



# Navigating Big Tech

Understanding Platforms & Aggregators as the Little Guy



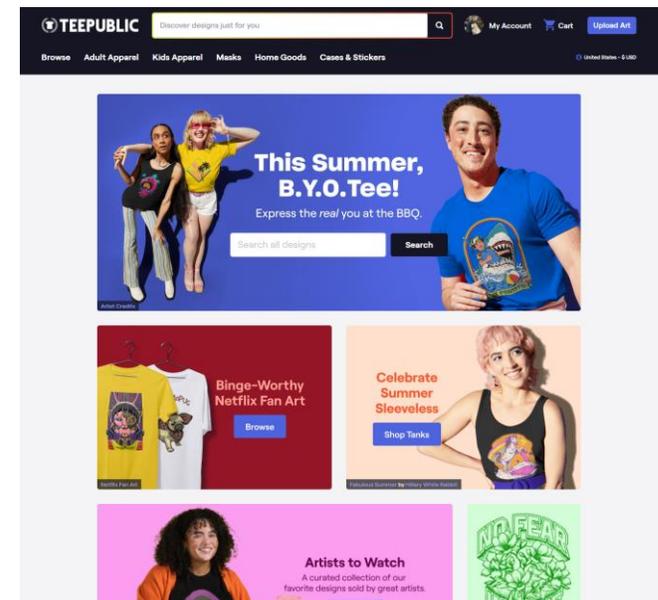
# Hi, I'm Joe

CTO @ TeePublic.com

TeePublic is an artist marketplace for independent creators to sell their original works across T-Shirts, Hoodies, and more.

Founded in 2012

Acquired by RedBubble.com in 2018



# “Big Tech? Why Does This Matter to Us?”

- We’re not competing with big tech!
- We’re in a completely different vertical!
- We’re using Big Tech with great success!”
- “I’m just a programmer/designer/PM!”



Big Tech Doesn't Care About You, But You Need to Care About It

**Decisions made by Big Tech have massive effects on incentives and ecosystems all tech companies need to navigate.**

**Empowered engineering teams are given this context, not just told what to do.**

# Example: Apple vs Meta

- Apple Hates Meta
  - Aesthetics: Facebook is a Boomer App
  - Mobile: Fight over “Facebook Apps”
    - RIP Farmville
  - Advertising: Critical to Meta, Afterthought for Apple
- Apple introduced “Privacy”
  - **ATT** (App Tracking Transparency) nuked Meta’s quality of targeting.
  - **Safari Restrictions** break browser based tracking.
  - **Not Going Away:** Apple has zero incentive to slow down.

# Outcome?

- Ad Costs **UP**
- Conversion Rate for paid **DOWN**
- Ad Platforms outside of Meta and Google **crushed**.
- “Little Guy” E-Commerce faced with higher customer acquisition costs and lower conversion rates.



Example:  
“Why Doesn’t TeePublic  
Have an API?”

# Big Tech: A MAMA

- Systemically Important Companies that control
  - Platforms **or**
  - Eyeballs (aka Aggregators)
- Our List: **A MAMA**
  - Alphabet
  - Microsoft
  - Apple
  - Meta
  - Amazon



# The Church of Ben Thompson

Have you heard the good word of [Aggregation Theory](#), Brothers and Sisters?



# Platforms vs Aggregators

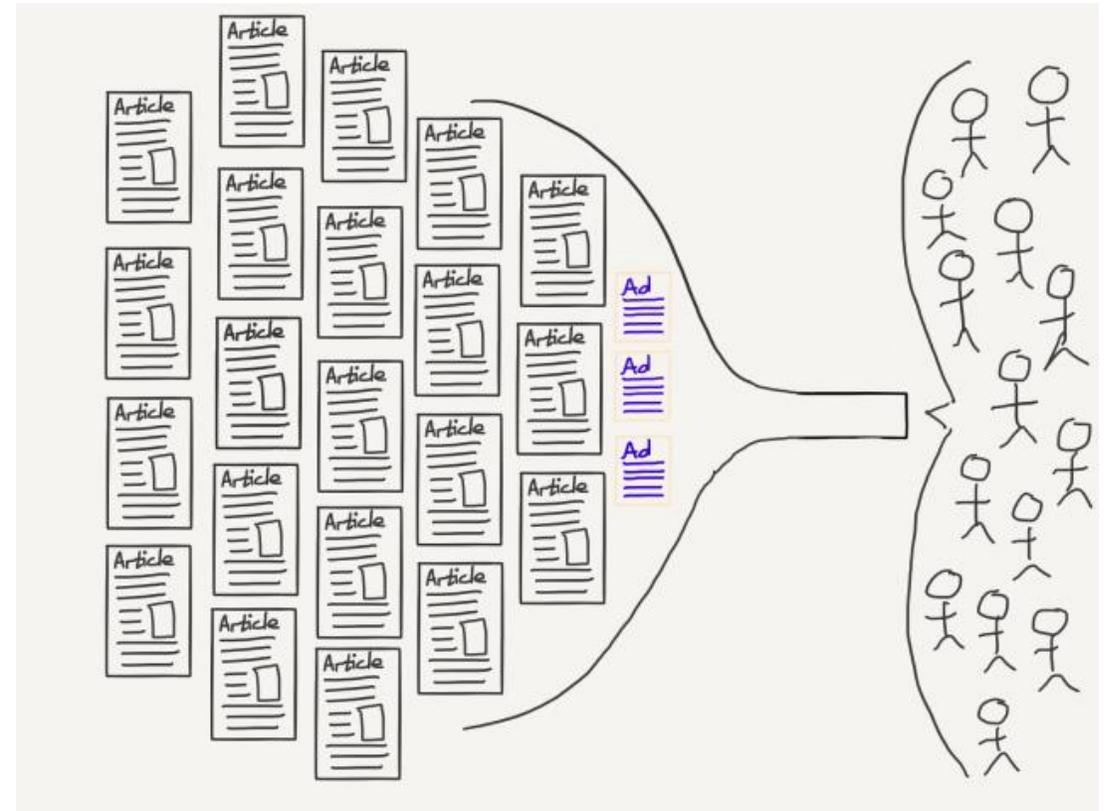
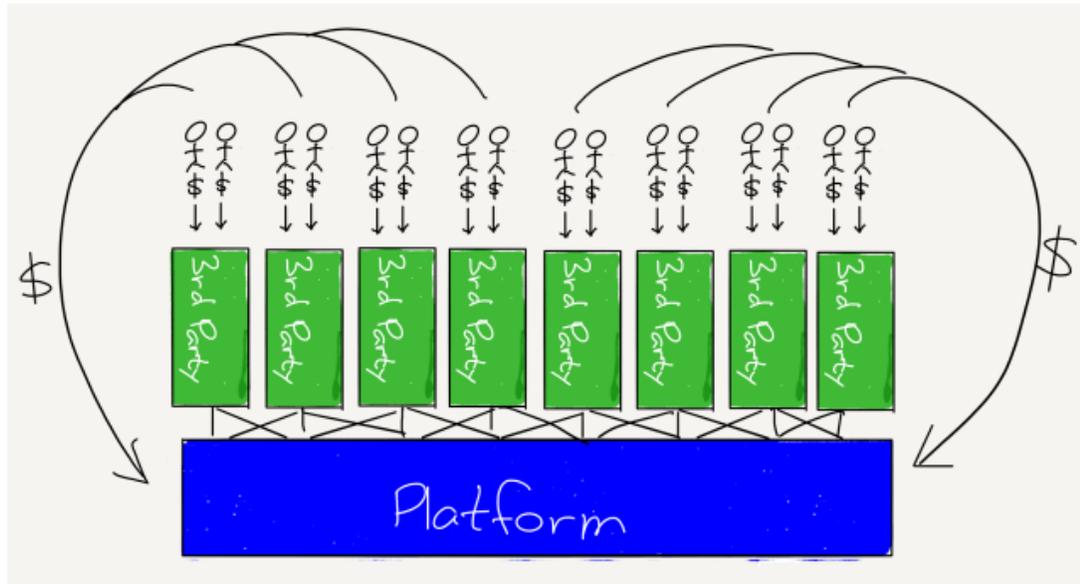
## • **Platforms**

- Create Shared 'Infrastructure' for Content Providers
- Attract users to ecosystem based on depth and breadth of experience.
- Profit from Users *buying into* Platform.

## **Aggregators**

- Collect critical mass of customer attention.
- Attract Providers based on owning users.
- Profit from Users *transacting* through limitless options.

# Platforms vs Aggregators



# Alphabet (But Really Google)

- Owns and monetizes **intent**.
- Search is the ultimate aggregator.
  - Your site and product is one of a billion endlessly interchangeable blue links.
- Aggregates the Aggregators
  - Every click *off* Google means a user will stop seeing ads *on* Google.
  - Therefore, Google keeps expanding into other aggregators space.



# Google is Coming for Every Other Aggregator

- Flights
- Hotels
- Reviews
- Lyrics
- Shopping
- Jobs

The image shows a Google search interface with three main results sections. The top section is for 'nyc to chicago flights', showing flight prices for various airlines like JetBlue, United, Delta, and American. The middle section is for 'hotels in nyc', listing hotels such as Pod 51, The Manhattan at Times Square Hotel, and Carlton Arms Hotel. The bottom section is for 'gluten free food near me', listing restaurants like abcV, Wild, and Ribalta. The interface includes search filters, a calendar for flight dates, and a map for hotel locations.

### Flights to Chicago

Flight prices:

New York, NY (all airports) to Chicago, IL (all airports)

Sat, Sep 2 to Sun, Sep 3

Economy Round trip Nonstop Less emissions

Airline	Duration	Flight Type	Price
JetBlue	2h 38m	Nonstop	from \$168
United	2h 38m	Nonstop	from \$168
Delta	3h 7m	Nonstop	from \$191
American	2h 40m	Nonstop	from \$202

Hotels | New York, NY

Hotel	Rating	Price
Pod 51	4.0 (3.2K)	\$140
The Manhattan at Times Square Hotel	3.1 (6.9K)	\$138
Carlton Arms Hotel	4.1 (427)	\$121

### gluten free food near me

Restaurant	Rating	Price
abcV	4.5 (1.4K)	\$\$\$ - Vegetarian
Wild	4.1 (747)	\$\$ - Gluten Free
Ribalta	4.4 (2K)	\$\$ - Italian

# Microsoft

“We’re Number Two!”

- #2 Cloud
- #2 Gaming Console
- #2 Search Engine
- #2 Ecosystem (Mobile > PC)

Microsoft is largely harmless...

Unless you are selling SaaS and Productivity Software to the Enterprise.

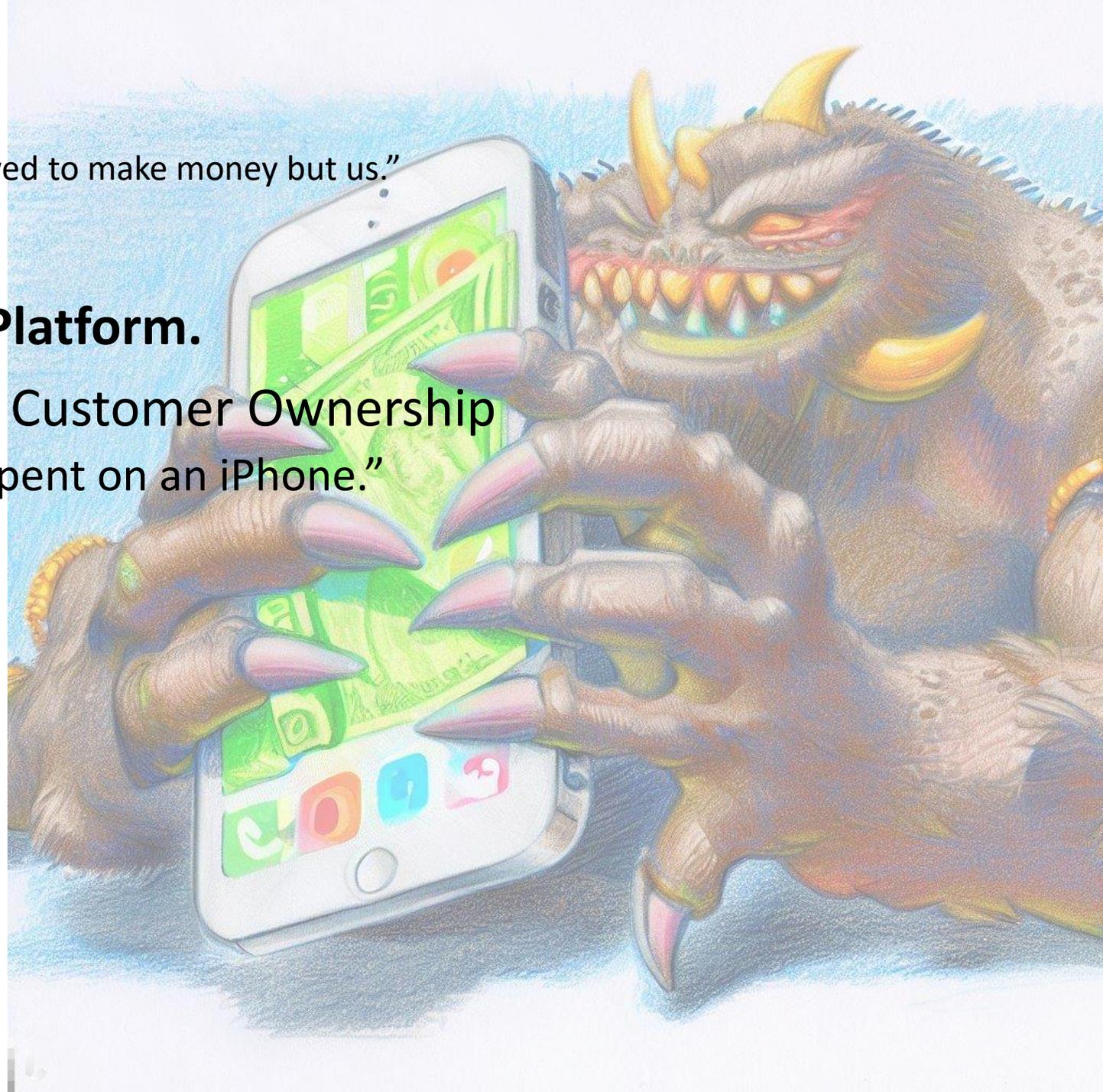
Then you are in trouble.



# Apple

“No one should be allowed to make money but us.”

- Owns the dominant mobile **Platform**.
- Aggregator Mindset towards Customer Ownership
  - “We get 30% of every dollar spent on an iPhone.”
- Pivot to Services
  - Apple TV+
  - Apple Fitness
  - Apple Arcade
  - iCloud



# Apple Hates You

- **“Privacy”** is a strategic weapon presented as a moral stand.
  - Apple has minimal advertising business.
  - Mobile Competitor Google and Aesthetic Arch-Nemesis Meta are entirely ad supported.
- **Paradoxically: Privacy entrenches Big Companies**
  - **Meta** and **Google** have resources to navigate iOS tracking restrictions. Other ad networks don't.
  - **New Products and Companies** have higher customer acquisition costs because of the reduction in ad efficiency. Established companies already have mindshare and brands.
- **E-Commerce Companies Should Ad Efficiency to Always Get Worse**

# Meta

“Thank God for Elon Musk”

- Owns and Monetizes **Attention**
- Overcame ATT and Privacy push to preserve ad efficiency.
- **Aggregator** of #content
  - Updates from childhood friends? #content
  - Local dog walking group? #content
  - That poster you thought about buying? #ad but looks like #content
- Desperately wants to own a **Platform**
  - Facebook Phone, Facebook Apps, VR are all attempts to create platforms.
  - Hates being beholden to Apple for distribution of products (see: privacy)



# Amazon

The Everything Business

- Traditional Retailer migrating to be both a **platform** and an **aggregator**.
- **Platform**
  - Buy with Prime
  - Fulfilled By Amazon
  - Amazon Pay
  - AWS
- **Aggregator**
  - Customers start their shopping journey's here so give us your content.
  - It's fine to sell on Amazon but remember...

# Aggregators always become ad platforms.

prime day Deliver to Joseph Hinsdale 60521 All away luggage EN Hello, Joseph Account & Lists Returns & Orders Cart

All Prime Day Deals Clinic Amazon Basics Beauty & Personal Care Groceries Pharmacy Pet Supplies Shop By Interest Coupons Prime Day deals end in 08:12:33

1-48 of 714 results for "away luggage" Sort by: Featured

**Delivery**  
 All Prime

**Deals & Discounts**  
[Prime Day Deals](#)

**Department**  
Luggage  
Carry-On Luggage  
Luggage Sets  
Suitcases

**Customer Reviews**  
★★★★☆ & Up  
★★★★☆ & Up  
★★★★☆ & Up  
★★★★☆ & Up

**Amazon Fashion**  
 Premium Brands  
 Top Brands

**Brands**  
 Samsonite  
 Travelpro  
 Amazon Basics

 Spring into new adventures  
[Shop Samsonite >](#)

  Samsonite Evolve SE Hardside Expandable Luggage with Spinners | Alpine Green | 2PC SET (...)  
★★★★☆ 50  
✓prime

**Results**  
Price and other details may vary based on product size and color.

 **Best Seller**   

Sponsored

# Aggregators always become ad platforms.

Etsy  × 🔍 Sign in 🛒

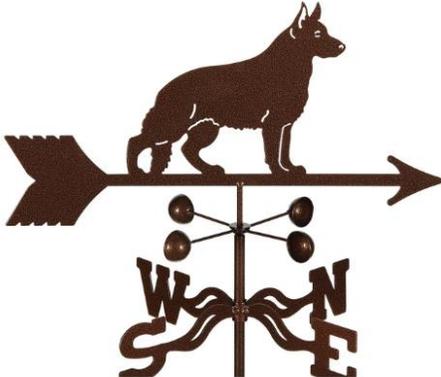
Home Favorites Jewelry & Accessories Clothing & Shoes Home & Living Wedding & Party Toys & Entertainment Art & Collectibles Craft Supplies Gifts & Gift Cards

Estimated Arrival Any time 🏠 All Filters 1,609 results, with Ads 📄 Sort by: Relevancy



German Shepherd - Sterling Statuary | Handma...  
★★★★★ (187)  
\$61.20 ~~\$72.00~~ (15% off)  
Ad by Etsy seller

+ Add to cart More like this →



Hand-Crafted German Shepard Dog Weatherva...  
★★★★★ (329)  
\$34.95  
Free shipping  
Ad by Etsy seller  
Only 2 left — order soon

+ Add to cart More like this →



German Shepard  
★★★★★ (3)  
\$36.00  
Free shipping  
Ad by Etsy seller

+ Add to cart More like this →



German Shepard light up silhouette Sign , Neo...  
★★★★★ (5.7k)  
\$29.99 ~~\$39.99~~ (25% off)  
Ad by Etsy seller

+ Add to cart More like this →

# Aggregators always become ad platforms.

Google

clown mugs

View more in Google Ads →

Sponsored

 <p>Vintage Circus Clown Show...</p> <p><b>\$13.39</b></p> <p>Zazzle</p> <p>30-day returns</p> <p>11 oz · 4.5 in high</p>	 <p>mugs clowns circus</p> <p><b>\$11.85</b></p> <p>Zazzle</p> <p>30-day returns</p> <p>11 oz · 4.5 in high</p>	 <p>Crazy Clown Emoji Coffee...</p> <p><b>\$11.59</b></p> <p>Zazzle</p> <p>30-day returns</p> <p>11 oz · 4.5 in high</p>	 <p>French Clowns French Clown...</p> <p><b>\$10.79</b></p> <p>CafePress</p> <p>30-day retur...</p> <p>11 oz</p>	 <p>Custom Clown Text Mug</p> <p><b>\$13.92</b></p> <p>Zazzle</p> <p>30-day returns</p> <p>11 oz · 4.5 in high</p>	 <p>20% OFF</p> <p>Pumpkin Mug by Johanna...</p> <p><b>\$29.00</b></p> <p>Cuddle Decor</p> <p><b>\$23.20 with ...</b></p> <p>Ceramic · 5.3 in high · Fall</p>	 <p>Bunch Of Clowns Coffe...</p> <p><b>\$11.85</b></p> <p>Zazzle</p> <p>30-day returns</p> <p>11 oz · 4.5 in high</p>	 <p>1pc, Cute Clown Coffee...</p> <p><b>\$14.98</b></p> <p>Temu</p> <p>Get it by 7...</p> <p>17 oz · Ceramic · 1 mug · Summ...</p>
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# So Why Doesn't TeePublic have an API?

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TeePublic is an **aggregator**.

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**Aggregators** own customer attention.

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**APIs** allow content to proliferate to other sites.

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Other sites end up owning customer attention, not TeePublic.

# Thank You!

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Go subscribe to Stratechery!

Image courtesy of [bing.com/create](https://bing.com/create)

*yes, bing*

