

# Inside the World of Twitch's Small Streamers

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Some of Twitch's most dedicated streamers are the ones you've never heard of.



Twitch's Logo [Courtesy of twitch.tv, Amazon]

It was a balmy night in May of 2020. The world was shut down due to COVID-19 lockdowns. In a small house on the side of the highway in the middle of nowhere, Mississippi, I, 3 years younger and a whole lot less burnt out, stared intently at my mouse hovering the Go Live button. This wouldn't be the first time I'd streamed on Twitch, but it would be the most important. With one more successful stream, I'd hit affiliate status and begin being able to earn money from content creation. Years of daydreaming finally made reality. It's been nearly 5 years since that night and since then I've accrued ~850 followers on Twitch and made decent money along the way, but it hasn't always been easy. Sometimes weeks pass between followers, I've gone on two indefinite hiatuses, and almost quit more times than I can count. So, I've decided to do a deep dive into what motivates other small streamers, to see if I can use any of their tactics for myself.

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Every year, millions of people go live on Twitch. Some of the biggest names in the

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space boast incredible numbers in terms of viewership. For example, in the last week, the most-subbed streamer Kai Cenat has averaged ~83,000 viewers per stream. This month, he will gross a minimum of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000 USD) from Twitch subscriptions alone. The largest Twitch stream ever, which occurred in September of 2023, hosted over 3 million viewers at one time. In August of 2019, Ninja struck a ~30 million dollar deal with Microsoft to stream exclusively on their (now-defunct) platform, Mixer. With stats like these, it's no wonder so many people try their hand at streaming and content creation. It's no secret, however, that not everyone gets to be the next Ninja or Kai Cenat. So, what gives smaller creators the motivation to keep going, even when the return on investment has long since stopped being in their favor?

For some small creators, like Brandan [BooBearington on Twitch], streaming is a "light at the end of the tunnel". The dream of one day becoming a famous content creator is enticing enough to bring him back and keep him creating content week after week. "When life gets busy and tough it's why I grind harder 'cause [having] this as a career is the light at the end of the tunnel," he says, "I have never been great at something. I've always been decent at multiple things, but I feel like genuinely I could be a great content creator..." Brandan has been streaming since 2017 and currently has an average viewership of 3.5 concurrent viewers per stream.

*"I know that for the people that do watch, I'm making their day a little bit better."*

Anne [also known as GhostyAnne on Twitch], from New England says that her motivation for streaming comes from her want to make people feel good. After streaming for almost 3 years, she says she doesn't necessarily want to turn streaming into her fulltime job, but that she knows how important it can be to have someone to listen to in the background while working on projects. "I like making people feel good. Making people laugh or feel cozy. It's nice. I don't have too many people that watch my streams, but I know that for the people that do watch, I'm making their day a little bit better."

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GhostyAnne, gazing lovingly at her son, Snoby. [Courtesy of GhostyAnne]

Another streamer, TheAfrochick, says that her motivation for streaming is purely the fun of it! They don't see themselves becoming a large creator, though they wouldn't mind if they did.

*"All I see are lights. All I see are guns. ...The world went silent for a few seconds."*

Even with a million reasons to keep going, there are still concerns that begin to be increasingly apparent the larger your platform becomes. A potential source of concern is doxing. When a person is doxed, bad actors "search for and publish private or identifying information about (a particular individual) on the internet, typically with malicious intent." Someone who is doxed may end up on the receiving end of unwanted attention, up to and including stalking, unwanted mail, and something called swatting.

For instance, in 2022, four unrelated streamers were "swatted" in the span of one week. "Swatting" in this context is a term that refers to "the practice of making a prank call to emergency services in an attempt to bring about the dispatch of a large number of armed police officers to a particular address." Swatting unfortunately is not a harmless practice, as in 2017, it resulted in the death of a 28-year-old man, Andrew Finch. In an interview with Youtuber Anthony Padilla, QTCinderella speaks of the trauma she suffered due to an incident in which she and her housemates were swatted in 2021. "...I

look up, ...and that's when it[sic] I see it. ...All I see are lights, all I see are guns, and I hear the intercom: "This is the L.A.P.D., come out with your hands up, and the world went silent for a few seconds."

Anne tells me that while she's horrified by the actions of swatters, she personally isn't too scared of it happening to her. "Mostly because of the fact that I use a PNG avatar instead of a webcam, I don't really see any reason why anyone would get any sort of satisfaction from swatting me." However, she is still concerned about being doxed, and it's something she goes to great lengths to avoid. "I'd be a little worried about stalking if my popularity grew to that size, so I gotta[sic] keep details under wraps so people don't find my address."

When asked, TheAfrochick says that they haven't really thought about doxing, but that they don't really know what they'd do if it did happen to them. "I can't really afford to move if people get weird since I still live at home. If it happens I just gotta roll with it, I guess. As long as I know I did everything to keep myself safe that's what matters."

Brandan on the other hand, has firsthand experience with subject. "[I've] already had a very interesting interaction where someone in my chat went to my brother's work. [It was] very enlightening on what I can and can't say during streams." Due to his dreams of becoming a big creator, the prospect of being swatted holds a lot more weight. "Swatting scares the life out of me, I don't know how I'd react. What if I have headphones on and they break my door down? That's terrifying."

*"Despite earning roughly 2 billion dollars per year, the Amazon owned company consistently operates at a loss..."*

Additionally, if all that wasn't already enough to raise doubts about streaming on Twitch, the state of the company itself can be pointed to as a reason for concern. In early 2024, along with most of the rest of the tech industry, Twitch laid off a staggering number of employees. 500 staff members, or 35% of their total staff, were let go to cut costs. This is because Twitch as we know it is operating at a significant loss. Despite earning roughly 2 billion dollars per year, the Amazon owned company consistently operates at a loss after paying employees, streamers, and hosting fees. In an effort to curtail these losses, Twitch has been trying everything they can to scrape up extra cash, including increasing the prices of subscriptions, running more ads against the wishes of streamers, and even temporarily making the misguided (and poorly worded) decision to

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allow artistic nudity on the platform before reverting the policy in response to backlash.

Brandon says, "...they are trying to make the platform profitable, [but] I think they are going about it in the wrong way. I think they can do it but they gotta figure out what people want..." These changes don't discourage him from streaming and creating content, but he says that if a notable competitor like YouTube would pay him more to stream on their platform, he'd switch in a heartbeat.

Others like TheAfrochick have already made the switch, citing Twitch's abnormally strict banned games list, as well as the sharp increase in ads run on channels as their reasoning moving to streaming competitor Kick. "I feel like discoverability was always bad to begin with but that really didn't help. The website really feels unusable as it is now."

Anne, however, says that she thinks not all of Twitch's changes are for the worse. "I initially chose Twitch over YouTube because of its discoverability. Since I decided to make that change however, it's just gotten so much harder to get new people to watch. Recent changes to the mobile app seem to be trying to fix this, though. They're showing more smaller streamers on the home page!"

*"The website really feels unusable as it is now."*



TheAfrochick's Various .png models [Courtesy of TheAfrochick]

Overall, it seems that streamers on twitch find their motivation for streaming from sources almost as varied as the streamers themselves. So, with that in mind, I

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think it's up to me, and every other aspiring streamer to find our own reasons to keep going. But, for any other small creators out there, it's always important to remember one thing: If you need a break, take a break. The internet will be waiting for you when you get back.