it may even happen automatically.

For example, my foundation used to be selling my artwork in Artist Alley at Comic Cons, but for obvious reasons, that had to change! Just because we are building this pyramid, doesn't mean it is inflexible.

For me, my foundation is: PATREON *(hey thanks guys!)*



I'll answer the questions to evaluate:

- **How much does it make?** Enough to pay my rent
- **Is it Consistent?** Yes, it is pretty consistent with minor ups and downs
- **Do I enjoy it?** Yes. I love creating content for patreon and connecting with my patrons.

- **What is the Growth Potential?** Somewhat high. If my audience continues to grow and I offer appealing rewards, I think the potential to grow is pretty high. But Patreon does tend to be a slow growing thing, so I have to be patient.

I've spent years building it up, I enjoy creating content for it, and at the moment I can expect around the same amount from it each month. It isn't enough to completely cover my bills, but it is a good **BASE!**

Because it is my foundation, it is what I put the most time and energy into.

If you are just starting out, this might be where you **stop** and **focus** your energy. Build that strong foundation with 1 or 2 sources before worrying about 10 other income streams.

Secondary Income/ Your 2nd Foundation

Once you have your foundation starting to build up, you can decide on a second income stream to start growing. Ideally, this second block has the potential to grow to actually be a **2nd base** of income for you, nearly equal with the first. But don't worry, it can start small and grow over time!

I put my **SHOPS** as my 2nd block.



First of all, lets answer the questions to evaluate:

- **How much does it make?** About 2 weeks worth of Groceries

- **Is it Consistent?** Not very consistent, but that's because I don't advertise enough.
- **Do I enjoy it?** Yes. I love creating products. I want to do more in the future!
- **What is the Growth Potential?** Very High if I start designing more products and advertising properly!

At the moment my Shop is relatively small compared to my Patreon base, but that is because I haven't dedicated the time to growing it, making lots of new products and advertising it.

Despite this, I put it as my 2nd base because it is relatively consistent, and I know that if I put my time and attention into it for the future, it has the potential to grow into a 2nd base.

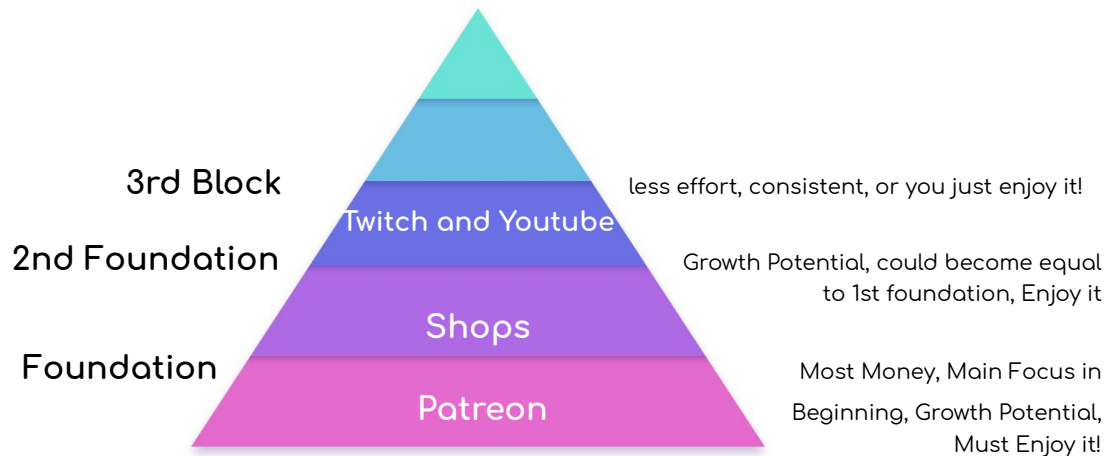
Not only that, but as it grows, there are ways to smartly scale it when enough orders start coming in by using **warehouse pick and pack services**, so that someday the store could **almost** be passive income as long as I make cool products and advertise smartly.

Now, **that** dream might be a long way off, but it is something I keep in mind for the eventual time when I switch to focusing on my art business full time!

3rd Block: Less but Consistent Income

Ideally, this block should be for incomes that don't take as much of your time to maintain *or* they should be something you do out of *passion*, not necessarily because you expect a huge return on investment.

For me, this is **Twitch and Youtube**. I know this might be a little surprising to some of you, especially if you joined my patreon from twitch.



Both Twitch and Youtube take quite a bit of time and energy to maintain. So even though there is a fairly consistent amount of income from each that comes in every month, it doesn't at all reflect the amount of time and effort invested.

Despite that, I enjoy growing both channels (Twitch more than Youtube, if I'm being honest.) And, like I said, they are pretty consistent in the amount I can expect each month.

So that gives me a pretty good answer to the 4 questions I posed before:

- **How much does it make?** About 1.5 weeks worth of Groceries
- **Is it Consistent?** Yes, as long as I stay on Schedule
- **Do I enjoy it?** Yes. But I want to hire a video editor someday
- **What is the Growth Potential?** Technically the growth on platforms like youtube could be huge. BUT, if I'm being realistic I don't see the growth in how much actual money being all that much. The real value may actually be in exposure and driving traffic towards patreon and my store. Ad revenue might continue to just be a nice little extra top off.

4th Block: Passive Income

This Block should be mostly **PASSIVE** income. Income that might be another consistent trickle but really takes **NO** effort on your part to maintain. It could be something that you put a good effort into in the beginning, like creating an online course, and then you just let it do its thing.

Recently for me, this is **Licensed art**, which is actually kind of new for me but I'm very excited to see the potential.



Licensing art is when you sell the rights of a design to an individual or company to use that artwork for an amount of time on a specific product. And in return you receive a fee and/or royalties.

Licensing art seems to be a classic way that many fine-artists who have been around for a while make much of their living from, so I am very hopeful about this block.

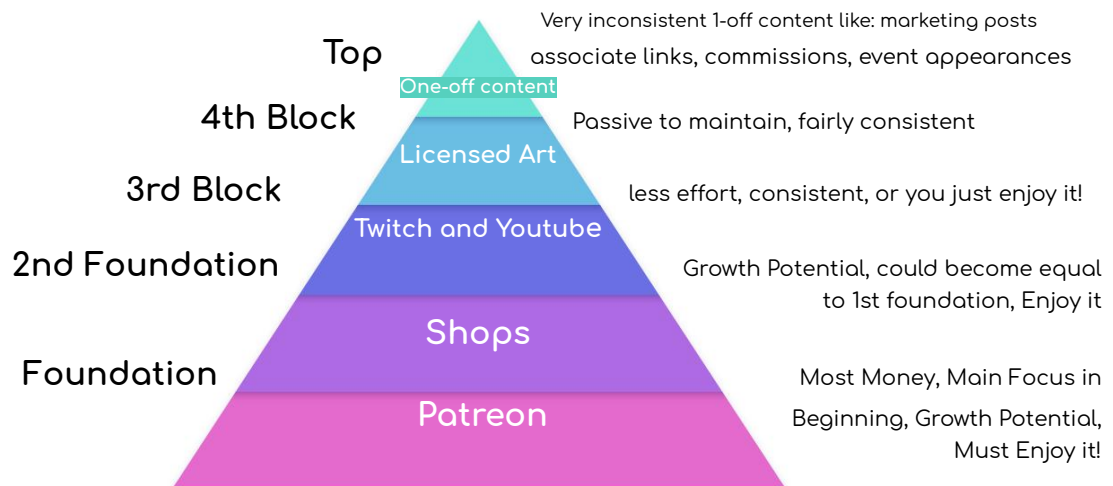
But because I don't yet know **EXACTLY** how much revenue will be coming in from royalties and how consistently that will be, I decided it should stay at nearly the top of my pyramid for now.

- **How much does it make?** I'm not sure yet.
- **Is it Consistent?** It should be consistent since another company is actively handling all the product creation and advertising.
- **Do I enjoy it?** Yes. I don't have to do much.

- What is the Growth Potential? If my designs are popular, then there could be a lot of growth potential

The Top of the Pyramid: One-Off Content/Gigs

This block is for all those little inconsistent incomes that might pop up every once and a while.



For me, that's things like:

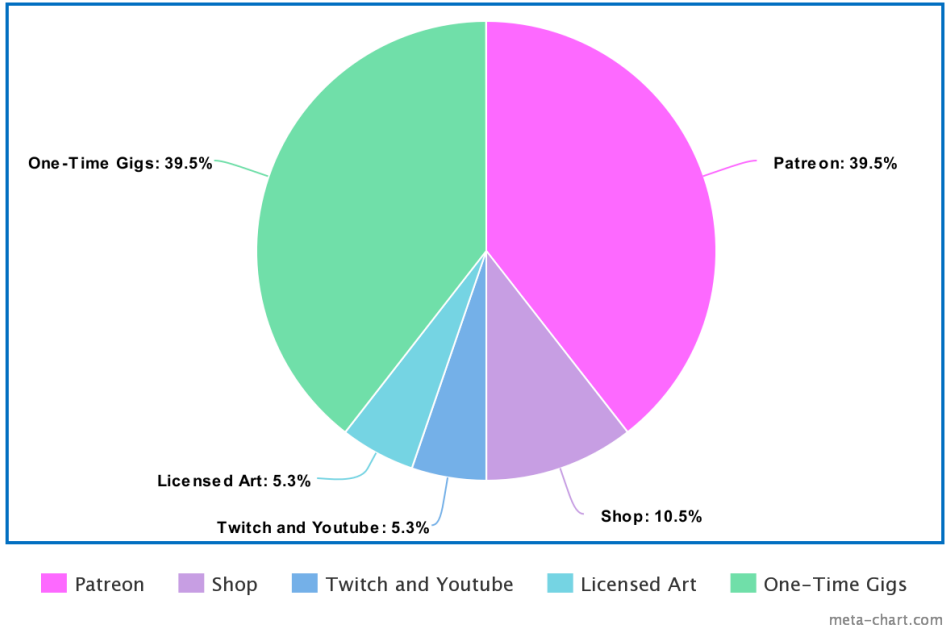
- Event Appearances
- 1 month Sponsorships
- Marketing Posts
- Associate Links
- Commissions (since I don't usually accept commissions)

Some of these things can actually pay quite a big sum in one chunk, but despite this, I prefer to keep them at the top of my pyramid because they aren't as reliable as the other streams of income.

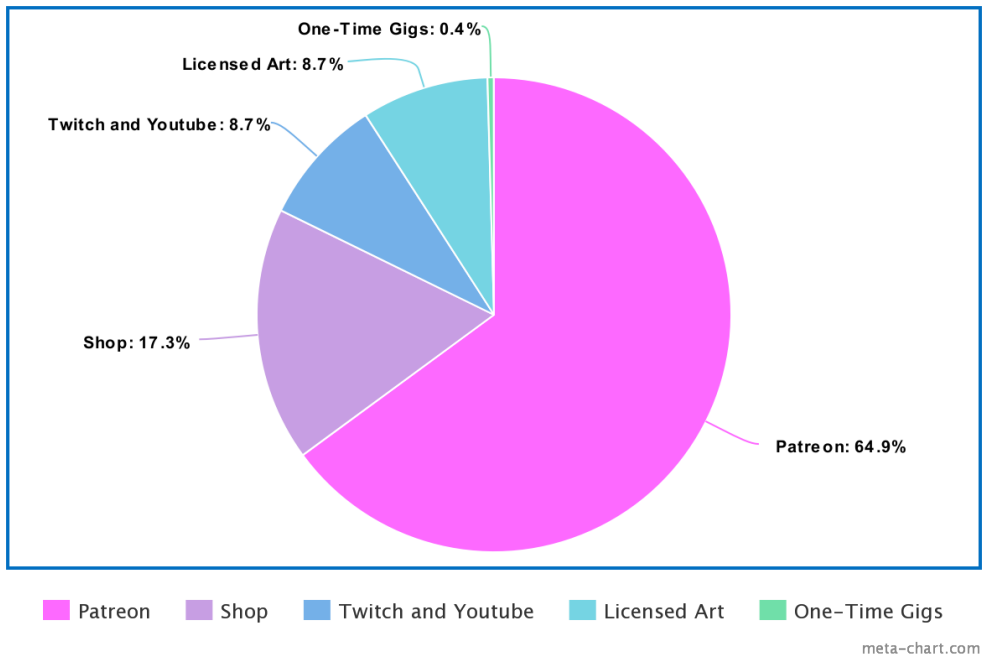
- **How much does it make?** Between a couple weeks of groceries and a rent payment depending on the job
- **Is it Consistent?** Not consistent at all
- **Do I enjoy it?** Sometimes. I usually only take deals that I am interested in, but they aren't always my favorite thing to spend my time on.

- **What is the Growth Potential?** If my audience size grows, then opportunities like this could grow. But they do tend to rely on me and my time.

What sometimes happens is that one or 2 of these inconsistent opportunities will come up, so I will make double what I normally do that month, but then nothing else like that comes up for another 5 months. So my income distribution can look like this one month:



And this the next month:



Saving that Extra

Because the top of the pyramid can be inconsistent, it is a good idea to save extra money from opportunities like this for the leaner months that will eventually come.

Any freelancer will tell you that this kind of inconsistency is pretty normal, but if you have built a foundation of at least somewhat more consistent revenue streams, you will have those to fall back on.

If you find you made extra one month,

- Remember to always set aside money for taxes
- Build up your 3-6 month emergency savings account
- Pay off debt
- Invest money in retirement accounts

I have a lot of thoughts about retirement, early/partial “retirement” and what that could look like as an Artist, but all of that is outside of the scope of this already very long article!

If you are interested in a future article about retirement and what I have dubbed “Artist F.I.R.E. (Financial Independence Retire Early)”. Let me know!

In Conclusion

I have shown you how I build my revenue streams, and I hope that it has demystified a bit of what goes on behind building up incomes. Every artist is different; you certainly don't need to copy my same structure if it doesn't resonate with you.

Maybe you have a wildly successful youtube channel, so that's your foundation, or maybe you have built an online course that will keep giving you passive income! There's really so many options when it comes to mixing and matching what income sources work for you!

If this is all too overwhelming, start with just 1! Try answering these questions about the revenue streams you are considering:

- How much does it make?
- Is it Consistent?

- Do I enjoy it?
- What is the Growth Potential?

Based on your answers, start with the best option for **you** and focus on building it up before adding an additional foundation to focus on.

The “S” Curve of Growth

When it comes to progress and growth, we often think of it as a very linear path, but that’s not typically how it is.

More often, the path will be slow to start. So slow that it might feel like no progress is being made at all!

But eventually you reach a point where things start to pick up exponentially. Sure, there might will be more little bumps up and down than this very simplified graph depicts, but **LONG TERM**, this exponential growth, especially when it comes to building incomes, is closer to reality.

As long as you keep putting in the work and improving. That’s key. **Nothing is magically going to happen without effort and long term dedication.**



And yes, once your growth starts to level off with any new venture, product or idea, that is a good indicator that it’s time to refresh, spice up your

products, innovate, add something new, or whatever the adjustment might be...

But the point I want to make with this graph for now, is mainly that first part of the graph, since I think a lot of us are still stuck at the beginning. We might be expecting linear growth, not seeing and being tempted to give up! When actually that inflection point where exponential growth might be just ahead if we keep working.

I'm not saying don't innovate and just keep doing the same thing over and over again if you haven't experienced progress. I think it is a good idea to always be brainstorming and innovating your ideas to improve your products, services, and strategy!

Honestly, that's part of what makes this job fun!

Be Patient and Stay Focused!

It might be a long journey, and no one said this would be easy, but if it is truly what you want for your life, I believe you can do it!

