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Our Step-By-Step Guide to Launching a Business

Networking Made Easy

According to Hit Podcaster

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Bat boy for the Savannah Bananas minor league baseball team.
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CHAPTER 1

BRAND AID

Find the who, what, and why to your entrepreneurial idea.

Start Your Own Business

HOW TO BUILD A BRAND

The difference between your product and your brand is simple: Your product is what you sell; your brand is what your product means in the marketplace. You need both to be a success.

You're really excited about your concept for a new product or service. But do you have a potential brand in the making? Unfortunately, it's a question too many small-business owners ask far too late, or never ask at all—not a good idea in a world full of savvy consumers and big companies that have mastered the branding game.

Great brands are all around us, and it's no accident they make us think of certain things. Think FedEx, and you think of overnight delivery. Apple brings to mind cutting-edge computer products, must-have phones, music, and now TV and wearable devices.

Even celebrities are brands. Would you describe Bradley Cooper the same way you would Jack Nicholson? Their differences—charming versus gruff, refined versus rough and rugged—helped define their particular acting "brands" and let the public get a grasp on their personas. Corporate brands are no different. They have their own personalities.

We like to categorize everything, whether we're talking about people, printers, or pizza places. Test this theory yourself. What draws you to one local business instead of another selling a similar product? One local restaurant might strike you as cute and inviting; another might make you lose your appetite without setting a foot inside—even though both restaurants serve the same type of food. You're not alone if you find yourself categorizing each business you pass.

As a startup entrepreneur, you'll be branding whether or not you're even trying. If you don't have a clear idea of what your new company is about, your potential customers will decide on their own—a risky move for a new company. Better to have a branding strategy in place before you hang up your shingle. However, before we start strategizing, let's answer the most basic question of all.

ADD PERSONALITY

Make your company's website more than just a boring online brochure by adding an e-newsletter or a monthly podcast from the founder—anything that conveys your brand's personality and humanizes your company in the eyes of potential customers. People want to know who they're buying from, especially if it's a new company. And if you're not offering this, remember your next competitor might be.

WHAT IS BRANDING, EXACTLY?

Branding is a very misunderstood term. Many people think of branding as just advertising or a really cool-looking logo, but it's much more complex—and exciting, too.

Branding is your company's foundation. It is more than an element of marketing, and it's not just about awareness, a trademark, or a logo. Branding is your company's reason for being, the synchronization of everything about your company that leads to consistency for you as the owner, your employees, and your potential customers. Branding meshes your marketing, public relations, business plan, packaging, pricing, customers, and employees.

Branding creates value. If done right, branding makes the buyer trust and believe your product is somehow better than your competitors'. Generally, the more distinctive you can make your brand, the less likely the customer will be willing to use another company's product or service, even if yours is slightly more expensive. "Branding is the reason why people perceive you as the only solution to their problem," says Rob Frankel, a branding expert and author of *The Revenge of Brand X: How to Build a Big Time Brand on the Web or Anywhere Else, Round 2* (Frankel & Anderson, 2010). "Once you clearly can articulate your brand, people have a way of evangelizing your brand."

Branding clarifies your message. You have less money to spend on advertising and marketing as a startup entrepreneur, and good branding can help you direct your money more effectively. "The more distinct and clear your brand, the harder your advertising works," Frankel says. "Instead of having to run your ads eight or nine times, you only have to run them three times."

Branding is a promise. At the end of the day, branding is the simple, steady promise you make to every customer who walks through your door—today, tomorrow, and 10 years from now. Your company's ads and brochures might say you offer

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speedy, friendly service, but if customers find your service slow and surly, they'll walk out the door feeling betrayed. In their eyes, you promised something you didn't deliver, and no amount of advertising will ever make up for the gap between what your company says and what it does. Branding creates the consistency that allows you to deliver on your promise over and over again.

CREATE A GREAT TEAM

Many companies, large and small, stumble when it comes to incorporating employees into their branding strategies. But to the customer making a purchase, your employee *is* the company. Your employees can make or break your entire brand, so don't ever forget them. Here are a few tips:

Hire based on brand strategy. Communicating your brand through your employees starts with making the right hires. Look to your brand strategy for help. If your focus is on customer service, employees should be friendly, unflappable, and motivated, right? Give new hires a copy of your brand strategy, and talk about it.

Set expectations. How do you expect employees to treat customers? Make sure they understand what's required. Reward employees who do an exceptional job or go above and beyond the call of duty.

Communicate, then communicate some more. Keeping employees clued in requires ongoing communication about the company's branding efforts through meetings, posters, training, and regular discussion. Never, ever assume employees can read your mind.

BUILDING A BRANDING STRATEGY

Your business plan should include a branding strategy. This is your written plan for how you'll apply your brand strategically throughout the company over time.

At its core, a good branding strategy lists the one or two most important elements of your product or service, describes your company's ultimate purpose in the world, and defines your target customer. The result is a blueprint for what's most important to your company and to your customer.

Don't worry; creating a branding strategy isn't nearly as scary or as complicated as it sounds. Here's how:

Step one. Set yourself apart. Why should people buy from you instead of the same kind of business across town? Think about the intangible qualities of your product or service, using adjectives from *friendly* to *fast* and every word in between. Your goal is to own a position in the customer's mind so they think of you differently than the competition. "Powerful brands will own a word—like Volvo [owns] *safety*," says Laura Ries, an Atlanta marketing consultant and coauthor of *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding: How to Build a Product or Service into a World-Class Brand* (HarperBusiness, 2002). Which word will your company own? A new hair salon might focus on the adjective *convenient* and stay open a few hours later in the evening for customers who work late—something no other local salon might do. How will you be different from the competition? The answers are valuable assets that constitute the basis of your brand.

Step two. Know your target customer. Once you've defined your product or service, think about your target customer. You've probably already gathered demographic information about the market you're entering, but think about the actual customers who will walk through your door. Who are these people, and what is the one thing they ultimately want from your product or service? After all, the customer is buying it for a reason. What will your customer demand from you?

Step three. Develop a personality. How will you show customers every day what you're all about? A lot of small companies write mission statements that say the company will "value" customers and strive for "excellent customer service." Unfortunately, these words are all talk and no action. Dig deeper and think about how you'll fulfill your brand's promise, and provide value and service to the people you serve. If you promise quick service, for example, what will "quick" mean inside your company? And how will you make sure service stays speedy? Along the way, you're laying the foundation of your hiring strategy and how future employees will be expected to interact with customers. You're also creating the template for your advertising and marketing strategy.

Your branding strategy doesn't need to be more than one page long at most. It can even be as short as one paragraph. It all depends on your product or service and your industry. The important thing is that you answer these questions before you open your doors.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Congratulations—you've written your branding strategy. Now you'll have to manage your fledgling brand. This is when the fun really begins. Remember, FedEx was once a startup with an idea it had to get off the ground, too. Here are some tips:

Keep ads brand-focused. Your promotional blitzes should be narrowly focused on your chief promise to potential customers. For example, a new bakery might see the warmth of its fresh bread as its greatest brand-building


"Combining my career as an
event planner and my
passion for travel
I saw the possibility to
do what I love."
- EDDIE DIAZ, Franchise Owner Since 2009

asset. Keep your message simple and consistent so people get the same message every time they see your name and logo.

Be ruthlessly consistent in all you do. Filter every business proposition through a branding filter. How does this opportunity help build the company's brand? How does this opportunity fit our branding strategy? These questions will keep you focused and put you in front of people who fit your product or service.

Shed the deadweight. Good businesses are willing to change their brands but are careful not to lose sight of their original customer base and branding message. Consider Starbucks, which changed the way it made lattes to speed up the process. "You have to give up something to build a brand," Ries says. "Good brands constantly get rid of things that don't work."

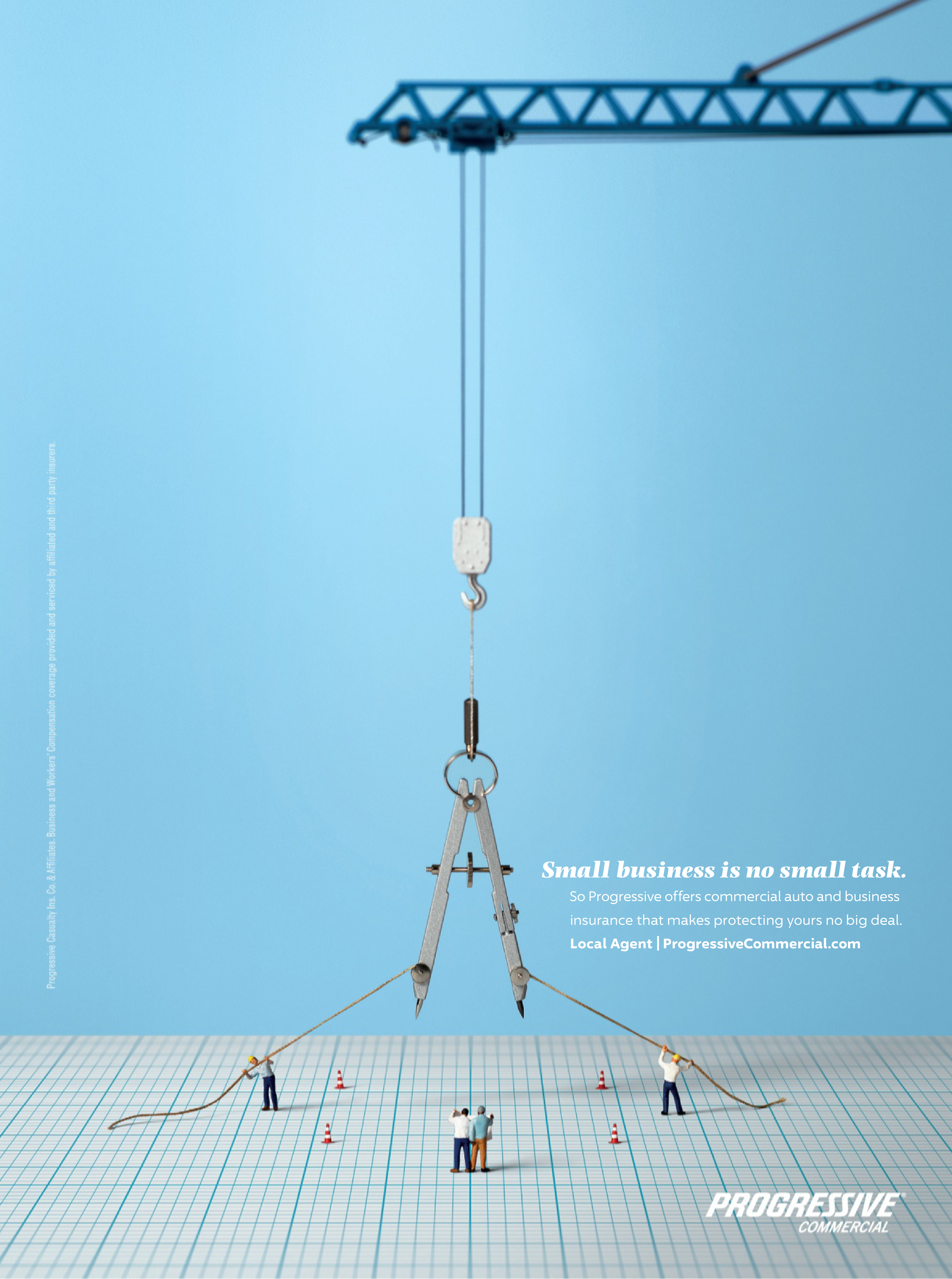
MANY HAPPY RETURNS?

It can be hard to put a dollar figure on what you're getting in return for your investment in branding. Branders talk about this dilemma in terms of brand equity: the dollar value your brand generates over decades in terms of the demand it drives and the customer loyalty it creates. Coca-Cola's brand equity, for example, is estimated in the tens of billions of dollars.

Think about conducting a simple brand audit at least once a year. This means looking at how your product or service is marketed and branded (your marketing messages, etc.), analyzing your brand positioning (i.e., asking customers what they think of your brand), and then comparing the two (your branding efforts versus customer perceptions) to see how well the two connect.

A simple customer survey with questions like "When you think about our company and our product, what words come to mind?" can tell you volumes about the strengths and weaknesses of your branding. A new coffee shop owner, for example, might think she serves the best coffee in town, while convenience or ambience–say, the type of music played over the sound system–turns out to be as much, or more, of a selling point from the customer's perspective. A brand audit will help keep you on track and build on what you already do well. Plus, it can help you tweak where you put your money and efforts, not just for branding but also marketing and your actual product.

There's a lot of work that goes into launching and building a world-class brand, but it pays off. Nike once ran its business out of the back of a car, but now it's a global brand worth billions of dollars. Think of your fledgling brand as a baby you have to nurture, guide, and shape every day so it grows up to be dependable, hardworking, and respectable in your customers' eyes. One day, your company's brand will make you proud. But you'll have to invest the time, energy, and thought it takes to make that happen.



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Customer Service

STOP DOING WHAT PEOPLE HATE

That's the philosophy **Jesse Cole** used to build the Savannah Bananas, an unusually popular (and weird) baseball team. And it can work for any business. **by JENNIFER MILLER**

Baseball is a game of tradition, and Grayson Stadium is as traditional as they come. The Savannah venue was built in 1926, back when game-day radio broadcasts were a new thing. The Boston Red Sox held spring training here, leading Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, and Jackie Robinson to round its bases. For three decades, a local high school also took Grayson's field for its annual Thanksgiving Day game against a military academy. And between 1984 and 2015, it was home to a minor league team called the Sand Gnats. This was all baseball in its classic form—orderly and staid, romanticized by purists.

Now? Things are a little different.

It's the bottom of the second inning at Grayson Stadium on a muggy midsummer night this past August, and baseball is briefly on pause. The local team is now called the Savannah Bananas, and its four pitchers are lined up along the first-base line in their bright yellow uniforms, thrusting their hips back

Players film a video to promote their upcoming playoffs.

Photographs Jason Frank

Cole in his trademark yellow tuxedo.


The team mascot is ready for game day.

and forth to "That's What I Like," by Bruno Mars. Alex Degen, an 18-year-old pitcher from the University of Kentucky, is really getting into it. *I got a condo in Manhattan*. Degen thrusts left. *Baby girl, what's hatnin'?* He thrusts right. Later, in the fourth inning, he'll hand out roses to little girls in the stands. In the seventh, he'll rip off his shirt atop the dugout.

And as he charms and preens, he'll be just one part of a general circus atmosphere. They'll toss oversize Dolce & Banana underpants into the crowd. A Summer Santa will drive a VW Bus around the bases. The break-dancing first-base coach will bust out his moves, and the team's official, on-the-payroll high-fiving kid will high-five as many fans as possible. "I was shell-shocked when I first saw the Bananas," says Degen, the pitcher, of his arrival in Savannah. "I was very skeptical. In college, baseball is serious. It took two weeks for me to realize this was fun."

It didn't come naturally to the team's owner, either. Like many of his peers, he was once a baseball purist. Then, once he started investing in teams, baseball nearly wrecked his life. He was forced to sell his house and empty his savings account. He and his wife were $1.8 million in debt and sleeping on an air mattress. Things were desperate. But out of desperation came innovation. "We had to dramatically change the type of business we were in," owner Jesse Cole says. "We needed to no longer be a baseball team; we needed to be an entertainment company."

That meant fixing any aspect of the fan experience that didn't inspire joy. And to his eye, there were many: from marketing to sales to stadium food to the sport itself. "Normal gets normal results," Cole says. "So I thought, *What would be abnormal at a baseball game? What will get people saying, 'I can't believe what I saw tonight?'*"

Cole started wearing a yellow tuxedo to every game (and often around town, too) to stand out. He reinvented everything he saw. And in the process, he built this new team at an old, worn-out ballpark into Savannah's hottest ticket. It's so hot, in fact, that the team saw 20 percent growth in total revenues last season in line with years of 20 to 25 percent year-over-year improvements. More than 4,000 people pack the stands every night. Savannah's mayor languished on the waitlist for more than a year before he was able to get season tickets.

As his team succeeded, Cole began crystallizing a philosophy he calls "fans first." The idea is simple. At every step, you put yourself in the shoes of your customers and your employees, and you ask: *Is their experience exciting or boring? Easy or complicated? Fun or frustrating?* And if at any point it's the latter, then you've got a problem. Now Cole is thinking even bigger. If "fans first" could work for baseball, why couldn't it work for any company in any industry? "For every company that wants to take care of its culture, you want the best possible fan experience," he says. "Stop doing what your customers hate."

So that's what the Savannah Bananas' chief banana is preaching. Every business is born out of tradition. But what good is tradition if it isn't making people happy?

Cole is 36 years old, six foot one, banana thin, and unapologetically devoted to his cause. He owns seven yellow tuxes and three yellow top hats, which he wears on rotation daily. His confidence might read as cockiness if he weren't such a goofball. "It was very Steve Jobs-esque, very Henry Ford," Cole says of what he'd done in Savannah. "If you asked people what they wanted [in 1900], they would have said faster horses. No one said that the iPod was best for people or that the car was best for people. And no one else realized there was a problem with baseball."

At first, Cole didn't either. He'd pitched at an NCAA Division I college and assumed he'd go on to play pro ball.

Then he tore his shoulder in his junior year. The injury was career ending, so he moved into coaching. “I had a big epiphany,” he says. “I hated watching the game.” Baseball, Cole realized, was painfully boring if you weren’t on the field.

But Cole wasn’t ready to let go. At 23, he became the general manager of the Gastonia Grizzlies, a team in North Carolina. And to understand the realm of baseball that Cole now occupies, it is important to pause here and understand the Grizzlies. Baseball is a many-tiered world, and Major League Baseball (with the New York Yankees, Los Angeles Dodgers, and so on) is at the top. Beneath that is Minor League Baseball (with its AAA, AA, and Single-A affiliate teams), which is followed by regional independent leagues (where players aspire to make the minor leagues). Then, at the very, very bottom, there are teams like the Grizzlies. They play in collegiate summer leagues—in this case, an organization called the Coastal Plain League—where college players who aspire to go pro can hone their skills (for no pay) while school’s out.

Bananas owner Cole is in the crowd for every game.

> *“For every company that wants to take care of its culture, you want the best possible fan experience,” Cole says. “Stop doing what your customers hate.”*

Collegiate summer teams can be thankless places. They are businesses; their owners would like to make money. But their players’ talent is of varying quality, which makes tickets a tough sell. When Cole joined the Grizzlies, he had no management experience and the Grizzlies had no prospects. The team averaged a scant 200 fans per game, had lost $100,000 the previous season, and had $268 in the bank. “I never forgot seeing that bank account and thinking, *What are we going to do?*” Cole recalls.

To answer his question, Cole returned to his epiphany from the previous year. Baseball was boring, and boring didn’t sell. So what did? He had an idea: Fun! What if the primary draw wasn’t hits and runs, but silly dancing and a dunk tank during the seventh-inning stretch? Between every inning, there could be a wacky promotion to amuse the crowd—a kid smashing a pie in his dad’s face, or a bunch of cheerleading grandmas. Lower-tier baseball has long included some of this stuff, but Cole wanted to make it the main attraction. Gastonia’s owner was incredulous but had nothing to lose. Cole took the lead.

The plan worked. Attendance skyrocketed until Gastonia ranked fourth in the country among its peers and was seeing six-figure growth. In 2014, at age 30, Cole purchased the team. Later that year, he and his new fiancée took a vacation to Savannah, where they went to see the city’s minor league team, the Sand Gnats, play at Grayson Stadium. As it happened, the Sand Gnats were leaving town due to lack of interest. In their departure, Cole spotted an opportunity to double down on his playbook. He could create a new team in Savannah, replicate his success from Gastonia, and own two booming teams. So in 2015, he worked out a deal: The Coastal Plain League (in which the Grizzlies played) sold Cole the expansion rights for a new team, and he installed it in Savannah’s Grayson Stadium.

But Cole, it seemed, was the only person in Savannah excited by summer collegiate ball. “The skepticism from the city was unbelievable,” he says. “We were trying to share our story”—and the success in Gastonia—“but no one knew who the Grizzlies were.” Cole remembers sitting around the stadium offices with his 24-year-old president and three 22-year-old interns calling every business in town, looking for sponsors. Nobody called back, which presented Cole with a catch-22. People needed to see the story to understand it, but to do that you needed to sell tickets. He couldn’t create an innovative fan experience without fans.

By January 2016, Cole’s personal and professional finances were a wreck. Cole still owned the Grizzlies, and he and his then fiancée (they have since married) had just finished building their dream house in North Carolina. There was no way to offload the Savannah team without taking a giant financial hit, so they had no choice but to sell the house, empty their savings, and move to Savannah. They set up in a dilapidated duplex and inflated an air mattress. Then they got to work. “We were going to look at all the problems in baseball,” Cole says, “and try to solve them.”

To drum up local interest, Cole put out a citywide call to


Fans go bananas for the Bananas.

name his new team. Only one good suggestion came in, but it was a winner. "We knew 1,000 percent the Bananas was it," Cole says. "You can't say 'Savannah Bananas' without laughing in your head a little bit." Savannah was laughing, too–but at Cole, not with him. "When we came out with the name locally, we were crucified. We got hate mail," he says. He was called an embarrassment on Twitter. People said he'd never sell a ticket. But Cole had faith. "When you create attention, you'll be criticized. But if you're not criticized, you're not doing anything."

He was right. When the Bananas' logo was revealed, it was so absurd–a rough-and-tumble banana wielding a bat–that it went viral. The team trended on Twitter. *Good Morning America* called. Merch sold like crazy. "Everyone knew who we were," Cole says.

Creative branding was only part of Cole's strategy. To fill seats, he needed to structurally rethink the fan experience. So he asked himself a question: *What do fans hate about attending a baseball game?* He had many answers. They hate the confusing tiers of ticket prices. They hate how much food costs. They hate the constant marketing.

To fix this, Cole created a new value proposition. Almost all tickets would be general admission and priced the same, and they came with unlimited burgers, dogs, chicken sandwiches, sodas, popcorn, and cookies. (Beer and a few other items would still cost extra.) Now nobody felt nickel-and-dimed, and he was able to charge $15 per ticket–far more than other teams, but still turning a profit. Every game would be full of surprises, with new gags and games. Players would line up to greet fans on the way into the stadium. And to market these new offerings, Cole decided to be as unpushy as possible: The team's aspiration would be to immediately wean itself off direct marketing.

"We shifted to a pure content approach," says Berry Aldridge, the Bananas' 26-year-old vice president. "And we're not going to ask you to buy. It's a pure give. Assume your buyer is smarter than you think, and they'll take the next step themselves."

To promote the 2019 season, for example, the team released a video of the players dancing to Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" while leading a horse around the infield. To promote the playoffs, it made a video of the team fake-fighting with a Mexican wrestler in the locker room. Efforts like this work so well that Aldridge didn't make a single cold call last year. Most games are sold out four to six months ahead of time. There's a 435-person waitlist for stadium club memberships, which include catered food and an open bar. And while you're on the waitlist, you're not languishing–because the only thing sports fans hate more than buying tickets is not being able to buy tickets. So twice a year, the team throws free events with food and drinks for waitlisters and the public.

"Keeping them engaged is better than just having them in the void," Aldridge says. Or as Cole says, "Don't talk about what you can't do. Talk about what you can do."

How can this apply outside baseball? Ask Chris Dalzell.

He's the owner of Shoreline Construction, which builds residential houses and commercial properties in the South Carolina Lowcountry. His customers are mostly high-net-worth people looking for second and third homes. After 13 years in business, Dalzell was doing fine, but he had a problem: "A lot of guys in town can produce the same product I can," he says. To stay alive, he's had to spend a lot of money on marketing. He'd long wondered how to distinguish himself from his competitors.

Then in 2017, Dalzell met Cole at an event. Dalzell was so taken with the Bananas' story that he later drove to Savannah for a Fans First Experience workshop, a one-and-a-half-day

Grayson Stadium in Savannah.

program that Cole started to teach CEOs how to turn customers into fans for life. While there, they broke down Dalzell's business by asking a version of the question Cole once asked himself: *What do home buyers hate about building a home?*

This got Dalzell thinking about every stage of the process. He saw that all of it—from design to contract to construction to post-closing—contained some tedium, and was therefore an opportunity to impress and delight his customers. So to start, he and Cole focused on the closing experience. Typically, when construction is done, clients walk through their new house with the builder and look for mistakes. Dalzell now realized what a buzzkill that was, especially on a day that was supposed to be about new beginnings. So he reimagined it as a "day one celebration"—a performance with an actual red carpet, a ribbon cutting, champagne, and gifts from local businesses. There would be no walk-through. Dalzell would just tell clients to move in; if they encountered problems or were unhappy with something, they could call his office and his team would come back.

When Dalzell returned to his construction office, he realized that he had to reorient his team to think about the customer, not just the job. "The hardest part is getting them to see that we can turn [a skeptical customer around] if we continue to exceed his expectations," he says.

To help, Dalzell adopted another of Cole's guidelines: Give your staff autonomy and creative license so they feel a sense of ownership over their roles. (This is what Cole does at the Bananas. "We have zero policies," Cole says. "We give them freedom, and we expect creativity.") So Dalzell invited his team to come up with ideas to wow clients, and they did. For a particularly finicky customer, Shoreline sent flowers on his anniversary. For a couple flying in to view the progress on their new home, Shoreline picked them up from their hotel in a limo, then delivered them to the unfinished frame of their house...where a catered dinner waited inside.

Since running programs like this, Dalzell says, Shoreline has been able to cut its traditional marketing budget significantly. "Our leads are coming from our customers," he says. "They're

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saying, 'You can't believe what Shoreline did for us.' "

Cole's philosophy, fans first, is all about serving the customer. But he believes it helps a company internally as well. In fact, he believes it's helped the Bananas players become better at baseball. He said this in 2018 while speaking to a business management class at Georgia Southern University, and the professor, Curtis Sproul, was immediately skeptical. "What happens in movies, where you take the lovable losers and put them in a great environment and they beat the Yankees—that doesn't happen in real life," Sproul says.

So Sproul wanted to test it. He compared the on-base percentage, plus slugging percentage, for every player in the Coastal Plain League over three years. He also looked at how players performed in college, both before and after they played in the league. The results were clear: Bananas players were the only ones in the league whose scores, when averaged together, showed a demonstrable improvement each year. "I was shocked when I saw it," says Sproul.

The results wouldn't have shocked a Bananas fan, though. Since its debut in 2016, the team has won its division twice and the league championships once. Last summer, it went 35 and 15.

"This is 100 percent making me a better player. I'm pitching much better here than in college," says Alex Degen, the dancing pitcher. "In school ball, I tend to get a lot more nervous."

Theories vary on what's causing this. "What else can it be

"This is 100 percent making me a better player. I'm pitching much better here than in college." —Alex Degen, the dancing pitcher

than how they manage the team, create an atmosphere for the players, allow them to be more themselves?" Sproul says. But Tyler Gillum, the Bananas' coach, thinks the team atmosphere helps players become more versatile; they "learn to go from moment to moment"—from entertaining to playing and back again—"without a loss of enthusiasm or focus," he says. Maybe that directly translates into going from offense to defense.

Still, despite the surprise results, Sproul worries that Cole's success isn't easily replicable. "Changing culture doesn't always work, and more often than not, organizational change fails," he says. He believes Cole has been so successful in Savannah because he started from scratch. And truth be told, now that the Bananas culture is established, Cole is having trouble adding people to it. He hired a former cruise director to be the team's director of fun, but the guy "was put off by our culture because he was trained with checks and balances," Cole says. The new hire kept asking what he was allowed to do. "I said, 'Anything,' and he didn't understand," Cole says. Generally, he's had more luck promoting from within, even if it means putting inexperienced employees into higher-level positions.

It also remains to be seen how sustainable a Bananas-style culture can be. In Gastonia, the fans-first philosophy fell apart when Cole left. He tried to train his replacement before selling the Grizzlies, but the organization lacked the necessary commitment and enthusiasm for his approach, and ticket sales declined.

Still, change like this can ripple out. Just look at the Coastal Plain League, where the Savannah Bananas play. Cole often describes himself as "the redheaded stepchild" of the organization, disdained by the tradition-minded owners of other teams. "They hate us; this is the truth," he says. But Justin Sellers, the league's COO and commissioner, doesn't sound so fiery. Cole says the Bananas are all about entertainment, and Sellers agrees. "I've learned to go down the rabbit hole [with Cole]," Sellers says, "and reserve the right to say no later on."

And the rest of the league has taken notice of Cole's success. At least half the teams now offer all-you-can-eat tickets, encourage more player-fan interaction, and routinely inject humor into the proceedings. One of the league's newest teams, founded in Macon, Ga., in 2018, even named itself the Macon Bacon. Sure, things like this may break with tradition. They may not be what baseball stadiums were intended for in the 1920s. But when tradition is bucked and it leads to profit, then tradition stops looking so important. Instead, it becomes an opportunity for leaders to look at their customers anew—and start to give them what they never knew they wanted.

Jennifer Miller is a journalist and novelist in Brooklyn.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BOBBI BROWN

What's in a Name?

WHEN THE BRAND IS YOU

After transforming the beauty industry and then leaving her namesake company, **Bobbi Brown** is leveraging her experience to create more new brands. by **JASON FEIFER**

What do you do for a second act, when your first act literally changed an industry? That was the question facing makeup powerhouse Bobbi Brown, whose simple line of lipsticks blossomed into the billion-dollar company Bobbi Brown Cosmetics.

She left it in 2016 with no plans for what to do next; all she knew was that she was done with corporate life. (The company had been acquired decades earlier by Estée Lauder.) "It wasn't freeing," she says. "It was like, *Oh, shit; now what?*" But she's since found an answer–expanding into new territories with a supplements line for Walmart (Evolution_18), an editorial site (justBOBBI), and a boutique hotel (The George), all of which launched in spring 2018. She also has a new podcast (*Beyond the Beauty*) and a film and photo studio (18Label). But the second act isn't really so different from the first act, she says: At its heart, everything an entrepreneur does is just about *doing*.

You made your name in a time before the phrase *personal brand* existed. Did you ever think of yourself as a brand?
Not even a little bit. I didn't know what a brand was back then. I was a makeup artist. I just wanted to make something that was better than what was on the market, and that I got really excited about.

I hear that a lot from famous people—that they weren't strategic about building themselves up. It's such a contrast to now, where people consciously treat themselves like brands.
A lot of them come to me for advice, and the only advice I have is: "OK, go home and just do it. Put your head down, figure out what it takes, and just do it. And if it doesn't work, then do it, but do it a little bit differently." Everyone wants to talk about doing it and planning and strategizing, but people are forgetting you actually have to do it. I'm a doer.

Did anybody give you that advice at your start?
No. The only advice I got at my start was from someone who said, "The world doesn't need another cosmetics company. You don't know what you're doing." So I said, *OK*, and I just kept doing what I was doing, which was making a lipstick that didn't smell bad, that was actually the color of your lips, and that wasn't dry or greasy. I met a chemist at a photo shoot and told him what I wanted, and he made it for me, and I said, "Wow; people are going to love this," and he said, "All right. I'll make it, you sell it for $15—you get $7.50, I get $7.50." I said, "Deal!" And that's how I started.

"The world doesn't need another cosmetics company" sounds dismissive, but I wonder if it's also good advice. Because the world *doesn't* need another cosmetics company, any more than it needs, say, another beverage company. Which means an entrepreneur really needs to make the case for what they're creating.
Right. When times were quiet, I thought, *Well, to make some extra cash, let me go into a salon and do makeup for women*. So I worked with mothers and aunts and sisters, and I would teach them makeup, and they'd be like, "Oh my God—I love this. It's so simple." And as my brand grew and my career grew, it just was common sense. My brand became the teaching brand.

You've said that if you wrote a business book, you'd call it *Duh*. Do you feel like, at its heart, business is actually quite simple?
Yes, and I find people waste time, energy, and money on things that don't matter.

So, I want you to walk into an imaginary business right now and tell people to stop doing things. What should they stop?
Well, first of all, stop putting your head down in your computer. At least once a day, raise your head, get some fresh air, and talk to people. And stop having so many meetings. Honestly, sometimes a discussion just takes two seconds.

You left Bobbi Brown Cosmetics in 2016, after 25 years of building the company. Now you're doing totally different things—supplements, lodging, content. Is that disorienting?
No. It's honestly no different. Because I'm someone who thinks about a project, thinks about what it is, how it could be better, how to really explain it to people, how to curate it, how to Instagram it, and how to visualize it. Doing Evolution_18 is the same thing I did when I was creating colors for the season or product categories. You know, you just make things up. An entrepreneur really is just someone who likes to make things up and likes to get them done.

Not everything you've tried since leaving Bobbi Brown Cosmetics has worked out, like a stint as a Yahoo beauty editor. Do you worry about failure?
I'm not afraid of failure. If something doesn't work out, I look at it and say, "OK. That was fun. That was interesting. This is why it didn't work." Because I always like to learn from it. I've done things where I say, "I don't want to do it again, but it was interesting to see."

I'd bet that's really freeing. When you're not afraid of failure, you're willing to take more risks.
Totally. Like, I've been given an opportunity to have a podcast. I don't know anything about interviewing people. I don't prep. I'm handed a piece of paper, I go into a room, and I just talk to the person—you know, anyone from Mickey Drexler to Jeff Raider to Joey Fatone. I'm not the smartest in the room, but I'm sure the most curious.

Speaking as someone who interviews people for a living, I can say: That's the right way to do it. If you use prewritten questions, you won't listen to what someone says and ask follow-ups.
Well, that's good to know. I don't look at them anyway!

If podcasting had existed at the very beginning of your career, do you think you would have done it the same way—just walk into a room and go?
No, not at all! I mean, the good thing about being experienced and getting older is that your confidence gets stronger. And honestly, after all these years, people want to know from me: *How do you become confident?* The only thing confidence is, is being comfortable in your skin. I'm comfortable to make mistakes. I'm comfortable to admit what I don't know. I just think it's interesting not knowing things, so long as you're not afraid to ask questions and say, "Wait; what do you mean?"

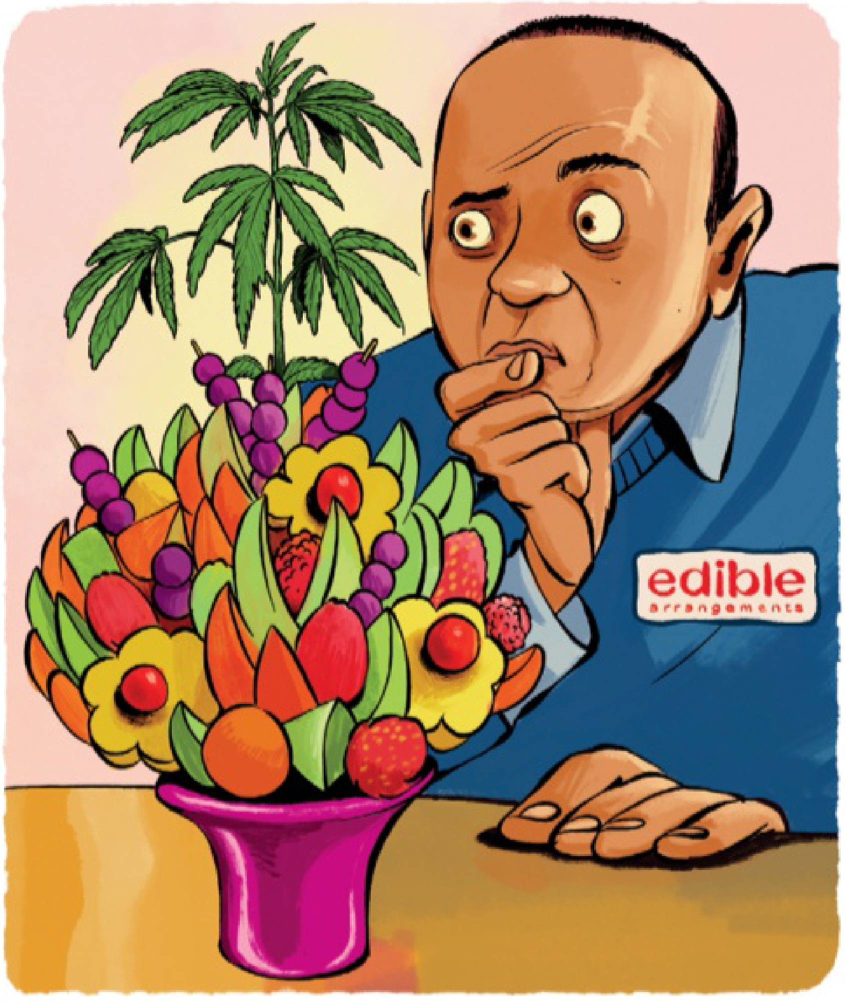
People would rather you ask the question and learn, rather than pretend you know it and don't.
Right, exactly. And for some reason, people think that to be a successful entrepreneur, you have the fairy dust: *Just sprinkle some on me!* And it's like, guys—what I have is that I just keep going forward.

Brand Name

SAME WORD, NEW OPPORTUNITY

It's easy to fear changes to your brand. It's harder (but more fulfilling!) to embrace them. That's why Edible Arrangements finally embraced a new definition of edibles. by JASON FEIFER

Tariq Farid thought he had a lock on the word *edible*. For more than 20 years, his company, Edible Arrangements, was famous for its bouquets of fruit and platters of chocolate-dipped fruit, and customers had begun casually referring to the company as simply Edible. In 2013, Farid went all in—trademarking the name Edible by itself and dropping Arrangements.



Then, in 2016, California passed Proposition 64, which legalized recreational marijuana. Farid read the text of the bill and was horrified: The word *edibles* was in there—familiar to any pot lover, and now enshrined into law to mean weed-laced food. *We can't let it happen*, he recalls thinking. He tried to fight it—and as he did, he learned an important lesson: Sometimes the greatest threats are opportunities in disguise.

This is an issue many industries grapple with, as consumer tastes and culture change. The beef industry, for example, has lobbied for laws to protect the word *burger* from plant-based companies like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods. Meanwhile, the dairy industry has tried to protect the word *milk* from oat, soy, and other plant-based competitors.

Farid felt similarly protective. Back in 1997, he owned a few flower shops in Connecticut and had developed an eye-catching product he called Delicious Designs. It was slices of fruit, speared onto sticks and arranged like flowers in a vase. As his team brainstormed a description for Delicious Designs, someone proposed the term *edible arrangements*. Everyone loved it so much that they changed the product's name—and from that, a successful national franchise company was born.

So when cannabis moved in on Farid's word, he was spooked. "I had never done marijuana, and didn't want anything to do with it," he says. He called his lawyer to develop a plan. Then he started lobbying, telling lawmakers that marijuana edibles were a modern-day version of cigarettes being marketed to kids.

Then, during one lobbying trip in 2017, someone told him this: "You can look at [the situation] two ways. You can look at it as a tsunami—and if it's a tsunami, get out of the way. Or you can look at it as a really nice wave—and go get your surfboard out."

Farid paused. *I may be fighting an uphill battle,* he thought. *What's the alternative?*

He decided to educate himself about cannabis. Farid took meetings with experts and traveled to Colorado to visit production facilities. He discovered CBD and other wellness-oriented products—stuff that doesn't get anyone high but still comes from cannabis and hemp. Farid heard from a friend whose mom uses CBD, "and for me, that word, *mom*, was like—oh!" he says. His own mom had been the first to predict that Edible Arrangements would be a hit. Farid believed in the wisdom of moms.

After his research, he saw a way to embrace this. He hired a team and partnered with a research university, and his company planted 40 acres of hemp to develop an edible hemp-based CBD powder. To sell it, he decided to go big. He wouldn't just create a product—he'd launch, he says, "a retail experience."

The new brand is called Incredible Edibles. It'll be a line of CBD products, but also a chain of stores that offers CBD-infused juices, smoothies, and other foods. The first locations open this year in California, North Carolina, and Connecticut.

Now he has some advice for other businesses that feel threatened by a changing culture. "Understand the threat," he says. "Look at it, study it. And you may just see a big opportunity."

Illustration Zohar Lazar

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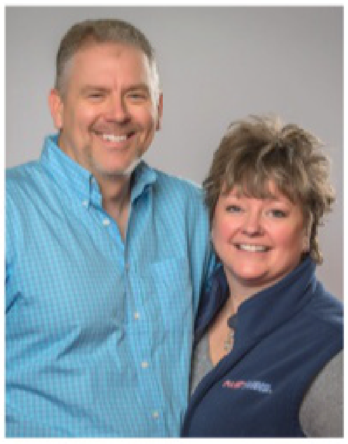

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CHAPTER

2

FUND YOUR DREAM

Finding money for your business.

Start Your Own Business

NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED

How to find and attract investors.

No matter what type of financing source you approach—a bank, a venture capitalist, or your cousin Lenny—equity financing is the type that creates those $1 billion "unicorn" valuations for startups that have received so much hype these past few years. In equity financing, you receive capital in exchange for part ownership of the company.

Equity financing can come from various sources, including venture capital firms and private investors. Whichever source you choose, there are some basics you should understand before you try to get equity capital. An investor's "share in your company" comes in various forms. If your company is incorporated, the investor might bargain for shares of stock. Or an investor who wants to be involved in the management of the company could come in as a partner.

Keeping control of your company can be more difficult when you are working with outside investors who provide equity financing. Before seeking investors, make the most of your own resources to build the company. The more value you add before you go to the well, the better. If all you bring to the table is a good idea and some talent, an investor may not be willing to provide a large chunk of capital without receiving a controlling share of the ownership in return. As a result, you could end up losing control of the business you started.

Don't assume the first investor to express interest in your business is a godsend. Even someone who seems to share your vision for the company may be bad news. It pays to know your investor. An investor who doesn't understand your business may pull the plug at the wrong time—and destroy the company.

HOW EQUITY WORKS

Because equity financing involves trading partial ownership interest for capital, the more capital a company takes in from equity investors, the more diluted the founder's control. Expect it to be between 25 and 75 percent equity in your company. The real question is: How much management are you willing to give up?

Don't overlook the importance of voting control in the company. Investors may be willing to accept a majority of the preferred (nonvoting) stock rather than common (voting) stock. Another possibility is to give the investor a majority of the profits by granting dividends to the preferred stockholders first. Or holders of nonvoting stock can get liquidation preference, meaning they're first in line to recover their investment if the company goes under.

> ***Before seeking investors, make the most of your own resources to build the company. The more value you add before you go to the well, the better.***

Even if they're willing to accept a minority position, financiers generally insist on contract provisions that permit them to make management changes under certain conditions. These might include covenants permitting the investor to take control of the company if the corporation fails to meet a certain income level or makes changes without the investor's permission.

Investors may ask that their preferred stock be redeemable either for common stock or for cash a specified number of years later. That gives the entrepreneur a chance to buy the company back if possible but also may allow the investor to convert to common stock and gain control of the company.

Some experts contend that retaining voting control is not important. In a typical high-growth company, the founder owns only 10 percent of the business by the time it goes public. That's not necessarily bad, because 10 percent of $100 million is better than 100 percent of nothing. The key is how valuable the founder is to the success of the company. If you can't easily be replaced, then you have a lot of leverage even though you may not control the business. But keep in mind, although you might think you're invaluable, you


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might not be in the eyes of your investors.

If the entrepreneur is good enough, the investors may find their best alternative is to let the entrepreneur run the company. Try not to get hung up on the precise percentage of ownership: If it's a successful business, most people will leave you alone even if they own 80 percent. To protect yourself, however, you should always seek financial and legal advice before involving outside investors in your business.

VENTURE CAPITAL

When most people think of equity financing, they think of venture capital. Once seen as a plentiful source of financing for startup businesses, venture capital–like most kinds of funding–is not easy to come by. It's one of the more popular forms of equity financing used to finance high-risk, high-return businesses. The amount of equity a venture capitalist holds is a factor of the company's stage of development when the investment occurs, the perceived risk, the amount invested, and the relationship between the entrepreneur and the venture capitalist.

Venture capitalists invest in businesses of every kind. Many individual venture capitalists, also known as angels, prefer to invest in industries that are familiar to them. The reason is that, while angels don't participate in the daily management of the company, they want to have a say in strategic planning to reduce risks and maximize profits.

Be aware that venture capital financing may involve a bit of luck. If you think we're trying to discourage you, we are. Money can be found for investing in your company, but the era of the venture capitalist happily handing out forklifts of money is over–especially for startups.

Venture capital is most likely to be given to an established company with an already proven track record. If you are a startup, your product or service must be better than sliced bread–with an extremely convincing plan that will make the investor a lot of money. And even that might not be good enough.

THE MANY FACES OF VENTURE CAPITAL

There are several types of venture capital. If you're going to pitch for some, first understand the differences–and where you are most likely to find small successes.

- **Private venture capital partnerships** are perhaps the largest source of risk capital. They generally look for businesses that have the capability to generate a 30 percent return on investment each year. They like to actively participate in the planning and management of the businesses they finance and have very large capital bases–up

AS NOT SEEN ON TV

By now, nearly everyone who has dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur has seen at least one episode of *Shark Tank*. During its 11 seasons, the show has featured many hopeful small-business owners pitching their products and ideas to a panel of "shark" investors, led by billionaire Mark Cuban. The sharks have invested in hundreds of businesses–and they've made many more offers that never closed. Just being on the show can boost a small business's presence and sales.

While pitching investors in real life isn't like the prescreened and rehearsed process you see on TV, there are lessons you can take from the demands the sharks make of the entrepreneurs–ones that will be useful in securing investors the traditional way. Here are five big ones:

The 10-second rule. The first 10 seconds of your pitch will set the tone and the impression investors have of you and your idea. Practice, practice, practice.

Be clear and concise. People who fail to get money or attention from the sharks typically lack clarity about their ideas and real conviction that they can succeed. State clear goals, clear plans, and projections, and make sure your passion comes through.

Know the problem and the market. The sharks are notorious for honing in on the problem a business is trying to solve and how big that problem is. That helps determine the likelihood of success. You don't need a product that's going to solve a worldwide problem to have a good idea. If your business solves a problem locally and the problem is substantial where you're located, that shows potential and your knowledge of the market. Be clear when you speak to investors about this.

Do the math–and do it well. Know the costs of making your product or running your business compared to the profits. Understand and be clear about your margins. Know the overall market size and a realistic share you can capture. Know what you plan to do with an investor's money. Commit all this to memory–and be able to back it up.

Be willing to listen and learn from feedback. On *Shark Tank*, the sharks almost always offer smart lessons, although they're often in the form of criticism or tearing apart (as sharks would) an idea they deem as unworthy of investment. If potential investors criticize or decide not to invest, listen for the advice in that criticism, and don't be afraid to ask for feedback about what would have changed their minds. Use that to improve your pitch.

to $500 million—to invest at all stages.

- **Industrial venture capital pools** usually focus on funding firms that have a high likelihood of success, such as high-tech enterprises or companies using state-of-the-art technology in a unique manner.
- **Investment banking firms** provide expansion capital by selling a company's stock to public and private equity investors. Some also have formed their own venture capital divisions to provide risk capital for expansion and early-stage financing.
- **Individual private investors**, also known as angels, can be friends and family who have only a few thousand dollars to invest or well-heeled people who've built successful businesses in a similar industry and want to invest their money as well as their experience in a business. The Angel Capital Network (ACE-Net, angelcapitalnetwork.com) is a nationwide, internet-based listing service that allows angel investors to get information on small, growing businesses looking for $250,000 to $5 million in equity financing.
- **Small business investment companies (SBICs)** are licensed and regulated by the Small Business Administration (SBA). SBICs are private investors who receive three to four dollars in SBA-guaranteed loans for every dollar they invest. Under the law, SBICs must invest exclusively in small firms with a net worth less than $18 million and average after-tax earnings (over the previous two years) of less than $6 million. They're also restricted in the amount of private equity capital for each funding. For a complete listing of active SBICs, contact the Small Business Investor Alliance, formerly the National Association of Small Business Investment Companies, at sbia.org.
- **Specialized small business investment companies (SSBICs)** are also privately capitalized investment agencies licensed and regulated by the SBA. They are designed to aid women- and minority-owned firms, as well as businesses in socially or economically disadvantaged areas, by providing equity funds from private and public capital. SSBICs are also restricted in the amount of their private funding. For information and a directory of active SSBICs, contact the National Association of Investment Companies at naicpe.com.

Most angels are not millionaires. Typically, they earn anywhere from $60,000 to $200,000 a year—which means there are likely plenty of them right in your backyard.

Before approaching any investor or venture capital firm, do your homework and find out if your interests match their investment preferences. The best way to contact venture capitalists is through an introduction from another business owner, banker, attorney, or other professional who knows you and the venture capitalist well enough to approach them with the proposition.

EARTH ANGELS

The unpleasant reality is that getting financing from venture capital firms is an extreme long shot. The pleasant reality is there are plenty of other sources you can tap for equity financing—typically with far fewer strings attached than an institutional venture capital deal. One source of private capital is an investment angel.

Originally a term used to describe investors in Broadway shows, *angel* now refers to anyone who invests their money in an entrepreneurial company (unlike institutional venture capitalists who invest other people's money). Angel investing has soared in recent years as a growing number of individuals seek better returns on their money than they can get from traditional investment vehicles. Contrary to popular belief, most angels are not millionaires. Typically, they earn anywhere from $60,000 to $200,000 a year—which means there are likely to be plenty of them right in your backyard.

Keep this in mind when crafting your pitch to investor angels: When angels reject a potential investment, it's often because: (1) They don't know the key people well enough or (2) they don't believe the owner and management have the experience and talent to succeed. If you can correct for these before your pitch, your odds of getting an investment are better.

WHERE ANGELS FLY

Angels can be classified into two groups: affiliated and nonaffiliated. An affiliated angel is someone who has some sort of contact with you or your business but is not necessarily related to or acquainted with you. A nonaffiliated angel has no connection with either you or your business.

It makes sense to start your investor search by seeking an affiliated angel since they are already familiar with you or your business and have a vested interest in the relationship. Begin by jotting down names of people who might fit the category of affiliated angel:

Professionals. These include professional providers of services you now use—doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, and so on. You know these people, so an appointment should be easy to arrange. Professionals usually have discretionary income available to invest in outside projects, and if they're not interested, they may be able to recommend a colleague who is.

Business associates. These are people you encounter during the normal course of your business day. They can be divided into four subgroups:

1 ■ Suppliers/vendors. The owners of companies who supply your inventory and other needs have a vital interest in your company's success and make excellent angels. A supplier's investment may not come in the form of cash but in the form of better payment terms or cheaper prices. Suppliers might even use their credit to help you get a loan.

2 ■ Customers. These are good contacts if they use your product or service to make or sell their own goods. List all the customers with whom you have this sort of business relationship.

3 ■ Employees. Some of your key employees might be sitting on unused equity in their homes that would make excellent collateral for a business loan to your business. There is no greater incentive to an employee than to share ownership in the company they work for.

4 ■ Competitors. These include owners of similar companies you don't compete with directly. If a competitor is doing business in another part of the country and does not infringe on your territory, they may be an empathetic investor and may share not only capital but information as well.

The nonaffiliated angels category includes:

Professionals. This group can include lawyers, accountants, consultants, and brokers whom you don't know personally or do business with.

Middle managers. Angels in middle management positions start investing in small businesses for three major reasons—either they're bored with their jobs and are looking for outside interests, they are nearing retirement, or they fear they are being phased out.

Entrepreneurs. These angels are (or have been) successful in their own businesses and like investing in other entrepreneurial ventures. Entrepreneurs who are familiar with your industry make excellent investors.

■ MAKE THE CONNECTION

Approaching affiliated angels is simply a matter of calling to make an appointment. To look for nonaffiliated angels, try these proven methods:

Advertising. The business opportunity section of your local newspaper or *The Wall Street Journal* is an excellent place to advertise for investors. Classified advertising is inexpensive, simple, quick, and effective.

Business brokers. Business brokers know hundreds of people with money who are interested in buying businesses. Even though you don't want to sell your business, you might be willing to sell part of it. Since many brokers are not open to the idea of their clients buying just part of a business, you might have to use some persuasion to get the broker to give you contact names. You'll find a list of local business brokers in the Yellow Pages under "Business Brokers."

Telemarketing. This approach has been called "dialing for dollars." First you get a list of wealthy individuals in your area. Then you begin calling them. Obviously, you have to be highly motivated to try this approach, and a good list is your most important tool. Look up mailing-list brokers in the Yellow Pages. If you don't feel comfortable making cold calls yourself, you can always hire someone to do it for you.

Networking. Attending local venture capital group meetings and other business associations to make contacts is time-consuming but can be effective. Most newspapers contain an events calendar that lists when and where these types of meetings take place.

Intermediaries. These are firms that find angels for entrepreneurial companies. They are usually called "boutique investment bankers." This means they are small firms that focus primarily on small financing deals. These firms typically charge a percentage of the amount of money they raise for you. Ask your lawyer or accountant for the name of a reputable firm in your area.

Matchmaking services. Matchmakers run the gamut from services that offer face time with investors to websites that post business plans for companies seeking investments. Fundraising success often hinges on the matchmaker's screening process. In other words: Does the matchmaker have a rigorous selection process, or does it take money from anyone regardless of funding prospects? While rates vary, starting at a few thousand dollars, a matchmaking service may charge as much as $25,000 to locate investors in addition to a percentage of funds raised. Before using any matchmaker, obtain a list of clients to assess recent successes and failures. A good place to start is AngelList or by googling "investor matchmaking."

Angels tend to find most of their investment opportunities through friends and business associates, so whatever method you use to search for angels, it is also important to spread the word. Tell your professional advisers and people you meet at networking events, or anyone who could be a good source of referrals, that you are looking for investment capital. You never know what kind of people they know.

GETTING THE MONEY

Once you've found potential angels, how do you win them over? Angels look for many of the same things professional venture capitalists look for:

Strong management. Does your management team have a track record of success and experience?

Proprietary strength. "Proprietary" does not necessarily mean you must have patents, copyrights, or trademarks on all your products. It just means that your product or service should be unusual enough to grab consumers' attention.

Window of opportunity. Investors look for a window of opportunity when your company can be the first in a market and grab the lion's share of business before others.

Market potential. Investors prefer businesses with strong market potential. That means a restaurateur with plans to franchise stands a better chance than one who simply wants to open one local site.

Return on investment. Most angels will expect a return of 20 to 25 percent over five years. However, they may accept a lower rate of return if your business has a lower risk.

If angels consider the same factors as venture capital companies, what is the difference between them? You have an edge with angels because many are not motivated solely by profit.

Angels invest in companies

for reasons that often go beyond dollars and cents. As a result, your appeal must not be only financial but also emotional. For example: “We need more than just dollars. We need you to bring your incredible wealth of experience to the table as well.” In the long run, that may be even more important than capital.

Particularly if your angel is a current or former entrepreneur, they may be motivated as much by the joy of helping a young business as by the money they stand to gain. Angels are more likely than venture capitalists to be persuaded by an entrepreneur’s persistence, mental discipline, and drive to succeed.

That is why it is important that your business plan convey a good sense of your background, experience–and drive. It should also spell out the total amount of financing you expect to need from startup to maturity.

What if your plan is rejected? Ask the angel if they know someone else your business might appeal to. If your plan is accepted, you have some negotiating to do. Be sure to spell out all the terms of the investment in a written agreement; get your lawyer’s assistance here. How long will the investment last? How will return be calculated? How will the investment be cashed out? Detail the amount of involvement each angel will have in the business and how the investment will be legalized.

Examine the deal carefully for the possibility of the investor parlaying current equity or future loans to your business into controlling interest. Such a deal is not made in heaven and could indicate you are working with a devil in angel’s garb.

Location, Location, Location

FOUNDERS, GO HOME

To attract the best investors and employees, startup founders once had to move to the coasts. But more and more, they're returning to their roots to build their businesses. by **MAGGIE GINSBERG**

Nobody really wanted to fund us," recalls Alex Kubicek, a soft-spoken Midwesterner with a shrewd scientific mind.

He's thinking back to 2013. He was 25 and had already banked dual degrees in physics and electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, as well as a master's in atmospheric science from top-tier UW-Madison. Then he'd created a hyperlocal weather observation company called Understory and landed it in the first-ever cohort of an accelerator in his hometown of Madison, which in turn sent him off on nearly a year's worth of pitching to Wisconsin-based investors. But nobody put in money.

Was his company the problem...or was it the stock of local investors? He decided it was the latter, and moved to Boston—where his fortunes changed. The local office of a hardware venture firm called Bolt invested first. San Francisco's True Ventures went on to lead a $1.9 million seed round. Understory was on its way.

But back home in Wisconsin, something was changing. That Madison-based accelerator, Gener8tor, helped launch another 42 startups in the region while Kubicek was gone. After a ton of work by a group of local entrepreneurs called StartingBlock Madison, American Family Insurance helped open a $55 million, nine-story building, with space set aside for entrepreneurial groups. Other venture capitalists started popping up around town, including Greg Robinson, a Bay Area investor who launched a Madison-based firm called 4490 Ventures. Then Robinson got the idea to lure one of Madison's homegrown startups back to town.

He asked Kubicek if he'd ever move Understory back to Madison. And Kubicek was intrigued. He was newly wed at the time and hungry for a better work-life balance—or, as he calls it, "tech and babies." There was plenty of talent to hire in Madison, and for far cheaper than he'd get in Boston. And the economics just made sense. "Our rent was going to be one-tenth what we'd get in Boston for a comparable space," he says. "We saw we could dramatically increase our runway, basically increase the life of the company by a year, by moving to Wisconsin."

So in February 2016, Understory came home. And across the nation, many others just like Understory have followed.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME. Dorothy knew it. So do entrepreneurs—but for a long time, there was no place to get funded like in California, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas, where companies receive 82 percent of the nation's total venture capital. So the great startup migration was born. Founders would move to the coasts, enduring high operating

Photographs Amy Lombard

Understory's Alex Kubicek back home in Wisconsin with his weather device.

costs in exchange for access to investors and top talent.

But in the past few years, smaller cities across the country have gone through the same transformation that Madison did. "There's typically a small band of really highly influential and dedicated people who push through this groundswell of attention around startups in their community, and it starts to fall like dominoes," says David Hall, managing partner at Revolution's Rise of the Rest, a seed fund that focuses on startups in smaller markets. It could be a politician, a university, an accelerator, an incubator, a corporation, a private investor, or an influential founder. In each city, some combination of these parties comes together to foster the growth of its own ecosystem—investors, founders, and talented employees interested in the startup world.

And that, Hall says, has begun to reverse the migration. Some startups that left town are coming back home. And the next generation of founders aren't all leaving in the first place. In 2018, VC investment rose in 33 states and Washington, D.C.

Hall is a big fan of this change. "If you're going to start a company, and given the strong and harsh demands of entrepreneurship, you want to start it in the easiest, most flexible, and cheapest place possible. And I think going home enables you to do that," he says. When founders move to the Valley or New York, they often think they're going to build a great network—but, Hall says, it's often extremely difficult to connect in these areas, where scores of entrepreneurs are clamoring for access to the same people. Back home, however? Founders are *already* deeply networked. And networks, he says, are one of the most overlooked tools in building a business.

That's why Maxeme "Max" Tuchman kept her company in Miami. She's the cofounder and CEO of Caribu, a video-sharing platform that allows caregivers and kids to read books together remotely. When she began fundraising, she went to San Francisco to meet investors—and each one of them required her to move to the Bay Area. She was tempted; she really wanted the money. But then she considered what she'd be giving up.

"I knew the woman who was writing about tech at the *Miami Herald*. I knew the woman who was running the Cambridge Innovation Center in Miami," she says. And it went on: She knew the heads of local incubators and conferences; she was connected to local immigrant and female entrepreneur communities with fierce hustle, which she knew she wouldn't find in the notoriously white, male Silicon Valley. "They were all part of my network from growing up," says Tuchman. "And I was like, 'We need to build and grow here. We have so many resources at our fingertips.'"

So she stayed—becoming, as she says in her very South Floridian way, "a big dolphin in a small pond." It's meant getting less investment money, but she sees the trade-off as well worth it. "Why would I give that up to live in cities I can't afford to live in, where the talent is too expensive and leaves me the second a better job comes along, where half the money I raised goes to office space?"

> ***"Why would I live in cities I can't afford to live in, where the talent is too expensive... and where half the money I raise goes to office space?" —Maxeme Tuchman***

Detroit native Nathan Labenz went through a similar realization. He left town for Harvard in 2002, with no intention of moving back. (Detroit, after all, wasn't looking good back then.) He eventually made his way to San Francisco, where in 2012 he founded Waymark, an online "make your own commercial" video template company, with a quarter million dollars of Silicon Valley legend Tim Draper's money. Four employees later and halfway through a $2 million seed fundraising goal, Labenz was shocked to read that Twitter was opening an office in, of all places, Detroit. He dug deeper and found that Quicken Loans was also creating an entrepreneurial center in his hometown through its venture arm, Detroit Venture Partners. Labenz had a connection there. He gave the guy a call. "I basically said, 'If you guys are there and you're making an investment, maybe it would make sense for us to make a move.'"

Detroit Venture Partners put together an offer, but when Labenz floated it past his Bay Area investors, most said they wouldn't fund him if he moved. They just didn't feel they could help guide his company from across the country, and they didn't think he'd find top talent to work for him—understandable, Labenz says. He moved home anyway.

At first, he says, "it was kind of like living in the ruins of a fallen civilization. You could see straight through these buildings because the windows were blown out." But soon things took off.

Not only did Labenz learn Detroit was rife with top candidates for hire, but his hometown's revitalization efforts are creating the kind of place that people want to be. Quicken Loans continues to support startups and serves as a talent magnet in itself. Of Waymark's now 25 employees, a third relocated from other parts of the country, including a former Squarespace and Apple product designer. Another Detroit native who was working in film production in Los Angeles came home and joined Waymark. The business culture is more open than in his previous big cities, vacant buildings are filled, and the restaurant scene is booming. "It's not the biggest city in the world," he says, "but it has a critical density now that makes it feel alive."

"GREAT ENTREPRENEURS can start great businesses anywhere," Hall says. It's an encouraging message, but of course, that doesn't mean it'll be easy. Hall's fund, Rise of the Rest, has become famous for its bus tour. It pulls into a city, hosts a pitch competition, and funds the winners as well as others it meets before or after the appearance. Past stops have included Albuquerque, Dallas, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and dozens of others. But its bus doesn't pull up just *anywhere*. Rise of the Rest conducts six months of groundwork ahead of time, making sure the cities it chooses have reached a certain point in their entrepreneurial evolution. To be frank: Not all cities are there yet.

But there are always exceptions. For example, Morehead, Ky. (population 7,634), is hardly a bustling entrepreneurial hot spot. But after a decade working in New York and Washington, D.C., on various sustainable energy projects, University of Kentucky grad Jonathan Webb felt that this place, in the heart of unemployment-ravaged coal country, was uniquely positioned to tackle three whoppers of problems—jobs, food insecurity, and climate change.

In 2017, Webb founded a sustainable indoor farming company called AppHarvest. (That's App as in "Appalachia.") Currently, Webb says, most of us eat produce that's trucked nearly a week. But it's possible to get to 70 percent of the United States in a day's drive from Kentucky, which makes it the perfect place to centralize production and cut costs of distribution. Now his company is building a nearly 3,000,000-square-foot greenhouse that he says will create 285 full-time, permanent jobs and 100 construction jobs.

"I've spoken at Georgetown Law School twice since founding AppHarvest, and I've tried to encourage folks, 'Go back to your communities,' " Webb says. "You're gonna have your mayor, who's reaching out to the governor, who's reaching out to your congressman. If you're starting a company in San Francisco, no one cares what happens to you in one or two years. But if you go back home, people care. They're going to be there, working to solve problems with you."

Webb isn't the only one who came back home to Kentucky. He lured his CFO back home from New York, his COO back home from Beijing, and his vice president of development back home from Washington, D.C. Then he lured money: Rise of the Rest provided seed and follow-on funding, as did ValueAct Capital, whose Jeff Ubben joined the AppHarvest board. The biggest boost of all came from Equilibrium Capital starting last May, in the form of what's now a $100 million, all-cash equity investment to fund construction of the greenhouse.

"I have 15 of the most talented people in this industry from around the world in the other room, and I'm in a rural town in Appalachia," Webb says, phoning in from a stakeholder meeting. "It's absolutely remarkable. It really does almost bring tears to my eyes."

BACK IN MADISON, Understory's Kubicek is feeling a lot of local pride. He's moved his 30 employees to a larger building with four times more space and 100 percent more windows to make way for the 10 additional staff he expects to hire by year's end. He's now officially living the "tech with babies" life, with two children at home. This spring, he closed his $5.25 million Series B round, which included Wisconsin investors (as well as Rise of the Rest, which also invested in his growth round). And Kubicek is looking to mentor other local founders. "The area is so successful because you have people who've had a startup and succeeded, and they can give back," he says.

That last part will be especially important to small cities. Because as many founders move home, a financial irony still remains. "Too often we see this dynamic where Midwest investors are buying the one-way plane tickets that finance our brain drain," says Joe Kirgues, one of the cofounders of Gener8tor, the accelerator that gave Understory its start.

The problem is multilayered. The Midwest is gaining investors, but it's sending lots of its money outside the region—in fact, 47 percent of investment commitments for coastal venture firms come from Midwestern investors, but only 12 percent of their capital is directed back to the Midwest in return. Also, the Midwest still exports most of its work. According to a June 2019 Brookings Institute report, the region produces almost a third of the nation's research and development, new patents, and top talent, but it sees only a tiny fraction of venture capital.

If a company *does* stay in the Midwest, it often attracts coastal investors. For example, last year Madison-based Propeller Health was acquired by San Diego's ResMed for $225 million, but it had almost no local angel investments and zero local investors. That meant no Madison-based investors got a big return that they could invest in the next local startup. The hometown hero hit it big, but its hometown missed out.

This is why Kirgues and his cofounders feel such a mission with their accelerator. They've spread it to 18 regional cities, including Minneapolis, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati. And while they're proud to see their founders succeed, it's bittersweet when one of them leaves town, like Understory once did. "We have a real opportunity, and a real challenge, to make sure our communities are giving themselves the best chance to participate in tomorrow's economy," says Kirgues.

In other words, the community needs to build something worth coming home to.

Maggie Ginsberg is a writer in Madison, Wisc.

Tap Your Network

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW

When I lost my job, I felt like I lost everything. But I hadn't. Here's how I built a network that helped me rebound even stronger—and build a multimillion-dollar podcast business.

by JORDAN HARBINGER

IN 2018, I had my dream gig: I hosted a podcast that reached millions of listeners and gave me access to the world's most inspiring entrepreneurs. Then my relationship with my business partners fell apart, and they emailed me to say I was fired. With that, I lost my livelihood, my calling, and my very sense of identity.

For weeks, I sat on my couch dreaming up ways to reclaim my show. But I couldn't; it was gone. Then I realized there was something I *hadn't* lost: my relationships! I'd met incredible people throughout my career. And as I reached out to them, they'd become the insurance policy I didn't even know I had—an insurance policy that would save me when I needed it most.

In turn, these people made me realize the full power of relationships and the importance of cultivating them.

At first, after being fired, I didn't entirely know what to say to my network. I settled on total openness, because what I needed most was guidance. In dozens of emails and phone calls, I told friends and colleagues about my troubles. In return, they gave me support and perspective. One of my mentors, a broadcasting veteran, helped me see that if I'd been successful once, I could do it again—and more quickly this time. Another close friend, a serial entrepreneur, encouraged me to move on rather than spend time and energy recovering what I'd had.

I took their words to heart and decided to launch a new podcast. (It's called *The Jordan Harbinger Show*, and it explores psychology, success, and entrepreneurship.) I'd need to rebuild my entire brand, audience, and infrastructure—with no startup capital. So again, I turned to my network. Now I needed their help.

That didn't come easy; asking for help has always made me feel needy and burdensome. But I came up with specific requests for specific people, and I was blown away by the response. Peers lent me their customer service and marketing staffs. Friends spread the word about my new show. I realized that asking for help is a profound, essential act of vulnerability. It made my relationships deeper and more meaningful. We were all in this together. And the results were amazing: With my network's help, the new show quickly rose in the podcast charts. We now enjoy six million downloads per month, generating a seven-figure revenue.

The experience made me reflect on something an old colleague said. He described networking as "digging the well before you're thirsty"—that is, constantly cultivating trust and loyalty with the people around you, with no immediate expectation of return. I'd done a version of this in my career, though never strategically. Now I understood its full value and decided to double down.

I created a system I call Connect Four. Every day, I text four people from the bottom of my text message inbox to reconnect. "Hey! Been a while," I'll write. "What's the latest with you?" We rekindle our connection, and I try to spot an opportunity to be of service. For example, I recently introduced a talented freelance writer to an investor friend who's planning a book, and I connected two newly engaged friends to the best wedding planner I know.

To stay on top of my communication, I use a CRM called Contactually. It's made for real estate agents, but I find it useful. Tools like this help me track my emails, follow-ups, and scheduled conversations, so I can follow through on my commitments over long periods of time. That might sound like overkill, but once I learned how important consistency and breadth were in my relationship building, I realized I'd need to implement strong processes to manage it.

Now, with these habits, I'm constantly engaging and expanding my network. I think of it as a premium I pay (and that I love to pay!) for my insurance policy today. It'll help me in ways I can't possibly imagine tomorrow.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM DILLON (RIGHT); PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HARTFORD (LEFT)

Finding Investors

FIRST, GET INVESTORS—THEN, MAKE THE PRODUCT?

When she set out to launch the new paint brand Clare, **Nicole Gibbons** was told to build first and raise money later. But to really create the startup she wanted, she'd have to go in reverse.

by STEPHANIE SCHOMER

As an interior designer, Nicole Gibbons was used to friends asking for decorating advice. And in 2016, one needed help selecting paint, so Gibbons consulted a well-regarded brand's website—and found it impossible to navigate. The lightbulb went off: She could create a direct-to-consumer paint brand that offers a curated range of colors, an algorithm to point shoppers toward their ideal shade, and a simplified way to sample hues. But her interior design business was already a full-time job, so Gibbons didn't move forward until, she says, "I woke up on New Year's Day 2017 and was like, *It's now or never.*" Here's how she went on to build Clare, raising money before she ever had a product to sell.

1 Go all in.
After deciding to build a startup, she talked with paint-industry insiders to research the space. "Someone who had spent decades in R&D told me I was onto something," Gibbons says. "That was the vote of confidence I needed." She'd been running a successful interior design business (which in turn landed her regularly on Oprah Winfrey's network and morning talk shows), but she hit pause on it all and lived on savings for a year while she researched and ideated.

2 Find a community.
Gibbons joined the female coworking space The Wing and used it as her prelaunch home base. "It was a critical part of my journey, being surrounded by all these other entrepreneurs. We leaned on each other." There, she met investor Susan Lyne, who told Gibbons that it's difficult to raise money pre-product. "But I knew the business was too capital-intensive to do that," Gibbons says—so she set out to do the raise early anyway.

3 Brand yourself.
Lyne had advised Gibbons that she'd need *something* to show investors. So she hired a designer to create branding, and consulted a baby-naming website to find her startup's identity. "Paint companies have these masculine names—Benjamin Moore, Sherwin-Williams—and I wanted this brand to feel approachable and human," she says. She liked the sound of "Clare," and loved it when she learned of its synergistic origins: It comes from the Latin word for "bright and brilliant."

4 Look for partners.
Before creating a product, Gibbons wanted to build the infrastructure that would enable her company to thrive. So for eight months, she worked to line up partners in supply chain, paint chemistry, and manufacturing (so she could build better paint rollers and brushes). "It took time to visit factories, visit trade shows, price out different vendors," she says. "I was very well-connected in the design world, but the startup world was new."

5 Get what you need.
By September 2017, Gibbons was ready to pitch investors. Susan Lyne, whom she'd met at The Wing, was impressed enough to offer contacts—and Gibbons went on to pitch roughly 30 firms and raise a combined $2 million from four of them. "It goes to how confident I was," she says. "When people said no, I didn't think it was because my idea was bad. I just knew they weren't the right investor. But often, they'd connect me to *another* investor." Seven months after closing the round, Clare launched its first product, buoyed by an aggressive PR strategy that led to press coverage. "It was like instant product-market fit," Gibbons says. "We weren't reinventing a category—we were just making it better."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CLARE

CHAPTER

3

GOOD OPPORTUNITY

Is there a perfect franchise for you?

The List

A DREAM FOR ANY BUDGET

We rank the top franchise opportunities for less than **$50K**, **$100K**, or **$150K**.

Compiled by TRACY STAPP HEROLD

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES/MIKROMAN6

There's more variety than ever in the world of franchising, from the types of businesses being franchised to their price tags. That's right–opening a franchise doesn't have to cost a fortune. There are hundreds of opportunities, in a wide variety of industries, that can be started for less than you might expect. To see what we mean, just check out our lists of the top franchises that can be started for less than $50,000, less than $100,000, and less than $150,000.

These franchises are ranked based on the scores they received in *Entrepreneur's* 2020 Franchise 500 ranking, our comprehensive analysis that looks at more than 150 data points in the areas of costs and fees, size and growth, franchisee support, brand strength, and financial strength and stability. One note: A company's placement within a particular cost tier does not mean that all franchisees will be able to start their business for less than that amount, but simply that it is realistically possible for some. For reference, we've listed the full initial investment range from each company's franchise disclosure document (FDD).

Remember also that this ranking is not intended as a recommendation of any particular company. Whatever you're looking to spend, it always pays to invest your time in carefully researching any opportunity you're considering. Read the company's FDD, consult with an attorney and an accountant, and talk to current and former franchisees to find out if the franchise is right for you.

TOP 100 FRANCHISES FOR LESS THAN $50,000

1 Jan-Pro Franchising International
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$4.2K-$54.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
9,155/0

2 Anago Cleaning Systems
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$11.3K-$68.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,692/0

3 RE/MAX
Real estate
STARTUP COST
$40K-$284K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
8,361/0

4 Stratus Building Solutions
Environmentally friendly commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$4.5K-$72.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,787/0

RE/MAX

5 Cruise Planners
Travel agencies
STARTUP COST
$2.3K-$23.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
3,061/1

6 Dream Vacations
Travel agencies
STARTUP COST
$1.8K-$20.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,432/0

7 Rooter-Man
Plumbing, drain, and sewer cleaning
STARTUP COST
$46.8K-$137.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
666/29

8 Realty One Group
Real estate
STARTUP COST
$49.3K-$222.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
189/11

9 NextHome
Real estate
STARTUP COST
$14.5K-$212.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
361/0

10 Goosehead Insurance Agency
Property and casualty insurance
STARTUP COST
$41.5K-$116.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
535/0

11 Vanguard Cleaning Systems
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$5.5K-$36.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
3,239/0

12 Estrella Insurance
Auto, home, and business insurance
STARTUP COST
$12.3K-$84K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
152/0

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF RE/MAX

13 Pillar To Post Home Inspectors
Home inspections

STARTUP COST
$37.1K-$45.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
577/0

14 Chester's
Chicken

STARTUP COST
$12.4K-$287.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,286/0

15 Leadership Management International
Leadership and organization training and development

STARTUP COST
$20K-$27.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
458/0

16 Jackson Hewitt Tax Service
Tax preparation

STARTUP COST
$45.1K-$110.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
3,922/1,857

17 My Gym Children's Fitness Center
Early-learning/fitness programs

STARTUP COST
$36.8K-$277.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
694/0

18 Skyhawks Sports & Supertots Sports Academy
Sports camps and programs

STARTUP COST
$30K-$71.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
102/65

19 Snapology
STEAM education programs

STARTUP COST
$40.4K-$214.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
142/2

20 American Poolplayers Association
Recreational billiard leagues

STARTUP COST
$20.5K-$28.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
316/8

21 Jazzercise
Group fitness classes, conventions, apparel, and accessories

STARTUP COST
$2.4K-$17.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
8,560/2

22 Soccer Shots Franchising
Soccer programs for ages 2 to 8

STARTUP COST
$41K-$53.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
223/9

23 Brightway Insurance
Property and casualty insurance

STARTUP COST
$42.3K-$178.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
190/1

24 Window Gang
Window, gutter, roof, and dryer-vent cleaning, pressure washing, chimney sweeping

STARTUP COST
$34.4K-$81.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
104/117

25 Lendio Franchising
Small-business financing

STARTUP COST
$30.2K-$117.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
69/0

26 SafeSplash/ SwimLabs/Swimtastic
Child and adult swimming lessons, parties, summer camps

STARTUP COST
$44.5K-$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
154/9

27 STEM For Kids
Biomed, coding, business, and engineering programs for ages 4 to 14

STARTUP COST
$19.9K-$48.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
97/5

28 Property Management Inc.
Commercial, residential, association, and vacation property management

STARTUP COST
$22.8K-$175.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
247/1

29 Destination Athlete
Youth athletic equipment, apparel, fundraising, and other services

STARTUP COST
$28.3K-$120.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
96/2

30 Drama Kids International
After-school drama classes and summer camps

STARTUP COST
$33.8K-$68K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
238/0

31 H&R Block
Tax preparation, electronic filing

STARTUP COST
$31.6K-$149.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
3,877/6,388

32 BirthdayPak
Direct-mail advertising

STARTUP COST
$29.5K-$144.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
27/2


Snapology

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SANPOLOGY

33 Sunbelt Business Brokers
Business brokerages
STARTUP COST
$43.5K-$104K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
167/0

34 Challenge Island
Educational enrichment programs
STARTUP COST
$48.3K-$62.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
101/3

35 ActionCoach
Business coaching
STARTUP COST
$47.9K-$189.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
788/2

36 Aladdin Doors Franchising
Garage-door installation and repairs
STARTUP COST
$32.4K-$99.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
43/2

37 National Property Inspections
Home and commercial property inspections
STARTUP COST
$40.7K-$43K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
215/0

38 Kinderdance International
Children's dance, gymnastics, fitness, and yoga programs
STARTUP COST
$18.1K-$46.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
161/2

39 ShelfGenie Franchise Systems
Custom pull-out shelving for cabinets and pantries
STARTUP COST
$45.1K-$95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
143/46

40 Proforma
Printing and promotional products
STARTUP COST
$5K-$59.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
637/0

41 Sit Means Sit Dog Training
Dog training
STARTUP COST
$49.8K-$145.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
137/0

42 The Alternative Board (TAB)
Peer advisory boards, business coaching
STARTUP COST
$48.6K-$97.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
290/25

43 Discovery Map International
Visitor-information maps and guides
STARTUP COST
$35.95K-$45.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
131/4

44 Motto Mortgage
Mortgage brokerages
STARTUP COST
$47.8K-$68.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
100/0

45 Parker-Anderson Enrichment
Enrichment programs
STARTUP COST
$15.98K-$81.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
18/1

46 SuperGlass Windshield Repair
Windshield repair, glass scratch removal, headlight lens repair
STARTUP COST
$18.7K-$84.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
332/0

47 Parisi Speed School
Youth sports performance training
STARTUP COST
$13.3K-$155.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
95/0


Kinderdance International

48 Aire-Master of America
Restroom odor control, scent branding, and commercial hygiene services
STARTUP COST
$40.5K-$145.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
108/7

49 Buildingstars International
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$2.2K-$53.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
799/6

50 Foliage Design Systems
Interior plant sales, leasing, and maintenance
STARTUP COST
$44.4K-$64.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
25/3

51 Atax Franchise
Tax preparation, business services
STARTUP COST
$17.5K-$76.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
43/1

52 Class 101
College planning and educational services
STARTUP COST
$45.9K-$63.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
42/1

53 Payroll Vault Franchising
Payroll and workforce management services
STARTUP COST
$49.1K-$74.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
43/1

54 TSS Photography
Youth sports, school, and event photography
STARTUP COST
$20.4K-$74.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
179/0

55 Abrakadoodle
Art-education programs for children
STARTUP COST
$38K-$81.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
487/2

56 TGA Premier Sports
Youth sports programs
STARTUP COST
$18.8K-$68.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
121/4

57 Computer Troubleshooters
Technology consulting and services for small businesses
STARTUP COST
$12.2K-$29.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
250/3

58 Hi-Five Sports Franchising
Youth sports programs
STARTUP COST
$17.9K-$388.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
15/3

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF KINDERDANCE INTERNATIONAL

59 Amazing Athletes
Educational sports programs
STARTUP COST
$30.7K-$61.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
119/11

60 Synergy HomeCare
Nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$38.9K-$159.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
331/0

61 Surface Specialists
Bathtub repair and refinishing, tub liners, bath remodeling
STARTUP COST
$43.2K-$56K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
48/0

62 The Patch Boys
Drywall repair
STARTUP COST
$45.5K-$66K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
77/0

63 Mint Condition Franchising
Commercial cleaning, building maintenance
STARTUP COST
$4.6K-$32.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
376/0

64 ACFN
Automated teller machines
STARTUP COST
$39.1K-$64K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
277/0

65 Mr. Sandless/ Dr. DecknFence
Interior and exterior sandless wood refinishing
STARTUP COST
$26.8K-$87.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
225/9

66 Acti-Kare
Nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$31.9K-$52.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
132/0

67 Club Z! In-Home Tutoring Services
In-home tutoring
STARTUP COST
$33.9K-$52.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
388/0

68 Coverall
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$16.5K-$51.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
8,238/0

69 Coffee News
Weekly publication distributed at restaurants and waiting areas
STARTUP COST
$10.8K-$11.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
685/8

70 Rhea Lana's Franchise Systems
Children's consignment events
STARTUP COST
$20.6K-$39.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
93/3


Chefs For Seniors

71 Jantize America
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$8.2K-$49K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
115/0

72 NZone Sports of America
Sports leagues and programs for ages 2 to 15
STARTUP COST
$41.1K-$58.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
47/0

73 Home Cleaning Centers of America
Residential and commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$43.3K-$45.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
32/0

74 Assist-2-Sell
Discount real estate
STARTUP COST
$24K-$45.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
140/1

75 One Sports Nation/ Fun Size Sports
Youth sports leagues/children's sports enrichment programs
STARTUP COST
$16.4K-$94.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
27/0

76 Town Money Saver
Direct-mail and digital advertising
STARTUP COST
$5.7K-$17K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
50/2

77 Grout Doctor Global Franchise
Grout, tile, and stone restoration and maintenance
STARTUP COST
$20.6K-$33.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
80/0

78 WIN Home Inspection
Home inspections
STARTUP COST
$34.7K-$49.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
176/0

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHEFS FOR SENIORS

79 Hommati
3-D tours, aerial videos, photography, augmented reality, and other services for real estate agents

STARTUP COST
$42.9K-$52.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
60/0

80 Lil' Angels Photography
Preschool, childcare, and family photography

STARTUP COST
$41.3K-$45.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
54/2

81 N2 Publishing
Monthly community publications

STARTUP COST
$975-$5.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
934/1

82 Young Rembrandts Franchise
Drawing classes for ages 3 to 12

STARTUP COST
$41.3K-$48.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
97/0

83 CleanNet USA
Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
$14.8K-$45.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1746/0

84 Superior Mosquito Defense
Outdoor pest control

STARTUP COST
$23.8K-$38.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
18/1

85 Complete Weddings + Events
Photography, DJ, video, and photo-booth services

STARTUP COST
$31.95K-$87.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
186/2

Oxi Fresh Franchising

86 IntegriServ Cleaning Systems
Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
$3.1K-$50K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
63/0

87 Realty Executives Intl. Svcs.
Real estate

STARTUP COST
$23.5K-$131K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
409/14

88 CodeFu
Coding classes for children

STARTUP COST
$21.7K-$33.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
13/9

89 PatchMaster
Drywall repair

STARTUP COST
$27.95K-$49.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
42/10

90 Cartridge World
Printers, cartridges, and printer services

STARTUP COST
$36.9K-$136.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
558/0

91 You've Got Maids
Environmentally friendly residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
$36.4K-$107K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
99/0

92 Little Kickers
Preschool soccer programs

STARTUP COST
$25.2K-$37.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
318/2

93 Chefs For Seniors
In-home meal preparation service for seniors

STARTUP COST
$10.5K-$26.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
39/2

94 In Home Pet Services
Pet-sitting, dog-walking

STARTUP COST
$9.2K-$35.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
14/1

95 Just Between Friends Franchise Systems
Children's and maternity consignment events

STARTUP COST
$38.6K-$54.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
150/7

96 Bar-B-Clean
Barbecue cleaning

STARTUP COST
$36.95K-$50.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
32/1

97 Fit4Mom
Prenatal and postpartum fitness and wellness programs

STARTUP COST
$6.9K-$26.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
317/1

98 Tapinto.net
Local online news sites

STARTUP COST
$10.3K-$16.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
77/0

99 KidzArt
Art-education programs, products, and services

STARTUP COST
$21.5K-$34.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
51/0

100 Oxi Fresh Franchising
Carpet, upholstery, hardwood floor, tile, and grout cleaning; odor control

STARTUP COST
$44.3K-$74.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
373/12

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF OXI FRESH

TOP 100 FRANCHISES FOR LESS THAN $100,000

Kumon Math & Reading Centers

1 ▶ Kumon Math & Reading Centers
Supplemental education
STARTUP COST
$73.4K-$154.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
26,256/22

2 ▶ Baskin-Robbins
Ice cream, frozen yogurt, frozen beverages
STARTUP COST
$93.6K-$401.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
8,072/0

3 ▶ HomeVestors of America
Home buying, repair, and selling
STARTUP COST
$56K-$426.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,102/0

4 ▶ Matco Tools
Mechanics' tools and equipment
STARTUP COST
$93.4K-$272.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,812/2

5 ▶ 911 Restoration
Residential and commercial property restoration
STARTUP COST
$70.1K-$226.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
204/0

6 ▶ CPR Cell Phone Repair
Electronics repairs and sales
STARTUP COST
$55.7K-$170.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
565/6

7 ▶ Merry Maids
Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$89.6K-$125K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,705/3

8 ▶ Chem-Dry Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning
Carpet and upholstery cleaning, tile and stone care, granite countertop renewal
STARTUP COST
$67.6K-$178.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
3,576/0

9 ▶ ServiceMaster Clean/ ServiceMaster Restore
Commercial/residential cleaning, disaster restoration
STARTUP COST
$93.7K-$294.4K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
4,919/10

10 ▶ Weed Man
Lawn care
STARTUP COST
$69.8K-$86.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
303/41

11 ▶ MaidPro
Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$57.6K-$222.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
267/1

12 ▶ Novus Glass
Auto glass repair and replacement
STARTUP COST
$54.5K-$258.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
2,014/30

13 ▶ Transworld Business Advisors
Business brokerages; franchise consulting
STARTUP COST
$74.9K-$97.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
294/1

14 ▶ PuroClean
Property damage restoration and remediation
STARTUP COST
$72.8K-$192.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
285/0

15 ▶ Patrice & Associates
Hospitality, retail, and sales recruiting
STARTUP COST
$90.6K-$108K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
157/0

16 ▶ Bloomin' Blinds
Window covering sales, installation, and repairs
STARTUP COST
$62.6K-$137.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
64/0

17 ▶ Screenmobile
Mobile window and door screening
STARTUP COST
$91.8K-$180.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
121/1

18 ▶ Tutor Doctor
Tutoring
STARTUP COST
$73.3K-$100.99K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
662/0

19 ▶ Restoration 1
Water, fire, smoke, and mold restoration
STARTUP COST
$79.1K-$183.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
201/0

20 ▶ Maid Brigade
Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$94.7K-116.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
449/1

*ServiceMaster's commercial/residential cleaning business models can be started for less than $100,000, but its disaster restoration model cannot.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF KUMON

21 Eye Level Learning Centers
Supplemental education
STARTUP COST
$59.3K-$126.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
813/808

22 Amada Senior Care
Home care and assisted-living placement
STARTUP COST
$87K-$237.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
98/1

23 Two Maids & A Mop
Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$60.9K-$144.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
77/1

24 The Cleaning Authority
Environmentally friendly residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$71.5K-$167.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
223/3

25 Orion Food Systems
Fast-food systems for nontraditional markets
STARTUP COST
$59.5K-$140K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,032/0

26 Made in the Shade Blinds and More
Window coverings
STARTUP COST
$53.4K-$61K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
102/1

27 GarageExperts
Garage cabinets, floor coatings, organization products
STARTUP COST
$51.5K-$146K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
90/0

28 Jet-Black/ Yellow Dawg Striping
Asphalt maintenance
STARTUP COST
$55.1K-$125.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
112/8

29 Bio-One
Crime-scene and trauma-scene cleaning
STARTUP COST
$80.98K-$127.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
88/0

30 Sylvan Learning
Individualized supplemental education
STARTUP COST
$68.7K-$159.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
575/8

31 360 Painting
Residential and commercial painting
STARTUP COST
$90.5K-$132.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
133/0

32 Fish Window Cleaning Services
Window cleaning
STARTUP COST
$87.3K-$150.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
278/1

33 N-Hance Wood Refinishing
Wood cabinet and floor refinishing
STARTUP COST
$51.97K-$167K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
590/0

34 Totally Nutz
Cinnamon-glazed almonds, pecans, and cashews
STARTUP COST
$59.9K-$216K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
77/13

35 GYMGUYZ
Mobile personal training
STARTUP COST
$56.1K-$121.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
218/22

36 Fibrenew
Leather, plastic, and vinyl restoration and repair
STARTUP COST
$87.8-$99.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
249/0

37 The Tutoring Center Franchise
Tutoring
STARTUP COST
$99.5K-$148.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
100/0

38 Mosquito Hunters
Mosquito, tick, and flea control
STARTUP COST
$70.1K-$85.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
53/10

39 Color Glo International
Leather, vinyl, fabric, carpet, and surface repair and restoration
STARTUP COST
$56.3K-$61.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
139/0

40 U.S. Lawns
Commercial grounds care
STARTUP COST
$39.8K-$81.3K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
260/0

41 Conserva Irrigation
Irrigation repair, maintenance, and efficiency upgrades
STARTUP COST
$29K-$87.3K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
81/4

42 Kitchen Tune-Up
Residential and commercial kitchen and bath remodeling
STARTUP COST
$94.97K-$129.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
198/0

43 BrightStar Care
Medical/nonmedical home care, medical staffing
STARTUP COST
$93K-$154.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
322/12

44 Shine Window Care and Holiday Lighting
Window cleaning, pressure washing, holiday lighting installation
STARTUP COST
$96.1K-$141.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
34/0

45 HouseMaster Home Inspections
Home inspections and related services
STARTUP COST
$61.1K-$106.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
313/0

46 Signal 88 Security
Private security guard and patrol services
STARTUP COST
$61.95K-$218.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
430/0

47 Pinot's Palette
Paint-and-sip studios
STARTUP COST
$96.8K-$246.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
131/3

48 Gotcha Covered
Window treatments
STARTUP COST
$75.7K-$93.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
93/0

*The low end of U.S. Lawns' investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $50,000.
*The low end of Conserva Irrigation's investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $50,000.

49 RSVP
Advertising
STARTUP COST
$96.4K-$265.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
67/0

50 Fiesta Auto Insurance and Tax
Insurance and tax-preparation services
STARTUP COST
$67.1K-$120.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
207/0

51 Right at Home
Home care, medical staffing
STARTUP COST
$80.2K-$147.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
591/1

52 Sandler Training
Sales and sales-management training
STARTUP COST
$97.5K-$114.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
263/0

53 ComForCare Home Care
Nonmedical and skilled home care
STARTUP COST
$96.2K-$208.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
203/0

54 Liberty Tax Service
Tax preparation, electronic filing
STARTUP COST
$58.7K-$71.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
2,922/84

55 Office Pride Commercial Cleaning Services
Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
$65K-$107.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
144/0

56 Merle Norman Cosmetics
Cosmetics and skin-care products
STARTUP COST
$39.5K-$180.9K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1115/2

57 Furniture Medic
Furniture and wood restoration, repair, and refinishing
STARTUP COST
$80.8K-$90.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
338/0

58 JEI Learning Center
Individualized supplemental education
STARTUP COST
$69.5K-$115K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
269/276

59 Pet Wants
Natural pet-food stores/delivery
STARTUP COST
$59.8K-$202K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
124/0

60 Board & Brush Creative Studio
DIY wood-sign workshops
STARTUP COST
$62.3K-$89.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
231/6

61 Sir Grout Franchising
Grout, tile, stone, concrete, and wood restoration
STARTUP COST
$78.8K-$131.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
39/2

62 InXpress
Shipping services
STARTUP COST
$85.6K-$169.99K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
355/0

63 Zerorez Franchising Systems
Carpet and surface cleaning
STARTUP COST
$76.7K-$182.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
56/0

64 GoliathTech
Foundation systems for the construction industry
STARTUP COST
$72.9K-$176K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
202/0

65 Lapels
Dry cleaning and laundry services
STARTUP COST
$86.5K-$710.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
99/0

66 Fresh Coat
Residential and commercial painting
STARTUP COST
$53.9K-$76.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
162/0

67 GradePower Learning
Supplemental education
STARTUP COST
$99.8K-$270.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
154/3

68 HomeTeam Inspection Service
Home inspections
STARTUP COST
$50.1K-$76.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
174/0

69 Creative Colors International
Upholstery repair and replacement
STARTUP COST
$95.1K-$122.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
76/3

70 Assisted Living Locators
Senior-care referrals and senior-living placement
STARTUP COST
$68.5K-$78.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
113/2

71 Duraclean
Carpet and upholstery cleaning, disaster restoration, mold remediation
STARTUP COST
$79.6K-$129.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
262/9

72 AmeriSpec Inspection Services
Home and commercial inspections, ancillary services
STARTUP COST
$53.6K-$72.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
272/0

73 Pronto Insurance
Insurance
STARTUP COST
$52.9K-$120.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
60/217

74 Assisting Hands Home Care
Home healthcare, respite care
STARTUP COST
$80.1K-$152K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
117/4

75 Caring Transitions
Senior relocation, online auctions, and estate management
STARTUP COST
$58.9K-$82.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
223/0

76 Precision Door Service
Residential garage door repair, installation, and service
STARTUP COST
$67.4K-$306.96K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
96/0

77 Padgett Business Services
Financial, payroll, consulting, and tax services
STARTUP COST
$20.2K-$99.98K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
331/0

*The low end of Merle Norman Cosmetics' investment range applies only to opening a studio within an existing business. Franchisees starting a new stand-alone studio will invest more than $50,000.
*The low end of Padgett Business Services' investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $50,000.

78 All County Property Management Franchise
Property management
STARTUP COST
$66.95K-$98.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
51/1

79 Executive Home Care
Home healthcare
STARTUP COST
$99.7K-$169.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
24/1

80 i9 Sports
Youth sports leagues, camps, and clinics
STARTUP COST
$59.9K-$69.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
146/1

1-800-Packouts

81 Five Star Bath Solutions
Bathroom remodeling
STARTUP COST
$75.5K-$141.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
39/1

82 Touching Hearts At Home
Nonmedical home care for seniors and people with disabilities
STARTUP COST
$52.9K-$75.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
70/0

83 Fully Promoted
Branded products and marketing services
STARTUP COST
$71.9K-$240.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
280/0

84 Mosquito Squad
Outdoor pest control
STARTUP COST
$65.8K-$86.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
243/0

85 Poolwerx
Pool and spa maintenance, service, remodeling, and supplies
STARTUP COST
$93K-$309.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
145/16

86 AR Workshop
DIY workshops
STARTUP COST
$62.9K-$116.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
115/4

87 Wine & Design
Paint-and-sip studios
STARTUP COST
$69.95K-$221.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
74/1

88 Fosters Freeze
Soft-serve ice cream, burgers, sandwiches, hot dogs, fries
STARTUP COST
$64K-$587.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
70/0

89 Crestcom International
Leadership development
STARTUP COST
$85.2K-$99.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
180/0

90 Robin Autopilot
Robotic lawn care
STARTUP COST
$60.3K-$134.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
15/1

91 Pro-Lift Garage Doors
Garage-door installation and repairs
STARTUP COST
$90.6K-$138K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
23/0

92 Cold Stone Creamery
Ice cream, sorbet
STARTUP COST
$53.2K-$468.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,204/4

93 Money Mailer Franchise
Direct-mail, online, and mobile marketing services
STARTUP COST
$65.2K-$77K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
149/80

94 TruBlue Total House Care
Home repair services, lawn care, and house cleaning
STARTUP COST
$61.9K-$81K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
40/0

95 Expense Reduction Analysts
Business financial consulting
STARTUP COST
$66K-$85.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
697/0

96 Dryer Vent Wizard International
Dryer-vent cleaning, replacement
STARTUP COST
$59.7K-$136.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
95/0

97 Qualicare
Medical/nonmedical home care, patient advocacy
STARTUP COST
$84.6K-$194.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
51/3

98 the Coder School
Coding education for ages 7 to 18
STARTUP COST
$65.3K-$150.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
26/3

99 1-800-Packouts
Building-contents packing, cleaning, storage, and restoration
STARTUP COST
$69.5K-$234K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
84/1

100 Mad Science Group
Science education and entertainment programs
STARTUP COST
$74.1K-$110.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
138/1

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF 1-800-PACKOUTS

TOP 100 FRANCHISES FOR LESS THAN $150,000

1 The UPS Store
Postal, business, printing, and communications services

STARTUP COST
$138.4K-$470K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
5,166/0

2 7-Eleven
Convenience stores

STARTUP COST
$47.1K-$1.2M*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
66,307/2,382

3 Great Clips
Hair salons

STARTUP COST
$136.9K-$259.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
4,371/0

4 Budget Blinds
Window coverings, window film, rugs, accessories

STARTUP COST
$110.3K-$234.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,213/0

5 uBreakiFix
Electronics repairs

STARTUP COST
$55.4K-$236.3K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
513/15

6 Anytime Fitness
Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
$76.7K-$521.4K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
4,510/10

7 Mathnasium Learning Centers
Math tutoring

STARTUP COST
$112.8K-$149.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,030/17

8 Fyzical Therapy & Balance Centers
Physical therapy, balance and vestibular therapy, preventive wellness services

STARTUP COST
$148.8K-$819K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
370/14

9 The Maids
Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
$63.3K-$141.2K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,278/174

10 Huntington Learning Centers
Tutoring and test prep

STARTUP COST
$127.1K-$292.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
274/24

11 Express Employment Professionals
Staffing, HR solutions

STARTUP COST
$140K-$211K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
800/0

12 Lawn Doctor
Lawn, tree, and shrub care; mosquito and tick control

STARTUP COST
$100K-$116.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
583/0

13 Cinnabon
Cinnamon rolls, baked goods, coffee

STARTUP COST
$108.5K-$3681.K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,539/1

14 Kona Ice
Shaved-ice trucks

STARTUP COST
$127.8K-$151.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,180/19

*While 7-Eleven's initial investment range varies widely based on different circumstances, most first-time franchisees' startup costs will be above $100,000.
*The low end of uBreakiFix's initial investment range applies only to officers, directors, or employees of uBreakiFix whose franchise and training fees are waived. Franchisees paying the standard fees will invest more than $100,000.
*The low end of Anytime Fitness' initial investment range applies only in rare cases. Most franchisees will invest more than $100,000.
*Although The Maids' initial investment range starts at $63,300, the company prefers franchisees to have more operating capital available in order to start the business.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE UPS STORE

15 Molly Maid
Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
$111.7K-$156.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
485/0

16 Mac Tools
Automotive tools and equipment
STARTUP COST
$131.5K-$287.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,124/1

17 Cornwell Quality Tools
Automotive tools and equipment
STARTUP COST
$59.5K-$272.8K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
698/0

18 ASP America's Swimming Pool Company
Swimming pool maintenance, repairs, and renovations
STARTUP COST
$108.1K-$145.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
310/0

19 Spherion Staffing
Staffing, recruiting
STARTUP COST
$148K-$347.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
193/0

20 Stanley Steemer Carpet Cleaner
Carpet and upholstery cleaning
STARTUP COST
$111.7K-$259.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
215/54

21 Miracle-Ear
Hearing aids
STARTUP COST
$119K-$352.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,417/54

22 Minuteman Press International
Printing, graphics, and marketing services
STARTUP COST
$74.9K-$180.1K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
967/0

23 CMIT Solutions
IT and business services for SMBs
STARTUP COST
$127.97K-$175.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
233/0

24 1-800 Water Damage
Restoration
STARTUP COST
$132.1K-$206.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
89/7

25 9Round
Kickboxing fitness circuit-training centers
STARTUP COST
$99.7K-$143.1K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
790/7

Two Men and a Truck

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TWO MEN AND A TRUCK

26 Interim HealthCare
Medical home care, medical staffing
STARTUP COST
$125.5K-$198.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
593/0

27 Rosati's Pizza
Pizza, Italian food
STARTUP COST
$136.2K-$1.2M
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
137/11

28 Cookie Cutters Haircuts for Kids
Children's hair salons
STARTUP COST
$132K-$339K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
101/1

29 Labor Finders
Industrial staffing
STARTUP COST
$128.5K-$217.96K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
195/0

30 Home Instead Senior Care
Nonmedical senior care
STARTUP COST
$108.9K-$124.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
1,051/3

31 Miracle Method Surface Refinishing
Kitchen and bathroom surface refinishing
STARTUP COST
$84.5K-$145K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
153/1

32 L&L Hawaiian Barbecue
Asian American/Hawaiian food
STARTUP COST
$133.7K-$535K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
195/0

33 YESCO Sign & Lighting Service
Sign and lighting service and maintenance
STARTUP COST
$65K-$352.2K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
61/37

34 Two Men and a Truck
Moving services
STARTUP COST
$100K-$585K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
299/3

35 Spring-Green Lawn Care
Lawn and tree care
STARTUP COST
$107.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
117/26

36 Freedom Boat Club
Membership boat clubs
STARTUP COST
$149.2K-$458.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
174/22

*The low end of Cornwell Quality Tools' initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*The low end of Minuteman Press International's initial investment range applies only to the purchase of an existing store. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*Although 9Round's initial investment range starts at $97,650, franchisees will typically invest more than $100,000.
*The low end of Miracle Method's initial investment range is possible only for its owner-operator model in small markets. Franchisees more typically operate an owner-manager model in larger markets, and their startup costs exceed $100,000.
*The low end of YESCO Sign & Lighting Service's initial investment range applies only to someone adding on to or converting an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.

37 ▶ Visiting Angels
Nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$122.5K-$153.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
594/0

38 ▶ TeamLogic IT
IT managed services for businesses
STARTUP COST
$104.8K-$143.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
176/0

39 ▶ GNC Franchising
Vitamins and nutrition products
STARTUP COST
$149.7K-$388.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
2,949/3,070

40 ▶ System4 Facility Services
Facility services management
STARTUP COST
$105.9K-$373K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
55/0

41 ▶ British Swim School
Swimming lessons for ages 3 months and older
STARTUP COST
$91.3K-$150.9K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
69/0

42 ▶ AdvantaClean
Restoration
STARTUP COST
$113.1K-$244.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
227/0

43 ▶ Nurse Next Door Home Care Services
Medical/nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$105.1K-$199.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
163/9

College Hunks Hauling Junk & Moving

44 ▶ Dippin' Dots Franchising
Specialty ice cream, frozen yogurt, ices, sorbet
STARTUP COST
$112.2K-$366.95K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
223/0

45 ▶ Burn Boot Camp
Women's fitness centers
STARTUP COST
$148.8K-$353.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
212/4

46 ▶ Painting with a Twist
Paint-and-sip studios
STARTUP COST
$118.5K-$285.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
298/3

47 ▶ Mosquito Joe
Outdoor pest control
STARTUP COST
$95.6K-$140K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
285/4

48 ▶ College Hunks Hauling Junk & Moving
Junk removal, moving, and labor services
STARTUP COST
$89.8K-$208.7K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
114/3

49 ▶ FirstLight Home Care Franchising
Nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$110.9K-$167.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
184/0

50 ▶ Mr. Appliance
Residential and commercial appliance installation and repairs
STARTUP COST
$60.8K-$139.5K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
268/0

51 ▶ CertaPro Painters
Residential and commercial painting
STARTUP COST
$133.3K-$169.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
359/0

52 ▶ NaturaLawn of America
Organic-based lawn care
STARTUP COST
$47.5K-$112.7K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
82/9

53 ▶ Cost Cutters Family Hair Care
Family hair salons
STARTUP COST
$148.9K-$316.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
405/203

54 ▶ Bin There Dump That
Residential-friendly dumpster rentals
STARTUP COST
$73.1K-$128.3K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
163/0

*Although British Swim School's initial investment range starts at $91,275, the company desires franchisees to have at least $100,000 cash liquidity.
*The low end of Mosquito Joe's initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*While it is possible to open a small-market College Hunks Hauling Junk & Moving franchise for less than $100,000, startup costs will more typically exceed $100,000.
*The low end of Mr. Appliance's initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*The low end of NaturaLawn of America's initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*Although Bin There Dump That's initial investment range starts at $73,050, franchisees are more typically investing more than $100,000 at startup.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF COLLEGE HUNKS HAULING JUNK

55 Senior Helpers
Personal, companion, and Alzheimer's home care

STARTUP COST
$104.8K-$144.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
304/12

56 Pop-A-Lock Franchise System
Mobile locksmith and security services

STARTUP COST
$96.9K-$130.3K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
577/4

57 Concrete Craft
Decorative concrete coatings

STARTUP COST
$135.3K-$227.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
58/0

58 College Nannies, Sitters and Tutors
Nanny placement, babysitting, tutoring

STARTUP COST
$105K-$173K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
191/0

59 Precision Tune Auto Care
Auto repair and maintenance

STARTUP COST
$127K-$253.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
273/53

60 Weichert Real Estate Affiliates
Real estate

STARTUP COST
$62.5K-$324.7K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
351/126

61 Delta Restoration Services
Insurance/disaster restoration

STARTUP COST
$129.7K-$269.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
38/1

62 Real Property Management
Property management

STARTUP COST
$86.8K-$117.8K*

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
325/0

63 Dale Carnegie
Workplace training and development

STARTUP COST
$108.4K-$255.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
238/1

64 Sanford Rose Associates International
Executive search and recruiting

STARTUP COST
$108.3K-$143.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
102/0

65 SmartStyle
Family hair salons

STARTUP COST
$149.4K-$305.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
516/1,524

66 Line-X
Spray-on truck-bed liners, truck accessories, protective coatings

STARTUP COST
$126.4K-$366.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
571/3

67 Spaulding Decon
Crime-scene, meth-lab, and hoarding cleanup; mold remediation; house buying

STARTUP COST
$100K-$132K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
18/4

68 Griswold Home Care
Nonmedical home care

STARTUP COST
$107.4K-$135.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
167/19

69 Mr. Handyman
Residential and commercial repair, maintenance, and improvement services

STARTUP COST
$117.5K-$149.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
231/0

70 30 Minute Hit
Kickboxing circuit-training programs for women

STARTUP COST
$100.6K-$165.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
62/0

71 Link Staffing Services
Staffing, HR solutions

STARTUP COST
$112.5K-$199K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
37/7

72 Any Lab Test Now
Health, wellness, drug, alcohol, and DNA testing

STARTUP COST
$133.6K-$214.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
177/0

73 Big Frog Custom T-Shirts
Custom garment printing

STARTUP COST
$183.2K-$250.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
94/0

74 Experimax
Electronics resales and repairs

STARTUP COST
$142K-$351.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
126/4

75 Bubbakoo's Burritos
Mexican food

STARTUP COST
$131.5K-$398K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
21/9

76 Multivista
Visual documentation services for the construction industry

STARTUP COST
$141.5K-$548.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
74/3

Bubbakoo's Burritos

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ALTERO/BUBBAKOO'S BURRITOS

*Although Pop-A-Lock's initial investment range starts at $96,904, the company recommends that franchisees have at least $100,000 in working capital.
*The low end of Weichert Real Estate Affiliates' initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.
*The low end of Real Property Management's initial investment range applies only to the conversion of an existing business. Franchisees starting a new business will invest more than $100,000.

77 The Junkluggers
Environmentally friendly junk removal
STARTUP COST
$105.4K-$222.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
21/1

78 Fitness Together
Personal training
STARTUP COST
$143.6K-$258.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
142/1

79 Bricks & Minifigs
Lego resale stores
STARTUP COST
$108.5K-$276.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
36/2

80 Accessible Home Health Care
Medical and nonmedical home care
STARTUP COST
$124.9K-$168.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
95/5

81 Code Ninjas
Computer-coding learning centers for ages 4 and up
STARTUP COST
$118.6K-$387.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
162/3

82 Jabz Franchising
Boxing studios for women
STARTUP COST
$147.2K-$242.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
16/3

83 CKO Kickboxing
Kickboxing fitness classes
STARTUP COST
$117.8K-$383.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
87/0

84 101 Mobility
Mobility and accessibility equipment sales and services
STARTUP COST
$118.3K-$216.6K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
168/2

Philly Pretzel Factory

85 Kidcreate Studio
Children's art education
STARTUP COST
$108.8K-$231.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
13/2

86 Apex Energy Solutions
Replacement windows
STARTUP COST
$98.9K-$197.5K*
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
16/3

87 ApexNetwork Physical Therapy
Physical therapy
STARTUP COST
$148.4K-$344.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
25/46

88 Preppy Pet
Pet daycare, boarding, grooming
STARTUP COST
$105.95K-$258.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
22/1

89 The Exercise Coach
Personal training
STARTUP COST
$106.1K-$298.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
67/2

90 Outdoor Lighting Perspectives
Residential, holiday, and hospitality lighting
STARTUP COST
$130K-$133.1K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
59/1

91 milliCare
Flooring, carpet, and textile maintenance
STARTUP COST
$110.7K-$154.9K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
56/0

92 Paciugo Gelato Caffe
Gelato, pastries, beverages
STARTUP COST
$124.7K-$489.3K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
31/1

93 D.P. Dough
Calzones, wings, sides, salads, desserts
STARTUP COST
$142.96K-$463.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
26/8

94 Re-Bath
Bathroom remodeling
STARTUP COST
$139.9K-$308K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
89/3

95 IceBorn
Ice and water vending machines
STARTUP COST
$113.1K-$245.7K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
69/104

96 Fox's Pizza Den
Pizza, sandwiches, wings, salads
STARTUP COST
$110.8K-$210.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
212/0

97 Snip-Its
Children's hair salons, party services
STARTUP COST
$130.8K-$240.4K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
55/3

98 Philly Pretzel Factory
Soft pretzels
STARTUP COST
$133.99K-$351.2K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
155/7

99 Sharkey's Cuts For Kids
Children's hair salons
STARTUP COST
$146.9K-$206.5K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
64/2

100 Groucho's Deli
Subs, salads, sauces
STARTUP COST
$103.9K-$592K
TOTAL UNITS
(FRANCHISED/CO.-OWNED)
33/1

*Although Apex Energy Solutions' initial investment range starts at $98,850, most franchisees will invest more than $100,000.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PHILLY PRETZEL FACTORY

ADVERTORIAL

THE SEVEN FUNDAMENTALS OF GOOD CONTENT WRITING

By Robert W. Bly

If you asked me to name the two biggest trends in B2B marketing today, I'd have to say social media and content marketing. And social media seems to work best when it's based on content.

But content marketing isn't just publishing information—there's way too much information available today and your prospects are drowning in it. What they want is *knowledge*—they want to know how to solve problems and how to do their jobs better.

The following are seven guidelines that can help set up your content marketing campaign and make it more productive and effective.

■ ■ ■

1. Narrow the Topic

There is no benefit to cramming every last bit of information about a subject into your white paper or other content marketing piece; the prospect can easily find that data through Google.

Content marketing works best when you narrow the topic. The more precise the topic, the more in-depth and useful your content can be.

2. Target the Prospect

The more narrowly you target the audience for your content marketing piece, the better able you are to deliver truly useful content.

3. Determine the Objective

Remember, you're not giving away information out of the kindness of your heart. There has to be a purpose for the content you spend time and money to produce. For instance, a software publisher discovered that it wasn't losing sales to a competitor because their products had better features and benefits. It was because the software in that category was expensive, and even though the prospects wanted the functionality the software delivered, they couldn't cost-justify the purchase. To solve this problem, the company published a white paper titled *Calculating Return on Investment for Purchase of XYZ Software*. It showed that the time and labor savings the software provided could pay back its high cost in six to eight months.

4. Educate the Reader

Chances are you possess proprietary knowledge about your products and their uses. Share some of this knowledge in your content and give your reader specific advice and ideas they haven't seen before. Don't worry about giving away too much. When they learn how much effort solving their problem entails and see that you clearly have the expertise they need, they will turn to you for help.

5. Deliver Value

When you can, include some highly practical, actionable tips the prospect can implement immediately. The more valuable your content is to prospects, the faster your content marketing program will achieve its objective. It's like food vendors giving away samples: the better the free food tastes, the more likely the consumer is to purchase a snack or meal.

6. Set the Specs

Outline the characteristics, features, and specifications your customers should look for when shopping for products in your category. If you do this credibly, the customers will turn your content into a shopping list. For example, if your title is *Ten Things to Look for When Buying a Mixer*, your mixer naturally will have all ten characteristics, and the competition's won't.

7. Generate Action or Change Belief

Content marketing succeeds when it gets prospects to take action or change their opinion, attitude, or beliefs about you and your product. When writing content, I always ask my clients, "What do you want to happen after the prospect finishes reading?" I often end the content with a section titled "The next step," which tells the reader what to do and how to do it. ■

Help Wanted

WHERE HAVE ALL THE PLUMBERS GONE?

America has a skilled trade labor shortage. Companies are struggling to hire plumbers, electricians, HVAC repair personnel, and more—leading to declining profits, longer wait times, and unhappy customers. Franchises are trying to fixing that. **by MAGGIE GINSBERG**

Illustration Rune Fisker

Back in Vinnie Sposari's day, plumbing was considered a good, honest living. Before shop classes started disappearing from high schools and four-year college was championed as the only respectable career path, Sposari could put a classified ad in Sunday's paper and have six or eight résumés on his desk by Monday. Good résumés, too. But those days have gone the way of print newspapers.

"Very, very rarely will you get a licensed, skilled plumber calling you," Sposari says. He's 56 now and spent his career rising up in the plumbing business. He started straight out of high school and soon founded Sposari Plumbing. In 1992, he bought into a plumbing franchise called Mr. Rooter to "learn the business side of things," and today he owns Mr. Rooter territory throughout western Washington, covering 3.8 million people, with 65 employees and 30 trucks. He's watched the skilled labor shortage coming for a long time, but it's only the past few years that have started to really hurt.

"When the computer age hit, maybe 20, 25 years ago, all of a sudden it wasn't sexy to be a tradesperson," Sposari says. "But back then, there were people my age still in it. Now we're seeing those people aging out, and there's nobody to backfill them. That's why we're having such a crunch now."

Then there's the lingering misperception that skilled trades and higher education are two different things—something people like Sposari want to change. It takes four to six years to earn a plumbing license, not unlike a college degree. And in some ways, a trade education is a better deal. Workers can be paid on the job while they learn and then "graduate" into the workforce with higher starting salaries and without the burden of student debt.

To save his profession, Sposari has begun thinking differently. Finding a licensed plumber had become a needle-in-a-haystack problem. "So we opened it up to the entire haystack," he says. He now hosts biweekly career nights to try to educate the local workforce on just how good plumbing can be and has implemented a 12-month paid training program so he can give new hires of any background $15 to $18 an hour to start. Once in a truck, he tells them, his plumbers make $60,000 to $80,000 yearly. With time and experience, some even make $200,000.

Will it work? It's a bigger question than one plumber in western Washington can answer. As the country's largest trade franchises are finding, success will require changing more than just careers—it will require changing society at large.

HOW BIG IS THIS PROBLEM? Here's one way of looking at it: A Deloitte study found that the skills gap may leave an estimated 2.4 million positions unfilled between 2018 and 2028, with a potential economic impact of $2.5 trillion.

And here's another way to look at it: Neighborly, the world's largest franchisor of home service brands, is hearing about this problem from its franchisees almost daily.

"Franchisees say they have constrained capacity. They have more jobs than they have people to do them, and that is holding them and us back," says Mary Kennedy Thompson, Neighborly's COO. Her company owns 22 home service brands, including Mr. Rooter, Mr. Electric (electrical services), Glass Doctor (glass repair and replacement), and Aire Serv (heating and air-conditioning services). In total, Neighborly has 3,800 franchisees, 900 associates, and more than $2 billion in annual sales. A skilled trade labor shortage impacts its bottom line—and Thompson feels that pain as more than just an executive with 25 years of franchise experience. She's also a licensed plumber.

"It's the hardest test I ever took," Thompson says. "Harder than any college exam I ever had."

Indeed, it isn't easy to become a licensed tradesperson, which is also part of the problem. The process takes time and commitment, and must meet the rigorous legal criteria required of technicians who work with complex, potentially dangerous systems. With fewer attempting the feat in the first place, and baby boomers retiring in record numbers, franchisees are left with a unique hiring gap that can't be filled overnight—and they're losing business because of it. A 2019 National Association of Home Builders survey showed 81 percent of members experienced delays in completing projects due to the shortage.

"I sent out an email to a group of our franchisees and said, 'How many jobs do you feel you missed because you don't have technicians?' " says Steve Truett, president of Aire Serv, which has more than 200 franchise locations across North America servicing residential HVAC systems. "One said they felt they missed as much as 10 to 20 percent of their business in the summer months. Another one, a larger company, may miss 30 calls a day during peak season because they can't get to them."

Truett sees the problem as generational. "Traditionally, we'd see more seasoned technicians that grew up in the trade, maybe their dad was in the business or they went to a trade school," he says. Each generation would follow the last—benefiting from good jobs that can't be outsourced. But now, Truett says, that generational inspiration isn't being passed down. "For every three people that retire from the trades, only one person is entering on the other end. Somewhere along the way, people started looking down their nose at trades, like they were beneath their kids, and it just shouldn't be that way."

So for franchisors like him, the first solution seems straightforward: They have to do what their retiring tradespeople have not, and introduce this career to a new generation.

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, Neighborly began an unprecedented effort to help its brands address the shortage. It began by surveying all franchisees about their pain points and then zeroed in on the biggest: Franchisees said they didn't know how—or didn't have the time—to find the people they need.

Addressing this problem would be tricky, because franchisors have to be careful about how they help franchisees with hiring. It's the result of a wonky regulation known as "joint employer." Five years ago, the National Labor Relations Board threw the franchise world into a panic by declaring that McDonald's might be liable for federal labor law violations at its franchises. The reason, it said, was that the McDonald's corporate office had indirect control over its franchisees' employees and therefore functioned as those employees' second employer. In response, many franchises scrambled to distance themselves from their franchisees' hiring and HR practices, lest they be found similarly liable. But that changed in March of this year when the Department of Labor relaxed that ruling. Still, the damage was done. "Because of this, it was a lot harder for brands and business owners to work together on anything employment related," says Stephen Worley, senior director of communications for the International Franchise Association.

Thompson, the Neighborly COO, was of course aware of all this, but she still wanted to find a way to help. Neighborly couldn't hire or recruit on behalf of Mr. Rooter franchisees, but it determined that the company could onboard vendors who provide tools to franchisees. So that's what it did, forming relationships with a wide range of useful companies. One of the most successful has been CareerPlug, a company that makes hiring software. Now when Sposari or any Mr. Rooter franchisee needs to hire a new employee, they can use CareerPlug to distribute their posting, prequalify applicants, and communicate with them efficiently. Today, 70 percent of Neighborly brand franchises use the service.

But Neighborly, along with other like-minded companies, is also thinking about this problem more broadly. That's why, in May, it joined a collective called Generation T. It was founded by Lowe's, the hardware chain, and aims to change the narrative about trade jobs. It currently has 60-plus members, who are coming at the problem in various ways. ▶

Mary Kennedy Thompson, Neighborly's COO, at a company-wide event.

Apparel brand Timberland Pro, for example, launched a campaign in fall 2018 called “Always Do. Never Done.” Bosch Power Tools North America, through a community fund it created, is providing scholarships for Chicago-area high school students who are interested in the trades.

These measures may help, but Harvard professor Todd Rose believes they’ll have only a limited impact. That’s because the skills shortage goes deeper than just hiring practices and advertising campaigns, he says. It goes to what we as a society value and believe—and, even more important, what we think *everybody else* values and believes.

“WE’VE DEFINED SUCCESS at a societal level so narrowly,” Rose says. And now, he says, that has resulted in a trade skills deficit.

His research backs him up. Rose is also the cofounder of Populace, a social impact think tank that studies the science of individuality. In September, his group released a poll that he calls “the largest study ever of how Americans view the life they want to live, and what goes into it.” The first results were unsurprising. For example, the *majority* of people surveyed said they value things like relationships, fulfillment, and character more than they value fame or money. But then things get interesting. According to the data, most respondents believe they’re in the minority. They think that the majority of Americans value different things—particularly, that other people value status above everything else.

The true majority, in other words, believes it’s in the minority. As a result, the majority is afraid to say what it believes. Economists have a term for this gap: *preference falsification*. And Rose says it might be leading people to prefer college over trade school.

“Not only from an economic standpoint, [trades] are really important, valuable jobs that will provide stability and opportunity to a wide range of people. But when you combine that with this incredible shift toward a much more personal and nuanced view of success for individuals, you realize there’s never going to be a one-size-fits-all there,” Rose says. “So this race to go to college is about as useful as saying everyone has to be a plumber.”

How do we change that perception—making people feel comfortable pursuing success as they define it? Rose believes franchises are uniquely positioned to play a role here. They can offer a path to management or even business ownership for individuals who may or may not have a degree, or outside training, but are passionate about the work. That means they can offer multiple versions of success at once. Someone can train in a trade and, if they want, eventually transition into a higher-status role.

Research is clear that we perform better in jobs we care about, when we're engaged, motivated, and feeling like what we do matters. But that formula is different for each of us, according to Rose's research. To be clear, he received a doctorate in education from Harvard; he's hardly anti-college. But he argues that attending college is not for everyone (no matter how intelligent), rarely predicts future performance in the workplace, and so far has clocked a staggering $1.5 trillion in student debt. The way he sees it, our culture needs to start recognizing the inherent value in varying pathways to success based on what we each uniquely value—and then we need to start admitting that out loud.

"You can't just backdoor your way into some of these jobs, because they require real training," Rose says. "So what worries me is that many people are forgoing the kind of training that would actually lead to a more secure and fulfilling life in order to play a game they don't even want to play but think they have to."

WHEN TRADESPEOPLE THINK about the shortages in their industry, they see a strange disconnect. You'd think people would value trade workers. Every homeowner cares deeply about their house. Everybody needs working toilets, heat to stay warm, and lights to see. So isn't the provider of those services valuable?

"What we do affects the quality of people's life on a day-to-day basis," says Truett, Aire Serv's president. "If you live in Texas in August and your AC goes out, or if you live in Wisconsin in January and your heat goes out, that can be a matter of life and death."

Truett wonders if the solution lies in schools, where many students first develop visions of their professional lives. If trades were more respected in schools, he believes, he might have an easier time convincing kids that his company can provide a career.

A few years back in Texas, however, he sat through a high school graduation ceremony that seemed to capture his problem. As each of the students was called up to receive a diploma, the announcer shared where they were headed—typically college, or the military. Of the 404 graduates, fewer than 10 hadn't chosen one of those options.

By contrast, Truett read about a high school that held a celebration day for graduates going into the trades, similar to what some schools do for athletes on National Signing Day.

"I thought that was fantastic, that they were celebrating, because we need that," he says. "We need people to look at the trades in a different light." ■

Maggie Ginsberg is a writer in Madison, Wisc.

Franchise Success

JOINING FORCES TO GROW

After running her sign-and-awning business for 18 years, **Nikki Taheri** decided to turn the operation into a FastSigns franchise. **by HAYDEN FIELD**

Nikki Taheri grew up in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution and was raised on tales of her trailblazing grandmother—a six-foot-tall woman who chose to forgo a hijab and dressed as a man in order to pursue a career in trade. Taheri never met her grandmother, but she likes to think she inherited some of her gumption.

In 1993, as opportunity and education for women seemed nonexistent in her home country, Taheri fled to the United States, where she earned her bachelor's degree, discovered a passion for design, and eventually opened a sign-and-awning business in Bayonne, N.J. Nearly two decades later, as business was thriving, Taheri made yet another bold decision and converted her business into a franchised location of FastSigns International in 2018. Joining a network of 724 locations may seem like an odd choice for a successful (and independent) business owner, but so far, all signs point to success.

Why did you want to open your own business back in 2000?
Being a first-generation immigrant has really pushed me to accomplish as much as I can. That's how I saw myself when I came to the U.S.: *I have to make it happen for myself.* I realized if I could incorporate the business genes I inherited from my grandmother with my own pinch of creativity, I could succeed in the sign industry. Back then it was a male-dominated field—fabrication, welding, sewing—and people said, "Are you out of your mind? A woman can't operate this." But graphic design was my passion.

After almost 20 years in business, why did you decide to convert your operation into a FastSigns franchise?
My husband and I were exploring ways to expand our business and attended a sign convention, where we met the FastSigns team. They had a lot to offer—name reputation, brand identity, continued training. The beauty is that I now have a support system for every aspect of the job. If we're puzzled by anything, we just call them, explain the situation, and ask, "What do you suggest?"

Was any part of the transition difficult?
Before, I had the luxury of running the business all by myself. I could be selective about projects, and I was a one-woman show. I used to print, design, deal with fabricators. When I became a franchisee, I needed to work with a team because of the additional business that came in, and I had to get out of my shell and collaborate with others. But it's amazing and rewarding. We've hired three young men we work with right now, and it's awesome. I feel like I'm giving back to the community by creating jobs.

Have your vendor partners and operations changed?
As a small-business owner, doing all the research and starting every product from scratch was hard. For example, we're working on an entire package of signage—interior and exterior signs—for FilStop, a Filipino supermarket chain. Coming up with a design without a clear blueprint and structure wasn't easy. But through FastSigns, we were able to connect with vendors who specialize in supermarkets and take advantage of discount pricing.

How did your existing customers react to the change?
They were shocked. They asked me why I was transitioning: "You spent all these years to make a name for yourself, and then you're just giving it up!" Their reactions made me briefly reconsider. But I feel confident in my decision; being a franchisee has been exactly what I was looking for. We're experiencing strong growth, an increase of 27 percent in terms of both customers and sales revenue.

Photograph Juliana Sohn


OPEN

Franchise Success

FROM FLYING HIGH TO PIZZA PIE

Former Air Force intelligence analyst **Stephanie Moseley** became a Marco's Pizza franchisee. And yes, those jobs do have something in common. **by HAYDEN FIELD**

Beginning in 1985, Stephanie Moseley spent seven years as an Air Force intelligence analyst with top-secret clearance, running a division that oversaw the highest- and fastest-flying aircraft ever built. Which is to say, she never thought she'd end up running a pizza joint.

But fast-forward to 2016, and as she was heading home from her corporate sales job in Virginia, a wind-waver banner caught her eye and lured her into a Marco's Pizza, an international franchise with more than 900 locations. She read the company's family-founded origin story, ordered a sausage-and-pepperoni pizza, and was sold: She wanted a piece of the Marco's pie. Two years later, she opened the doors to her very own location in Newport News, Va., and is learning that her experiences in corporate America and the military perfectly prepared her for life as a franchisee and entrepreneur.

Pizza is a total career shift for you. What tools has Marco's given you to help you succeed?

There's an online education platform called Marco's University that offers training and courses for franchisees, managers, and employees. Employees also take real-life courses on how to make a pizza, how to stretch dough, how to sauce a pizza, proper portioning, and more. The amount of cheese on a pizza, depending on the size, should be four, six, eight, or 10.5 ounces. If someone's not weighing the cheese and there's 8.3 ounces of it on the pizza instead of eight, for example, that translates into real losses. I have a new general manager who makes sure every pie is weighed, and my food costs have gone from $4,600 a week to $2,500.

How did you first market your franchise to the local community?

The day before our grand opening, we offered free pies for local residents. It was designed to get the employees operationally ready and train them on the point-of-sale systems and making and delivering pizzas in a timely manner. It was a zoo, but that was a good thing; it got members of the community to come in.

Did the lessons you learned in the military prepare you for entrepreneurship?

As an intelligence analyst, I learned how to apply critical and analytical thinking in decision-making. That skill served me well in all my military assignments, whether I was overseeing the SR71 aircraft program in Okinawa, Japan; working with the 6th Tactical Intelligence Group in South Korea; or stationed in Austin, Tex., while the U.S. fought the war on drugs. In terms of entrepreneurship, analytical thinking helps you analyze reports on sales by the hour and day, demographics, and geography so you can strategize how to grow your business and be profitable. If you know things are slow on Mondays, you have to come up with ways to increase business for that day of the week. Sometimes if we're slow on a Monday at my Marco's location, we'll put out a "50 percent off for nearby residents" sign and bring in business that way.

What's your advice for other veterans seeking franchise opportunities?

Seek out franchises that support veterans, like opportunities through the VetFran program. I got a lot of help from VetFran; they helped me get a discount on my Marco's franchise fee, and they paired me with a consulting company called FranNet. My adviser helped me navigate the franchise process–what to expect, what to look for in a good company, and pitfalls to avoid.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARCO'S PIZZA; HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHANIE MOSELEY


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- Specialty Food Business

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Use your people skills to provide superstar service for a pet business, as a travel service provider, through your own restaurant or in a retail store.

- Automobile Detailing Business
- Bar and Club
- Bed and Breakfast
- Clothing Store and More
- Hair Salon and Day Spa
- Food Truck Business
- Microbrewery, Distillery, or Cidery
- Pet Business and More
- Restaurant and More
- Retail Business and More
- Travel Business and More

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- eBusiness
- Freight Brokerage Business
- Green Business
- Import/Export Business
- Medical Claims Billing Service
- Vending Business
- Wholesale Distribution Business
- Staffing Business
- Transportation Service

THE WAY TO SELL YOURSELF

Our opening sentence is our most important. And too many of us are getting it wrong.

by JASON FEIFER

A man recently connected with me on LinkedIn and sent me this note: "Let me know if you ever need a writer." I guess he's a writer? I don't know!

But I do know this: The phrase "Let me know if you ever need a..." shows up a lot, in my inbox and surely yours, too. I've come to think of it as the eight most deadly words in entrepreneurship—because that phrase is the death of opportunity. We should all step back and think: Have we used these words? Have we used *similar* words? And if so, have we failed to seize the moment?

"Let me know if you ever need a..."

Let's break it down to understand.

First, consider the aspiration. This is written by someone hoping to provide a service. If they're a writer, they'd like to write. Publicists or entrepreneurs might want press coverage, so they'll tell me, "Let me know if you ever need a story about a dynamic CEO." A B2B company might want *Entrepreneur* as a client, so they'll say, "Let me know if you ever need a better customer service solution."

But now consider the approach. These people are being standoffish. Rather than selling themselves, they're shifting the burden onto *someone else* to make the sale. If I need a writer, I should reach out to them. If I need a story, I should ask them for an interview. If I need a customer service solution, I should ask them for details. "Let me know if you ever need a..." sounds like an invitation, but it's really a shrug. It's like putting a dollar on a table and hoping someone picks it up, buys a winning lottery ticket with it, and then gives you the spoils.

I understand where these people are coming from. They don't want to seem pushy. They don't want to appear needy. They're afraid of sounding too self-promotional. I can appreciate the instinct. I don't want to look pushy either! I'm also turned off by people who appear needy! But their approach misses something critical. "Let me know if you ever need a..." doesn't propose any value. Is this person a *good* writer? Is this CEO *worthy* of a story? Is this customer service tool *beloved* by others in my field? I don't know, because when this person shifted the sales burden onto me, they also shifted the research burden onto me. They gave me no knowledge. They gave me nothing to be excited about. They showed me no opportunity.

Imagine the situation in which I'd assign a story to the writer who said, "Let me know if you ever need a writer." I would have needed...a writer. Just any writer. Anyone who can string words together. I would have needed to be in a panic, so desperate for someone to contribute to our magazine that I'd stopped thinking about great writers, or good writers, or even serviceable writers, and simply settled for: *writer.*

This is not a situation that exists. The world is full of good options! You, and me, and everyone else—we are not living in times of scarcity. If we need a job done, there are plenty of qualified people to do it. Our question is: Who's the *best*?

If you want to create opportunity for yourself, answer that question convincingly.

The first thing to do is show someone that you *are* the opportunity. Hiring you can help *them*. Telling your story is good for *them*. Opportunity is not a handout. It's a symbiotic matching of needs—you need what I have, and I need what you have, and now we've got an opportunity for each other.

We need to stop hiding behind ourselves. Get out in front! Sell yourself and your amazing abilities. Understand someone's problem, and explain exactly why you're the solution.

"Let me know if you ever need a..."? No. Never. Instead, start with: "Let me explain how I can help you."

Now I'm listening.

Jason Feifer is the editor in chief of Entrepreneur.

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