"THE ROADMAP"

A Note: Knowing me, yes, this will end up being super long, in depth, and (most likely) prone to rambling. While I will be sharing this with anyone who's interested, its primary purpose will be to lend direction to both me and anyone working on my venture alongside me, a living, breathing doc I can go back to as a reference when I forget why I'm doing what I'm doing. Therefore, as a casual observer, if it's a little overwhelming and uninteresting...well, sorry about that. It's a lot, and not exactly "readable." You should check out our website, though, because that's where all of the entertaining / dope shit will be!

So there's a couple things I'm going to do here.

First of all, the language I've used to describe Unplugg'd has shifted and varied so often over the last three years. I find these different descriptors in many different pockets, from published articles to pitches to notebooks scribbles -- scribbles that took the place of notes I was supposed to record during a lecture or two or twenty -- to Google Keep cards to the whiteboard walls in The Garage...the latter from which some of our best ideas would spring and we would take pictures of the walls and never look at again. Therefore, I wanted one place to internalize all of that different language, and pick apart what still held true and thread the pieces together.

Second, I wanted to create a clear, succinct brand message. As someone who has determined that my main interest moving forward is a career in brand strategy and storytelling, I do think the word "brand" is overused way too much.¹ With that all being said, to the point of the previous paragraph, I still believe there needs to be something past "It's something that was created by NGL, that's it, that's the tweet" that ties the whole venture together. Otherwise...I think the whole thing just gets a little unclear.² In this section, I hope to better explain what Unplugg'd will comprise of + why I'll be doing each specific thing.

Third, I needed to set some goals for myself and Unplugg'd. The, ya know, pandemic at hand has obviously made everyone's long-term plans pretty murky, but -- assuming the full-on

¹ For example, I looked at two of the D2C companies most omnipresent in my life: Nike and The Ringer. For the former, while their brand message (the entrepreneurial grit of Phil Knight, Bowerman's waffle iron, the AJ1s getting banned) definitely strengthens my connection to the brand, I first fell in love with Nike basketball shoes because I liked the way they looked and felt on my feet. For the latter, I read The Ringer every single day and listen to their podcasts solely because I like their content and their personalities, not because of their brand "message" or what they "stand" for. To be honest, I've tried looking up what The Ringer "stands" for to no avail; maybe this is a sign that you don't need these things in order to survive, or maybe it's a sign that The Ringer isn't built for the long run.

² I like how The Hundreds brands itself: A 2-part project that houses a Classic Californian Streetwear brand and media platform dedicated to Global Street Culture. A good one-liner, and yet, Bobby has written a book and stated before that he'd love to get to the point where The Hundreds could, like, produce a movie and it would all sort of make sense. Plus, he blogs about The Oscars sometimes and stuff, which isn't exactly "Street Culture." Basically what I'm getting at here: labels only matter so much, but it's important to have some sort of umbrella overlooking it all.

apocalypse scenario does not occur, and society as we know it doesn't crumble into a *Mad Max*-like state of affairs³ -- I will still graduate from college come spring of 2021. Therefore, I want to make sure I set up a clear timeline in regards to what I can accomplish between now and then, all while simultaneously setting myself up for success in the professional world. TL;DR -- I've always said that even if Unplugg'd never blows up, the very worst outcome is it amounts to a great portfolio of work, and all of the time and energy I've poured into it is therefore worth it in my eyes.

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"THE LANGUAGE" 4

I'm going to somewhat analyze the language we've used over time here to chart our course / progression and bring it all together. Is this overkill? Probably.

To view the entire document (it ended up being like 9 pages, and I think it's pretty interesting), click here. I thought it amounted to a bit too many words for this doc. I looked at the ways in which I've described four things over time: our products/services; our branding/descriptors; the audience we intended to serve; and the revenue streams/business model.

My ideas for products started pretty simple: articles and podcasts. Video naturally followed, but the question was, *okay, how can we get a little bit more specific?* We went from "content" \rightarrow "stories" \rightarrow "narratives" \rightarrow "personal narratives," which I believe reflected the desire to nail it all down, as well as focus on what we found to be the most interesting.

When we moved into the idea of building a platform, the idea was to have an app and website where you could search for and create coffeehouses. I described it as "Tinder for discourse," but I don't think I would've ever wanted to implement a gamification, swipe feature. More so the idea of matching new people based on location and mutual interest.

In terms of branding, the site started with the idea of "Uncensored, Unfiltered, UNPLUGGED." It was the idea that longform stories shouldn't be altered with the priority of things such as the best SEO, and that they shouldn't be censored to fit an already-construed narrative. This moved into how we could further differentiate ourselves, first with vague terms like "quality" and

³ Honestly, I'm obviously hoping more than anything that we can limit the amount of deaths and people affected (via illness, economics, or anything and everything in between). In the best-case scenario, we can successfully limit these things, and we go back to our lives, with the worst thing we have to deal with being *New Yorker* think pieces on "How Americans Can Expect To Adjust To Their New 'Normal."

⁴ Man, I really hated the Off-White x Nike "The Ten" when it first came out, but by now, I can't stop doing the air quotes around everything I do. I do it for the lolz ig.

"professionalism" before honing in on the concept of proving young people had a coherent, valuable voice to bring to the table.

We started exploring the idea of shouting into the void and "giving back the microphone" -- how can we make more voices heard? This led to Coffeehouse, building a community of culturally-aware people who cared about authentic dialogue and the spread of ideas, as well as social media and its negative effects on our discourse.

Finally, after getting a little tired out by the startup world, I settled on building something that's somewhat anti-startup and doesn't have to have some fancy one-liner -- that it's a collaborative project created by NGL, the definition will change over time, and we just want want to create dope shit. "Being Unplugg'd means different things to different people; the choice of how you interact with our brand is up to you!"

A little inspiration from <u>mschf.xyz</u> here. Fuck a label, fuck a box, we just make stuff and you can buy it if you want!

When it comes to our target audience, I started broad -- fans of sports, entertainment, and life in general would flock to our content. Then it was like, okay, we have enough of a content base here, people who consume our content will follow us and become fans, and we'll just keep building our thing. In an attempt to narrow this down more, though, we thought about generation brackets, focusing on millennials before going with "young people," then Gen Zers.

A note on this: particularly when we switched to Coffeehouse, Gen Z was always the focus because we believed that us and our peers were the ones that needed it most. What's funny to me is that if I really cared about things like "scale" and revenue, I think I would completely switch this and focus on older people (like 50+) as a target demographic, as those seem to be the ones who have time / actually want it / would be willing to pay for it. But to me, while there's value created there, I don't think it's nearly as valuable as building something for young people, and I don't think it solves the problem as I outlined it in my "Case for the Coffehouse" piece...but I digress.

Moving forward, while I lean towards wanting younger people to be the ones flocking to Unplugg'd, reading our content, listening to our podcasts, rocking our merch and messaging in a Discord, I don't think it's that important to limit it. If someone is, like, 35 and likes our stuff and wants to support us on Patreon, more power to them! I think this comes down to focusing on building stuff based off of me and my interests, and people coming to it more for that -- more on this in the next section.

I do want people who are likely to communicate online, though. I think the strongest communities are the ones you can build online, then direct offline. More on that later, too. Finally, in terms of revenue, I've been in favor of subscription models from the get-go. What's clear to me is a business model in this realm has to be multi-faceted; moving forward, my strong

belief is that things like content sponsorship, Patreon support, merchandise sales, and events can work together. Nevertheless, I think the key point here is that there's a lot to be said about being more strategic about partnerships and collaborations, such as the one I'm cooking up with Tomate. Again, though, more on that later.

TL;DR⁵ -- here are some concluding thoughts for this section:

- I don't believe we have to label ourselves as anything. We're not a lifestyle brand, we're not a media company, we're not a this or that. We're a collaborative project created by Nathan Graber-Lipperman.
 - Some <u>inspiration from MSCHF</u> here, even if they're way cooler than anything I've ever done.
- What we do, though: We tell good stories, engage authentic dialogue, and make dope shit.
 - Nice and open to interpretation / change over time, but it makes sense to me!
 - When I say open to interpretation, too -- I mean, who's to say we don't release a card game down the line? Or a book? I wholeheartedly believe it can truly be this multi-faceted.
 - There are many different ways to interact with our brand; the choice is up to you!
 Which ties into the next bullet point...
- Being Unplugg'd means different things to different people.
 - Marketing campaign with this. Really good ideas here.
- Our audience is full of people who (a) enjoy interacting with what we do on different platforms and (b) are interested in me and what I'm interested in. I'm dumbing it down here because I think I get too in the weeds when I try to specify who we're building this for.
 - At the end of the day, too, if I'm really not that interesting and people aren't interested in what we're doing...that's fine! It will live and breath as a passion project, and there's nothing wrong with that.
- Our revenue streams include sponsorships on our content, support on Patreon, sales on our designs, and potential for events and other ventures (e.g. Coffeehouse) down the road.

"THE BRAND"

Okay, so I've nailed down the language to a degree. Unplugg'd is a collaborative project created by Nathan Graber-Lipperman. We tell good stories, engage authentic conversation, and make dope shit. There are different ways and platforms in which to interact with our brand, and it's up to the consumer to decide how to.

⁵ "Too long; Didn't read it" for your Internet lingo of the day.

What I always come down to with branding, however, is this: if someone sees an Unplugg'd hoodie, or t-shirt, or something else entirely while walking up Sheridan Road, what is the brand connection I want them to make? After all, when it comes to content, anyone can find a one-off story they like, or listen to one of my podcasts just because they like the guest interview.

But for this thing to grow at all, people need to fuck with the brand. I don't have the audience or capacity to make really good stuff while also reaching a lot of people; therefore, mass amounts of sponsors or subscriptions isn't really realistic at this point in time. Coming back to someone walking up Sheridan and seeing an Unplugg'd tee...what is it that'll make them say, *Oh, I'd rock that?*

As I see it, there's currently three buckets people have voiced to me and/or I've thought about myself:

- 1. "Oh, shit! That's a dope hoodie that person's wearing right there! I would buy it solely because the design looks nice, the hoodie is comfortable, and that's really all I care about when I make purchases!"
- 2. "Oh, shit! That person's wearing an Unplugg'd hoodie! Isn't that that company that Nate Graber-Lipperman runs? I would buy that solely cause I fuck with Nate and I want to support him with whatever it is he does!"
- 3. "Oh, shit! That's an Unplugg'd hoodie! I fuck with what they stand for -- that being unplugg'd means being me, about not fitting into a box or adhering to the mainstream.

 By buying an Unplugg'd hoodie, I get to determine what being unplugg'd means to me."

Now, to be clear, I don't believe that the answer to the question -- what is the brand connection I want people to make? -- needs to be answered by any singular one of those points. I think it's a mix: people could rock an UP hoodie because they like me, they like a message we stand for (e.g. "Being Unplugg'd Means Different Things to Different People"), and because they think it looks good and is comfy.

Honestly, if people like our hoodie enough on design alone to purchase and they never even figure out we do other stuff...more power to them! If that's the case, maybe that's a sign that I could just focus on designing merch...

Alas, here's where I'm at on this front: I don't want to go all in fully on *my* brand. I don't want it to just be a vanity project where the company is purely revolving around me, Nathan Graber-Lipperman. When someone sees an Unplugg'd tee or hoodie, I don't want them to think, "Oh, that's Nate's thing!" and that's the sole thing they associate with the brand.

When I call it a collaborative project, I come back to a core idea -- it's about the people. I want to be creating different things (articles, magazines, podcasts, designs, newsletters, videos, events,

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⁶ This point comes courtesy of Friend of the Brand, Mr. Justin Jackson himself.

conversations, chat rooms, and wherever else this takes us) that other people want to work on alongside me because they're passionate about it too. And even if people aren't directly working on projects with me, they can be part of it, following along on our newsletter, supporting on Patreon, chatting in our Discord...everything. Bobby Hundreds said it best in his book, that the beautiful thing about a t-shirt is a blank slate to broadcast a story to the world, that it's not so much about Bobby and his interests but how it connects with other people. That the people reading his stuff and rocking his shit are the ones building it, not him.⁷⁸

Come for the person, stay for the brand, and build it alongside them. The brand is the people, the community aligned through common interests, thoughts, and ideas brought to the table by me.

In regards to the point about "Being Unplugg'd Means Different Things to Different People," I believe this can be an effective marketing campaign that we can do soon. However, I don't think it has to be our guiding principle and/or brand. If people really fuck with it, then yeah, maybe we do go with this as our core message -- definitely some counterculture vibes. Maybe we have a special t-shirts sale here, or a Forty-Two-esque project there. But for now, I want to let the different things I create draw people in, and what brings them back is the conversations we're having and what we're creating together as a collective community.

Okay, so we've established that with this soft relaunch of Unplugg'd, it's going to be mostly steeped in projects I want to work on and I find interesting.¹⁰ That's all and well, but are the things NGL interested in really that interesting to other people?

That's the big question, of course. There are plenty of people making t-shirts and talking about popular culture. After all of my experiences in the past, what resonated with people, what didn't, here's where I believe Unplugg'd can build a voice for itself:

• The topics I find most interesting and want to write about / podcast / talk about are...

⁷ For example, The Hundreds just released a collaboration with Roald Dahl because he was one of Bobby's favorite authors growing up. Thing is, he was a lot of people's favorite author growing up, too, and by connecting with his fans through telling a story behind the collab, they buy into what the Hundreds is selling.

⁸ Also, I look at Bill Simmons and The Ringer. Most people that flocked to The Ringer originally were fans of Simmons, the kind of people that flock to r/billsimmons to discuss his latest podcasts and ventures. The thing is, Simmons has really scaled back his content production once he took on the role of bossman, and people started to realize that The Ringer had a lot of other really talented personalities like Jason Concepcion, Mallory Rubin, and Chris Ryan. This has allowed The Ringer to grow -- because they're able to create a lot of good content with creators people connect with.

⁹ One thing I will say -- I think The Ringer has room to improve in terms of engaging fans. Outside of r/BillSimmons, there really isn't one central place to talk about their content, along with the kinds of things that Ringer fans are interested in (sports, entertainment, millennial culture, etc.) I think they have a lot of improvement to be made in terms of branding -- yes, they make really great content, but where do I go next as a fan, and why should I come back? Stuff like events and collaborative merchandise by tapping into their network of connections (see: Complex) could go a long way imo. That may or may not be what I would want to do with them professionally...but that's for another day.

¹⁰ Tl;dr -- screw product-market fit! Not actually...but kinda.

- Entrepreneurship / Tech / Startup / VC world: these stories are awesome, and I
 think with the budding of student entrepreneurship culture, there's so much to
 explore here. Plus, they make for great people to know and great podcast
 interviews.
- Streetwear / Sneakers / Fashion / Design: there are outlets that cover these buckets, but the ones that do aren't super professional, and when mainstream outlets try to cover them, it's super painful. I can slot in as a longtime fan of this world, and again, there's a lot of really cool people in this world that have stories to tell.
- College / Gen Z culture / Discourse: No, I'm not the voice of Gen Z. I don't want to be. TikTok is clearly a culture that eludes me. What I do think I can talk about is how what I'm interested in relates to how my peers are acting and talking about things. I'm looking at the idea of the "electability" article I'm cooking up and rap and the 'n' word -- I'm not an expert on politics or music, but I can talk about the way in which we talk about these things. Plus, things like mental health, social media, educational insecurity -- these are really interesting topics to dive into that I know my peers are thinking about and can connect with in an authentic fashion.
- The media: I find big money media moves + how the media covers things to be really interesting, and there's not a whole lot of coverage of it, even though people find it fascinating. This ties into the startup world as listed above, but I do think the business of the media (and how much that shapes our world) is something I'm able to explore in depth.
- I put out really, high-quality, polished products. Like, better than 90-95% of the shit people are putting out. This is a high standard to hold myself to, but given my experiences in the past, I believe I can do it.
- I have a unique perspective given my age, my unique space of the media world / business world, and the rapidly-changing times. By accomplishing the previous two points, I believe this will prove that I -- and, by extension, Unplugg'd -- have a valid, fascinating voice to bring to the table.
 - This also builds into my whole angle about how culture influences business. I can
 provide real value by talking about, Hey, this is what's trendy, and this is why it's
 gonna disrupt the business world. Consumers drive the economy, after all.
- I can sometimes be silly, serious and anything in between. There's no such thing as "stick to sports"; this is where Unfiltered, Uncensored, Unplugg'd comes into play. You're gonna get the authentic version of our brand because you're gonna get the authentic version of me.

So we've established the brand behind Unplugg'd -- me, my interests, and the people that share those interests -- and what will differentiate us from a voice perspective. Now, what are the projects I will physically be making?

For right now, in my mind, those (realistic) projects include:

Longform articles

- Weekly newsletters
- Interview-style podcasts
- Collaborative designs
- An active Patreon and Discord channel

Some other projects I'd like to work on but don't think are super feasible are:

- Video series, such as The Hot Takes Show, G-L Review, and Shared Space¹¹
- Podcasts such as Black Box and Whistles
- A monthly physical magazine
- Offline events with speakers, panels, live pods, etc.
- Coffeehouse, a Tinder-like platform where people create meetups in order to engage in authentic conversations
- A Hot Takes AI chatbot¹²
- A card game¹³

Now, the latter projects are a bit much, and while I like all of them, realistically speaking, they're things that require other people to help me build, both from a time and skill perspective.

When it comes to the former, my next step is to build out <u>our website</u> as a central place to see everything. We'll have our landing page, more information on our story / our origins / our why, and our online store.

With that being said, though, when I say different people can interact with our brand in different ways, I mean that I want to reach people through various channels -- mainly, the channels where they are. While our website will be a great place to keep up with everything Unplugg'd, they don't need to go there every day in order to get their fix! Click here to read the details about the products we'll be making.

Okay, so we've now established what it is that Unplugg'd will do moving forward. The next step is to set some goals and expectations for myself.

"THE GOALS"

I could spend all the time in the world on Unplugg'd, but at the end of the day, if I want this to be a viable business, I need to be a little bit more strategic in regards to what I'm making and the time I'm spending doing it.

¹¹ Original IP is king. Also, these ideas are too good not to make...but they need other people working on them, too.

¹² This would be such good marketing for *The Hot Takes Show*.

¹³ This is more of a joke, but honestly, if someone had a good idea for an Unplugg'd card game, I'd be for it.

I essentially have 18 months to determine if this is something I could work on full-time. Therefore, I split that time up into six, three-month blocks and determined that in order to continue working on Unplugg'd "full-time" (40 hours of paid work per week) from block to block, I need to hit a group of key metrics for each of those blocks. Otherwise, UP becomes the "night job" / passion project, and I look for other work and a steady income elsewhere.¹⁴

Here's what those blocks look like:

Block	New patrons	New listens per month	New NL Subs	Shirts sold per month
Apr 20 - Jun 20	6	455	136	7
Jul 20 - Sep 20	12	920	272	14
Oct 20 - Dec 20	25	1,875	546	25
Jan 21 - Mar 21	50	3,750	1,091	50
Apr 21 - Jun 21	100	7,500	2,176	103
Totals	193 patrons	14,400 listens	4,221 subs	200 shirts

Okay, so starting Wednesday, April 1 and ending Wednesday, July 1, I will officially be on the clock for block 1! On first look, here's all the content I want to create between now and then:

- 3 longform stories for Unplugg'd Mag (one a month)
- 12 podcasts (once per week, released on Wednesdays)
- 12 newsletters (once per week, released on Wednesdays)

Here's a rough look at what that means time-wise during a given month given past experience:

Content	Quantity of Content	Time
Story	1	30 hours
Podcast	4	20 hours
Newsletter	4	24 hours
Total	9 pieces of content	74 hours

¹⁴ For a full view of that cost-benefit analysis, <u>click here</u>. It's not necessary to read (it's more some personal number-crunching for myself), but it does give a better understanding on where the metrics I'll be using are coming from.

Along with that, I also want to grow a Twitter and LinkedIn following for myself because I believe it will be easier to build my own before focusing on the brand's social media. I think Instagram and Facebook can factor into this, too, but I believe that the former two platforms will be more effective given our brand and what we're trying to do. ¹⁵ Plus, I would like to hold myself to what we're promising our patrons, as well as create a bumping Discord. Click here to read about what my social strategy will consist of.

Here's a rough look at what all of that looks like in a given month:

Content	Quantity of Content	Time
Twitter	42 tweets	30 hours
LinkedIn	12 posts	10 hours
Patreon	5 posts	5 hours
Discord	30 posts	15 hours
Totals	89 pieces of content	60 hours

Okay, so between content and social, if I'm working 160 hr / month, that means that there's 26 hours left in the month for merchandise design, production, and distribution. This means securing brand partnerships and fulfilling any order through our store / our patrons. Click here to read more details.

Here's what that looks like time-wise in a given month:

Merch	Time
Collabs	15
Patreon	3
Fulfill Orders	3
Total	21 hours

Overall, this leaves me with 5 extra hours a month. If I can find someone to help in some places -- social media, merch, etc. -- that could be huge. However, any paid hours I would be taking away from myself would then need to go to them.

¹⁵ Twitter: good for reaching a lot of people and raising brand awareness with people who care about the things we talk about. LinkedIn: best place to scale a following easily and get good engagement on posts.

So coming back to the metrics I want to hit for this block:

Block	New patrons	New listens per month	New NL Subs	Shirts sold per month
Apr 20 - Jun 20	6	455	136	7

The final -- and arguably most important -- component of this doc is the acquisition strategy, both for customers (patrons, merch) and users (listens, subs, readers). In order to hit these metrics, there's four conversions I need to make:

- 1. Convert readers, listeners, and general fans of our brand into paying patrons or customers.
 - a. UP MAG / Pod \rightarrow Newsletter \rightarrow Discord \rightarrow Patreon
 - i. In the start, we want people to join the Discord...but not too many people. We want the "champions of the brand," the superfans to come.
 - 1. UP MAG -- makes sense to drive people to "Community" page on our website. Here (in order) would be newsletter sub, information about Discord, and then Patreon information.
 - a. For UP MAG folk -- these are people that aren't as likely to be sticky in the beginning since they'll be coming from Google. Therefore, the goal should be to get them on our newsletter before getting them in the Discord and/or Patreon.
 - Pod -- these people are more likely to be sticky than a story, but still, a lot of this from the get-go is gonna be based off of reaching guests with already-established communities. I also want to drive them to the newsletter
- 2. Convert impressions of my podcast through marketing into listens.
- 3. Convert impressions of my newsletter through marketing into subscribers.
- 4. Convert impressions of a collaborative drop through marketing into customers.

Things I'm good at:

- Content
 - Content → SEO
 - Writing -- I like to think I'm a good writer! Been at it for a while, and definitely passionate about chasing a worthwhile (imo) story.
 - Podcasting -- I've been told I have a "sexy" podcast voice. I'm still not really sure what that means, but I like to think I do a good job as a podcast host and producer, as I come very prepared to every interview and treat my guests with respect. So I guess I'll take it as a compliment?
- Implementation -- "Getting Shit Done" -- and Passion
 - I know I'm a hard worker. I will stay up to finish a project, no matter what, even if there's no grade or dollar value assigned. That's simply not what's important to me.
 - To that point, when I care about something, I will dive into it. I will spend a ton of time on it. I get obsessed. The alternative -- not finishing -- is not an option.
- Ideation
- Graphic Design and Videography
 - Above average proficiency in pretty much all parts of Creative Cloud.
- Web Design
 - Pretty meh, but I have a basic understanding of
- Pitching / Selling a Vision
- Sending emails!

Things I'm bad at:

- Design (like, artsy design)
- Focusing on one thing
- Prioritizing / Execution
 - It's not that I'm not efficient, or can't get things done. It's just that I put a lot of time into any stray idea I come up with and put in as much work as possible to get it done.
- Strategy
 - Goes hand in hand with prioritizing. "If we do this, we will get ____ out of it." I'm more of a build-it-and-they-will-come kind of guy, but the reality is that to grow something, you need to have a clear strategy with clear goals.
- Analytics
 - Goes hand-in-hand with strategy! It's not that I can't do the numbers thing, cause I can and I will and I'm constantly considering what KPIs are important for our success.

- However, it's not
- Editing + getting edited

I want to build this thing with you! That's why it's "collaborative."

Just 'cause there's revenue gained doesn't make something inherently "bad." They should be built to help people.