NEWS LESSON

The Work Behind the Side-Hustle Pitch



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes an online money-making promise sound believable?
2. Would you rather earn extra money from a hobby or keep it just for fun?
3. What would you ask someone who claimed their business ran itself?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**counterweight**	☐	A	weakens something gradually
2	**aspiration**	☐	B	fairly small in size or amount
3	**gulf**	☐	C	well known and important
4	**complication**	☐	D	a strong hope of achieving something
5	**undermines**	☐	E	something that balances or reduces the effect of another thing
6	**modest**	☐	F	a very large difference between two things
7	**prominent**	☐	G	something that makes a situation harder or more confusing
8	**documented**	☐	H	recorded in detail with evidence

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Money-making videos show the payment and skip the work. A reporter's test of popular online ventures shows what stays outside the frame.

1 The pitch usually starts with an ordinary morning: breakfast, a phone and another payment arriving. The creator says the business almost runs itself. What the video leaves outside the frame is harder to price: making the product, finding customers and keeping them happy. Before envying the income, it is worth asking what work produced it.

2 The term side hustle covers an enormous range of activity, from private tutoring and weekend catering to online shops and affiliate marketing. There is nothing inherently dubious about earning money beyond one's main occupation. What deserves scrutiny is the way certain online ventures are presented as largely effortless sources of passive income. A product that can be sold repeatedly without being manufactured again may be inexpensive to distribute, but somebody still has to design it, market it, answer customer questions and persuade strangers to part with their money.

3 The gulf between social-media aspiration and ordinary earnings is revealing. In Save the Student's 2026 survey, 29% of respondents reported running a business or side hustle, yet 79% of that group had earned less than £500 in the previous twelve months. These figures describe a particular student sample, not every entrepreneur, but they provide a useful counterweight to the extraordinary success stories filling online feeds. Commercial surveys of British side hustlers similarly suggest that modest, inconsistent earnings are considerably more common than the life-changing sums advertised by prominent creators.

4 Digital marketplaces offer a useful illustration. Selling printable planners or design templates removes the need to hold physical stock, but low barriers to entry also attract competitors, and products that need little specialist knowledge are easy to imitate.

5 Affiliate marketing has its own difficulties: a commission link is worthless without attention, credibility and a customer willing to buy. Costs add up in both cases. Profit is what remains after platform charges, subscriptions and advertising, and it also has to cover the value of the hours the owner puts in.

6 A further complication is the business of teaching other people to make money. Some experienced creators sell genuinely useful training; others market expensive courses supported by carefully selected testimonials and vague income claims. The incentive is worth examining. A person may find it more lucrative to sell the prospect of entrepreneurship than to pursue the activity supposedly generating their wealth. A Guardian investigation published in October 2026 documented how difficult several fashionable online ventures proved in practice, reinforcing the need to distinguish exceptional cases from representative outcomes.

7 None of this undermines the value of entrepreneurship. Small ventures can create opportunities, top up low wages and develop skills that later become commercially valuable. The danger lies in presenting genuine enterprise as a shortcut around effort, risk and uncertainty. A prospective founder needs to know the customer, the competition, the likely costs and the time required before the first sale. Perhaps the most useful question is not whether a business can produce income while its owner sleeps, but how much work was necessary to get it there in the first place.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. A seller who brings in £4,000 but pays £4,500 in subscriptions, advertising and fees has made no profit. (T) (F) (NG)
2. The writer treats every creator who sells training as dishonest. (T) (F) (NG)
3. Most respondents who earned under £500 planned to give up their ventures. (T) (F) (NG)
4. The writer implies that easy entry to digital marketplaces is both an advantage and a weakness for sellers. (T) (F) (NG)
5. The writer says commercial surveys of British side hustlers contradict the student survey. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

endorsement	imitate	incentive	inconsistent	ostensible	scrutiny	testimonials	vague

1. Any claim that promises guaranteed returns deserves close _____ before a single pound is paid.
2. A seller whose monthly takings are _____ , soaring one month and collapsing the next, cannot plan around them.
3. Adverts that boast of life-changing results without a single figure are deliberately _____ about what buyers will actually earn.
4. Glowing _____ from satisfied customers are easy to select, edit or even invent.
5. The financial _____ is clear: a seller may earn more from enrolments than from the product the course describes.
6. A design that needs no specialist skill is easy for rivals to _____ .

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. A _____ pitch can make an average product seem irresistible. **(PERSUADE)**
2. There is nothing _____ dubious about earning extra money. **(INHERENT)**
3. A commission link is worthless without attention and _____ . **(CREDIBLE)**
4. None of this undermines the value of _____ . **(ENTREPRENEUR)**
5. A _____ founder needs to know the customer and the competition. **(PROSPECT)**

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, many phrasal verbs are fixed with a preposition too (hold up as, shell out for). Check the grammar after the gap, then choose the verb.

brush	cash	held	pan	shell	tide	weed

1. Occasional outliers are _____ up as proof that anyone can succeed.
2. Cautious buyers should not _____ aside the lack of verifiable income figures.
3. Few ventures _____ out as smoothly as the videos suggest.
4. Some marketers _____ in on the hype by selling courses rather than products.
5. Beginners are often persuaded to _____ out for software they barely use.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Which part of an online success story would you most want to see?
2. When does useful advice become a sales pitch?
3. Could turning a hobby into a business change how you feel about it?

9 Role-play: should we buy the course?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the excited friend

You've seen an online course that costs £300 and promises money while you sleep. You want your friend to join you. Explain why it looks like a good chance and answer your friend's worries.

Student B · the cautious friend

You're not sure the course is worth £300. Ask at least two questions about the costs, the customers and who is really making money. Suggest a cheaper way to test the idea.

Useful phrases

I've just seen a course that teaches you to earn money online.

That's a lot of money for something we can't try first.

Who's actually making money from it?

I'd feel better if we checked the reviews together.

What would you do if it didn't work?

Let's find a compromise.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you buy the course, and what made you decide?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 D · 3 F · 4 G · 5 A · 6 B · 7 C · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 scrutiny · 2 inconsistent · 3 vague · 4 testimonials · 5 incentive · 6 imitate

6 Word forms

1 persuasive · 2 inherently · 3 credibility · 4 entrepreneurship · 5 prospective

7 Language focus

1 held · 2 brush · 3 pan · 4 cash · 5 shell

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