

What every Software Guru
Should Live & Breathe



wear your
undies
on
the outside!

A Super Heroes Guide To

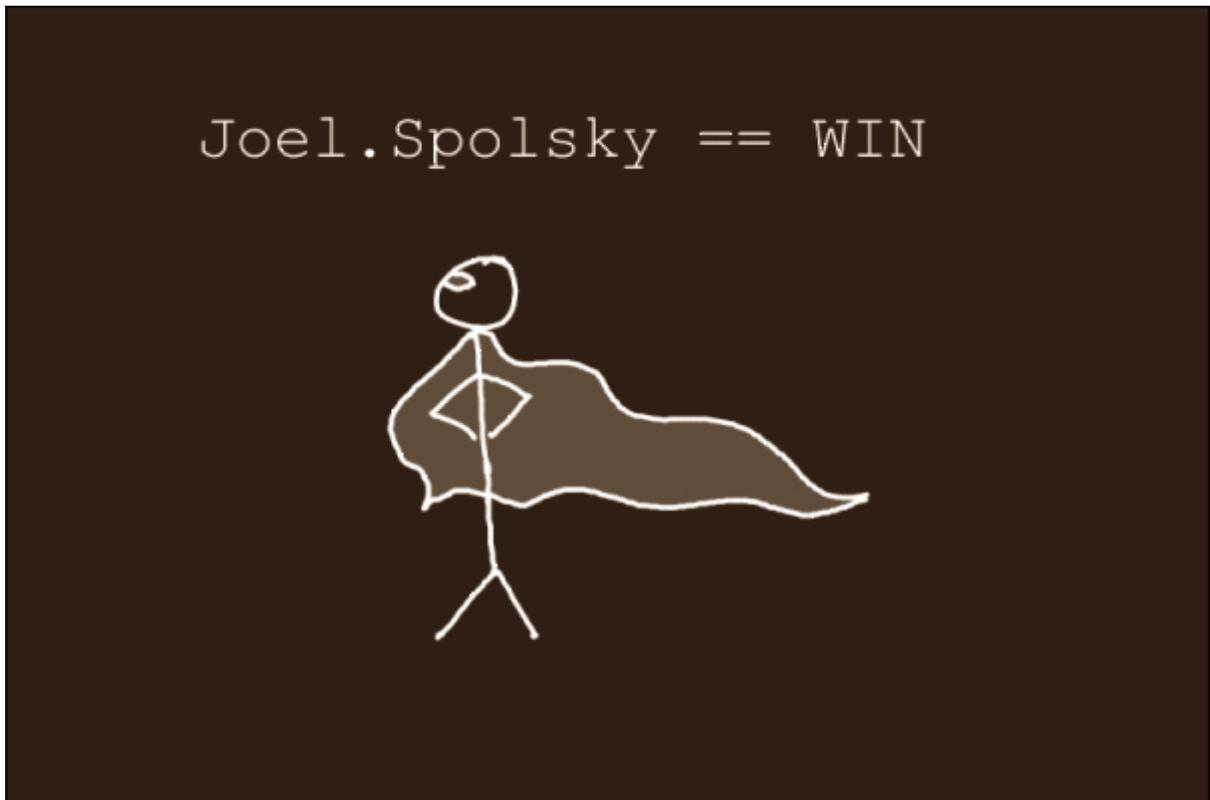
Development

By Stu Andrews



<http://stuandrews.com>

A Super Heroes Guide To Development



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Joel.Spolsky == WIN



Intro

G'day Folks.

My name is Stu Andrews.

Long eons past, in 2009, a charming fellow by the name @Warlach told me about an event known as @Barcamp. My knowledge of this event was sadly lacking. Quite possibly it could have been some place where Innkeepers got together, sitting around a fire regaling each other with stories of ale and wenches and fist-fights.

That auspicious day, it was a Wednesday if I do recall, @Warlach regaled me himself, like a story-telling Innkeep, that scant hours away a Barcamp was being held in Sydney.

As per usual, I immediately had visions of speaking in a great cathedral. Thousands upon thousands of people, hanging on my every word. I dreamt of pounding the lecturn with my fist, crying out to the heavens, speaking words of power and vision.

Then I remembered a talk I'd done a couple of years before in 2007 and forgot all that stuff.

Of course, as any coder worth their salt will know, looking back on previous code is a terrible and frightening experience. As Joel tells us, rewriting from scratch is bad. So I took the old talk, kept the points, and rewrote most of the in-betweens.

G'day Folks.

My name is Stu Andrews and I'm here to show you how to develop cool stuff while making absolutely no money!

Wait. No. Let's do that again.

My name is Stu Andrews, and I'm here to talk about Super Heroes.

Okay.

Let's pretend we're playing Jeopardy!

Note: Googling to find out how to spell Jeopardy, I discovered that the Exclamation point is actually part of the name. Nice!

Answers:

Rippling Muscles

Huge Breasts

External Underwear

Capes

Questions:

Things that will win you a Karaoke Contest

- Maybe

Things that remind you of the singer Meatloaf

- Mostly

Things that make you think of socially inept, green-screen loving, wow-playing, caffienated code monkeys living out of their parents basement ..

- Not Generally

Obviously, these are attributes of Super Heroes. And although they seem worlds apart, Software Developers and Super Heroes actually share a lot in common. Seriously.

Let's jump right in and take a look at - [A Super Heroes Guide To Development](#).



1. Get An Origin Story

A young man sits in a dark room, inside a dark mansion, on a dark night. The only light coming from the moon through the windows high above.

Outwardly he is a prime specimen of mankind, worthy even of bro-mance. Strong and tall, broad-shouldered. Olympic athletes could not hope to compete with this man. And the innate power of his mind is beyond that of mortal ken. An intelligence without peer.

But blood and chaos hound his steps. His is the pain of loved ones lost. Anger drives him, pushes him, it has almost consumed him.

The young man looks for a sign, some kind of symbol. His is a crusade of justice. His is a crusade of violence against those who would be violent. And all crusades need a focal point.

They need a Sign.

Of course, we know his identity, and we know his story.

A Super Hero was born that night when a bat flew through one of the open windows high above.

Batman is an iconic hero.

As an aside, Batman's origin story is, I reckon, still one of the best. Simple and profound, and set in the real world.

That is to say, I wasn't shot out of a planet about to explode. I haven't been, to my extreme sadness, gifted with a mutant healing factor and experimented on by secret clandestine government agencies, and birthed with claws. There's no super-soldier serum in my veins, and I'm pretty sure no gamma rays have bombarded this body.

But Batman .. I could be him! Well, maybe.

There are many Super Heroes.

Wolverine. Batman. Rogue. The Phantom. Druss. Robin Hood. Harry Potter. Dark Angel. Tarzan. Peter Petrelli. Spidey. Sydney Bristow. Jon Snow. Shadow. Samson. Jon Shannow. Rand Al' Thor. Dr Who. Captain Hammer .. err, wait on .. Dr Horrible! No, that's not quite right. Anyway, the list goes on. It's really quite long.

They've all got Origin stories. Some are plain for all to see. Some, are shrouded in mystery.

The importance of an Origin Story is undeniable.

Your Origin is your background. It's where you came from, what made you the way you are.

When you understand where you come from you can better know where you are going and why. You can understand what inspires you and why.

Get an Origin Story. Whether crafted from the fabric of reality, or from the hidden depths of your imagination. Have an Origin Story ready to reveal when it's needed. Show it on your website. Send it out in a newsletter. Spread it far on a special podcast. Make it into a song. Write a book.

It might be about your company. It could be about you, the individual. Even for your product.

If you already have an origin story, then get out there. Perhaps it needs some embellishment. Dragons are always good value, as are busty warrior women.

Get an Origin Story!



2. Know Your Super Powers

Most Super Heroes have at least one special Ability. Something that helps to set them apart. To give them an edge.

Let's think about a couple of Super Heroes. If we were in a room together, I'd say the first person to shout out the Power gets the wonderful prize of geek superiority. But since you're most probably reading this, take the calm superior smugness on-board as you breeze through the following "What super power do they have?" names:

The Flash? (Speed)

Daredevil? (Sense)

Peter Petrelli? (Empath, Absorbs others powers)

Chuck Bartowski? (Intersect)

The Invisible Woman?

Sam Winchester? (Not anything good)

And if you get this one, double thumbs-up ..

Obelix? (Fell into the magic potion as a baby).

This list too, goes on.

The question is:

Do you have a simple grasp of your own abilities?

Some of us might remember Roger Ramjet .. What a wonderful cartoon. Does anyone remember his signature power, apart from gross stupidity?

The Proton Energy Pill! It's a simple example of a clear understanding. As a kid, you knew that Roger couldn't defeat the evil boss without swallowing the Proton Energy Pill first. It gave him 20 seconds of unrivalled power.

Maybe you can understand cryptology and security better than anyone else. Perhaps you never give up. Maybe you can see to the heart of the matter at hand. Maybe you can be true to a single vision. You might be able to juggle multiple jobs.

There are lots of skills and abilities in the world of Development.

Look at Bill Gates. Maybe, quite possibly, we could code better than him. Or even envisage an OS that is better than Windows. But it seems to me that he played to his strengths. Sure, a lot of folk got burned in the process, but Bill Gates knew his abilities. He took hold of opportunity, having a vision. Some people probably thought he was crazy. But his singular success is astonishing.

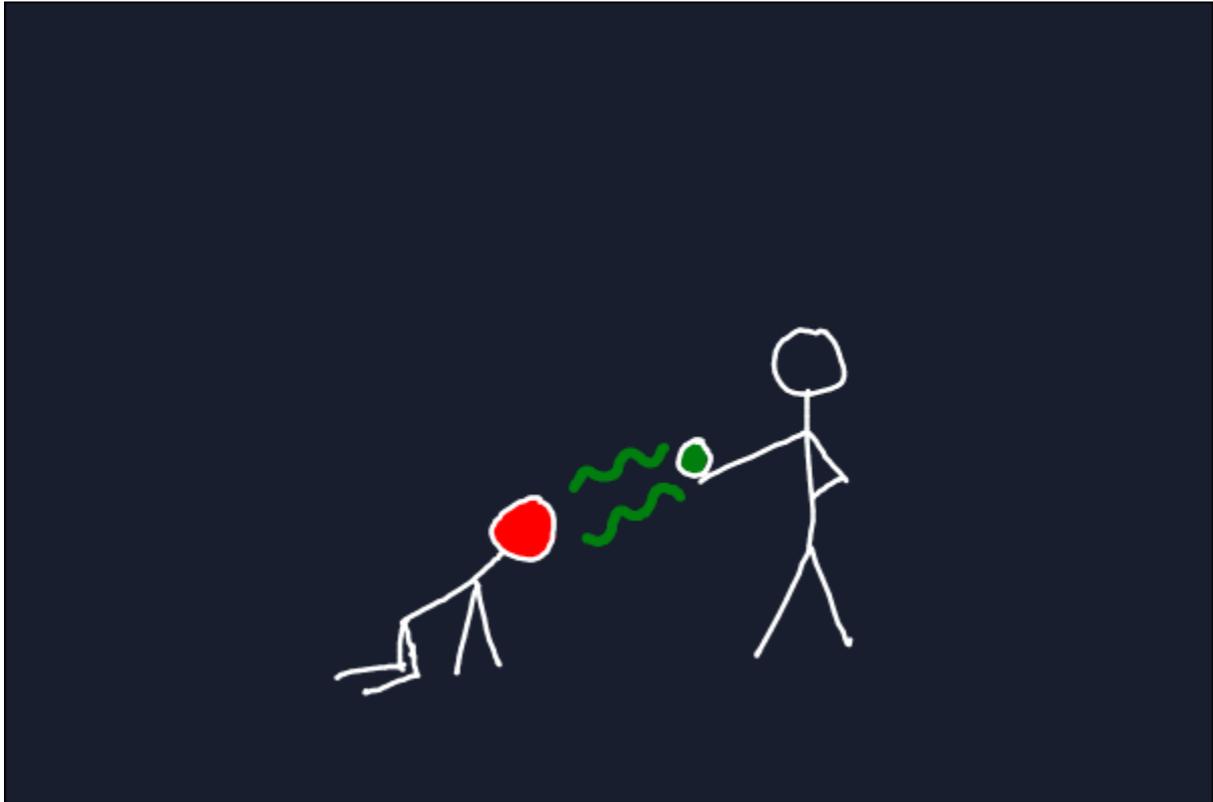
Do we dream of mediocrity? Lameness? A half-baked system?

No. We want awesomeness in a bottle! We want to become better and better at whatever it is we do.

Know your Proton Energy Pill!

Exercise your huge biceps, your fab abs, make sure your cape gets flight time.

When you know your Super Powers, show them to the world. Get them out there. It's not enough to simply have them. You have to make them known. Put the ladies on display. As Ron Burgundy tells us, Give people two tickets to the gun show.



3. Know Your Kryptonite

Just as a Super Hero has powers, they usually have an Achilles Heel. The most famous of these, apart from Achilles himself, is, of course, Kryptonite.

Superman was a hero with many powers. But as we all know, Kryptonite (let's just go with the green kind) made him as weak as a baby. It made him less than a super hero. It was his fatal weakness.

Know your Kryptonite!

Are we too quick to dismiss other opinions, even if they're wrong? Are we too worried about what people think of us? Do we find it hard to not trade equal blows when our character is under fire? Do we assassinate people's characters without hesitation? Are we too easily fired up, on forums, newsgroups, in emails, on our blog, twitter, facebook?

These are important questions to consider.

However, none of them matter in the light of the following weakness. It is the greatest single cause of kryptonotic power-loss in Software Development today.

Do we lack passion?

Are we able to get excited about our product? Our technology? Our abilities? Our wonderful shiny new powers? Can we tell other people, evangelise, and make others as excited as we are?

When I'm talking to George and Fred about my latest projects, of which there are a stupid amount, I want them to believe what I am saying. Look in the eyes. Get excited about the possibilities. Tell them how awesome it is, or how awesome it's going to be. Let them see the light.

Sure, there are many things that are our kryptonite. And obviously, passion isn't all we need. But as a Developer, lack of passion kills a huge number of great ideas before they get off the ground.

Know your Kryptonite!



4. The Super League Of Extraordinary Heroes

Super Heroes are often seen working together. Teams. This is mostly because writers dream up situations which require more than the skills of an individual.

Remember Voltron? Either the Car or the Lion one. Battle Of The Planets? Each entity kind of had a specific skillset that could be used in a particular situation.

A better, and clearer, explanation is that of the human body.

My fuzzy eyebrows can't show me the smile on the faces of my kids. My eyes can't power me up the hills at Sydney Park. My legs certainly cannot type in line after line of code.

Each segment of the body has its own unique talents, and each segment cannot be at its best without the other parts.

We're pretty good at pointing out faults in other people. It's a little harder to narrow down the gifts and talents in those same people. But when we do, when we can bind ourselves together, what we can produce is most definitely nothing short of amazing.

Let's think about some big successful teams.

There's Google, that mighty juggernaut of development. There's Blizzard, those beautiful men and women who gave us so many hours of glorious gameage. There's Facebook and Twitter and incredulously small number of people working on the awesome Minecraft.

There's the small development house able to enjoy their work and be home before dark. There's the husband and wife who live out their years together.

Teams can do far more than an individual. One person has limits. A group is able to push back those limits to a far greater radius.

Forming a team isn't just about getting a bunch of coders to work together. It's about achieving more than you can on your own.

What is the essence of this point?

Building relationships will grow you from singular into a team. And as a team, you can do more than on your own.

Let's not limit our understanding of what a team is either. When we meet together at Barcamp or Cloudcamp or This Seminar or That Seminar, we're meeting as a team. Sure, it might only exist for a couple of hours, but we're achieving something big! Far more than we could on our own.

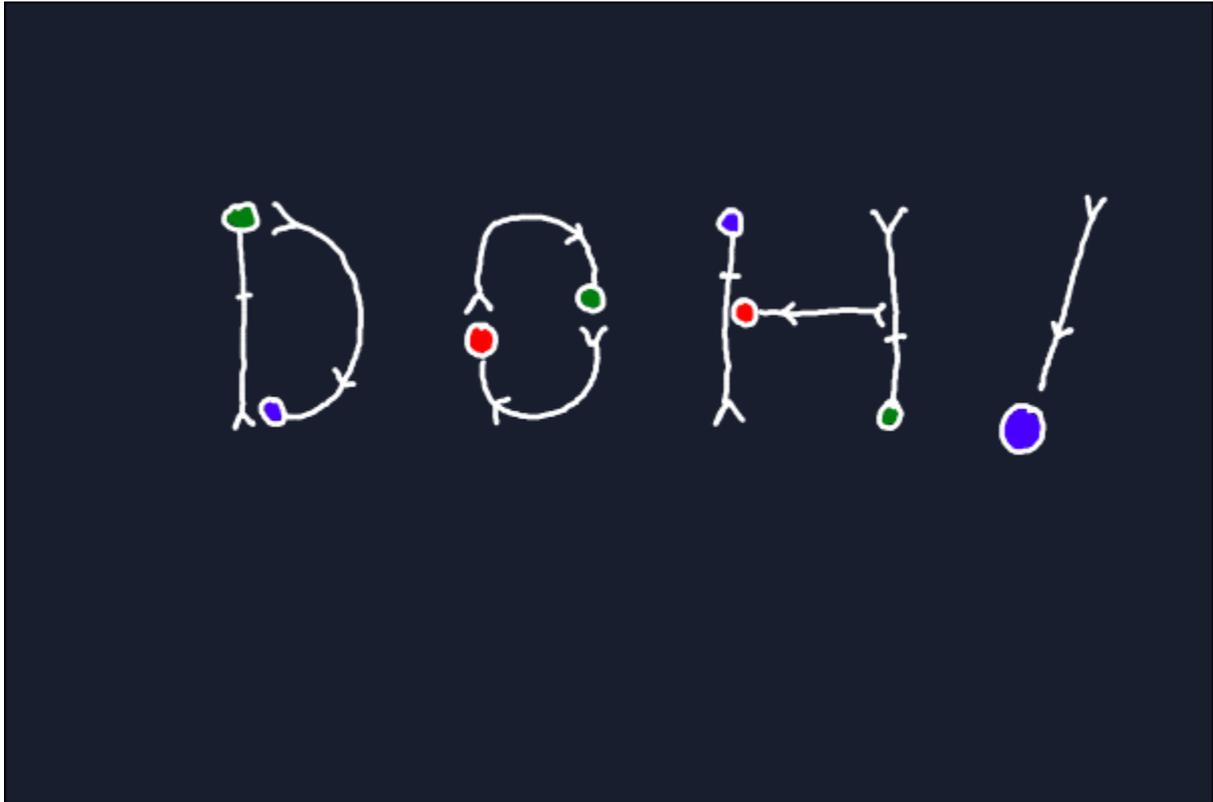
Friends often start companies and projects together. Why? Because they know each other well. They have a good grasp on the abilities of the team, because they have solid relationship.

Learn about the members of your team. How to get on with them. What they like, what they don't like. How they react under pressure, how they deal with crisis. What kind of dreams they have. What abilities they wield.

Then, when you know this, in the heat of the battle, you'll be able to provide them with the support they need, and vica versa. You can be the buffer for their weaknesses, and you can rely on them to be strong when you are not.

Building a team of Super Heroes who are bound together through cords stronger than mere acquaintance will bring you true power. A good team will help one another grow their powers and address weaknesses.

A League of Extraordinary Super Heroes is hard to find. Hard to create. But if you really want to achieve something earth-shattering in this world, then you need to join a team. Make a team. Lead a team. Find a team.



5. Get A Catchphrase

Here's some catchphrases you'll know:

"Holy Catchphrase Batman!"

"Up and Atom!"

"Hulk Smash"

"Mein Leiben!"

What are some other well-known Catchphrases?

"They caught a train."

"It's clobbering time!"

"Are you having a laugh?"

Crafting a memorable catchphrase is very important in the life of a Developer.

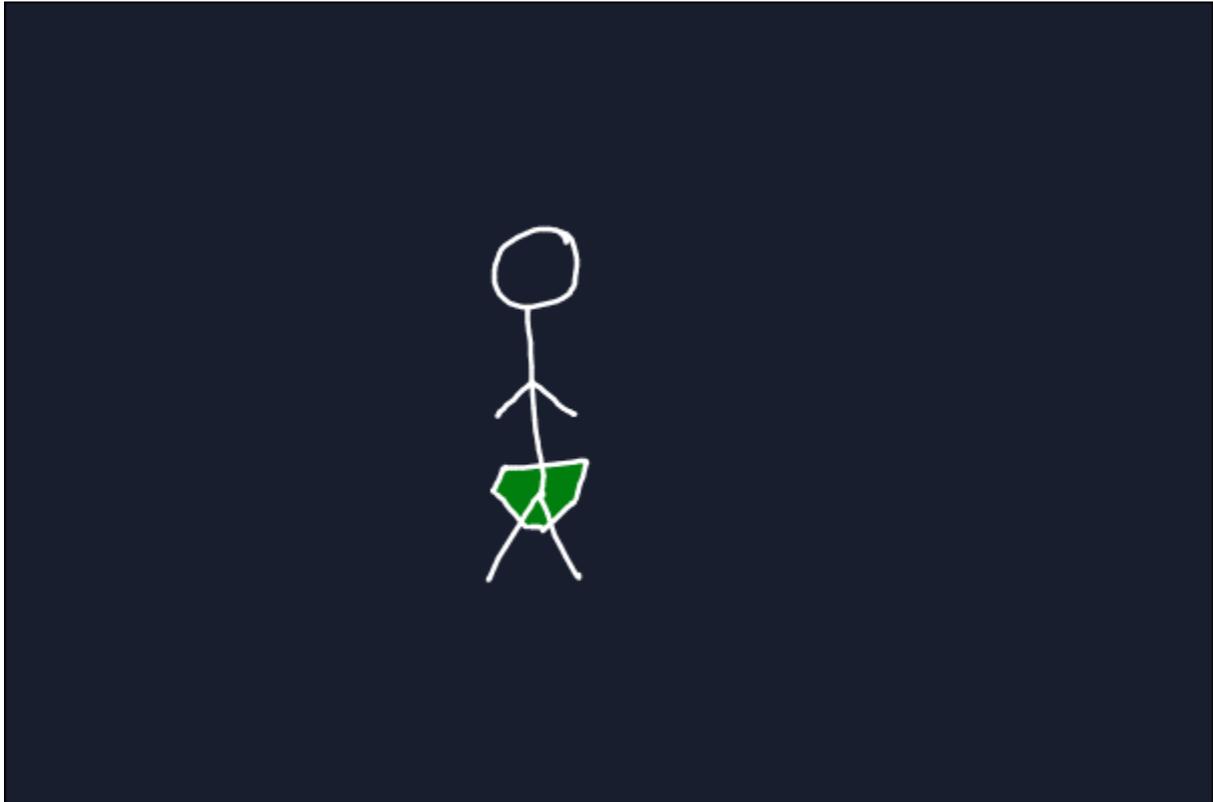
Having a simple catchphrase can be the difference between having a great product, and having a great product that is on people's lips.

Can you envisage speaking your catchphrase in general conversation?

All good salesmen know their pitch. Sure, they adjust according to the audience, but they have a hook, a sentence, a catchphrase.

At the beginning, you, the developer, should take time to be the salesman. If nothing else, creating a Catchphrase will get you to examine what it is you are doing.

Get yourself a Catchphrase!



6. Wear Your Undies On The Outside

My own catchphrase for today is, "Wear Your Undies On The Outside".

Who doesn't like spandex? Or velour, Zapp Brannigan style. I mean, seriously, what's not to like?

How we present ourselves – our companies, our products – is most definitely important.

We know this. It's pretty much the first thing you learn on any "How to make a million dollars a year just by listening to my marketing advice" blog.

Today, you need to start thinking about wearing your undies on the outside. Just like the Super Heroes.

Now, if you'd like, you can actually start wearing boxers or delicates outside your pants. That's up to you.

Better however, would be to take a page out of the undies-on-the-outside book.

When we are making ourselves presentable – think outside the box. Make something different about your appearance. Perhaps it's a website that's totally text. Perhaps

write a blog given over to some unknown aspect of your area of expertise. It could be giving out interviews, but only speaking in klingon. Ha, I'd like to see that.

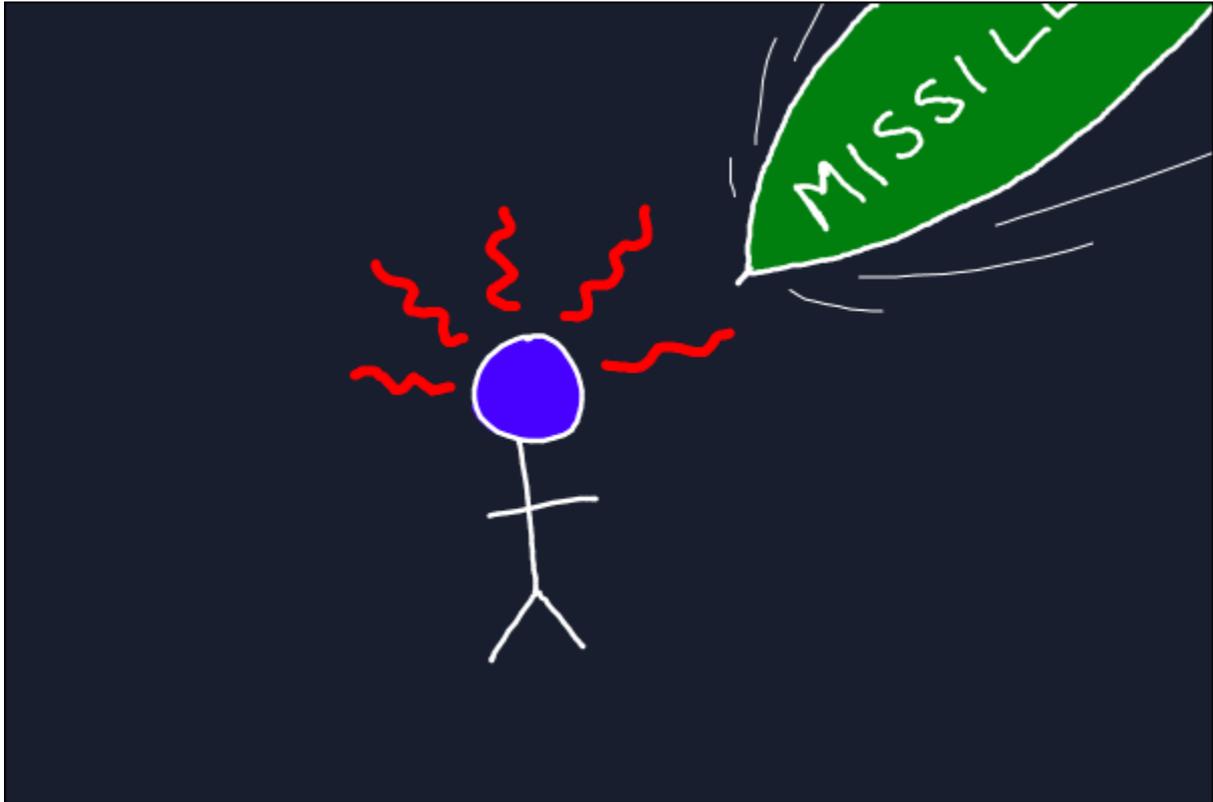
Take time here, and you will be rewarded.

A Barcamp is an excellent example of wearing your undies on the outside.

You have a bunch of folk who Un-organise an event where there are no spectators, only participants. What an excellent opportunity this is to wear your undies on the outside!

Don't be fooled by the little twinge of fear in your belly at the thought of the embarrassment, squash it back down somewhere deep and get those boxers out!

Today, in whatever you do, start thinking about wearing your undies on the outside!



7. Activate Your Spider-Sense

Spider-Sense. That wonderful ability Peter Parker has, a precognitive ability bordering on preternatural to sense immediate danger.

Support is usually boiled down to methods of communication where the Customer gets in touch with us. They have a problem, they initiate dialogue.

Wouldn't it be awesome if somehow we could be there before they even think of the problem? If you could dodge away from those little pumpkins the Green Goblin throws.

Simply put, we need to create an understanding in the Customer's mind that our product (ie. us) is ready and waiting. More, that we are asking the right questions before they need answering.

Put them in your app, somewhere easily visible, but not confronting.

Remember, this is above and beyond having a support website, having instant chat through the browser running. It goes beyond answering those fifty emails a day.

This is more.

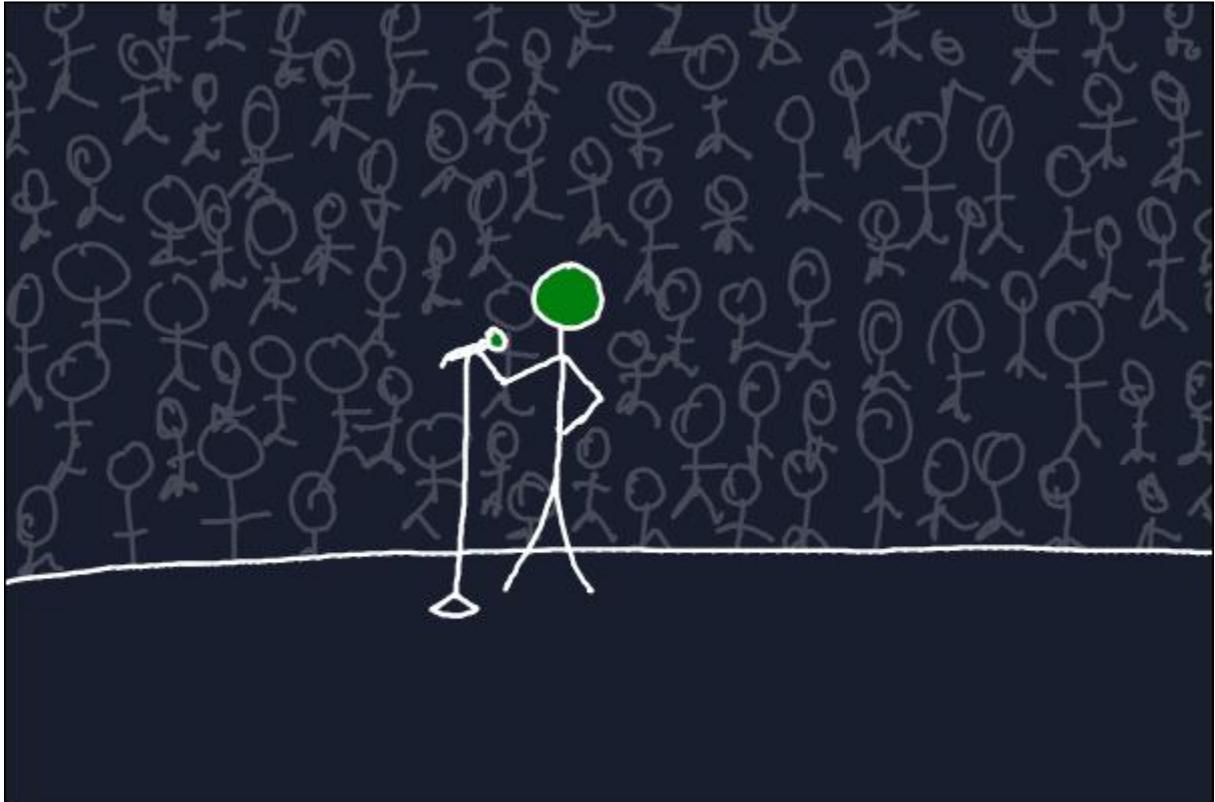
A Dashboard is a great example of how to activate your spider-sense. In addition to colourful graphs and contextual todo lists, a Dashboard allows you to ask the right questions.

"Got something to say? Talk to us right now!"

"Experiencing difficulties? Let us help you immediately."

"Need a Brute Squad? Click this button."

Level-up your Spider Sense so that the User knows you are there, anticipating their request for help, or their acknowledgement of your awesomeness.



8. The Magic Ingredient

So what have we looked at today?

1. Get An Origin Story.
2. Know Your Super Powers.
3. Know Your Kryptonite.
4. The Super League Of Extraordinary Heroes.
5. Get A Catchphrase.
6. Wear Your Undies On The Outside.

and

7. Activate Your Spider-Sense.

How do we achieve these things?

We need courage. Conviction. Imagination. Excitement. Passion. And we need the secret ingredient.

A little splash of Crazy.

As an example of the magic ingredient, I'd like to sing you my last point.

Super-Powered Geek

<http://stuandrews.com/2009/10/super-powered-geek/>

or

Google "super powered stu"



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