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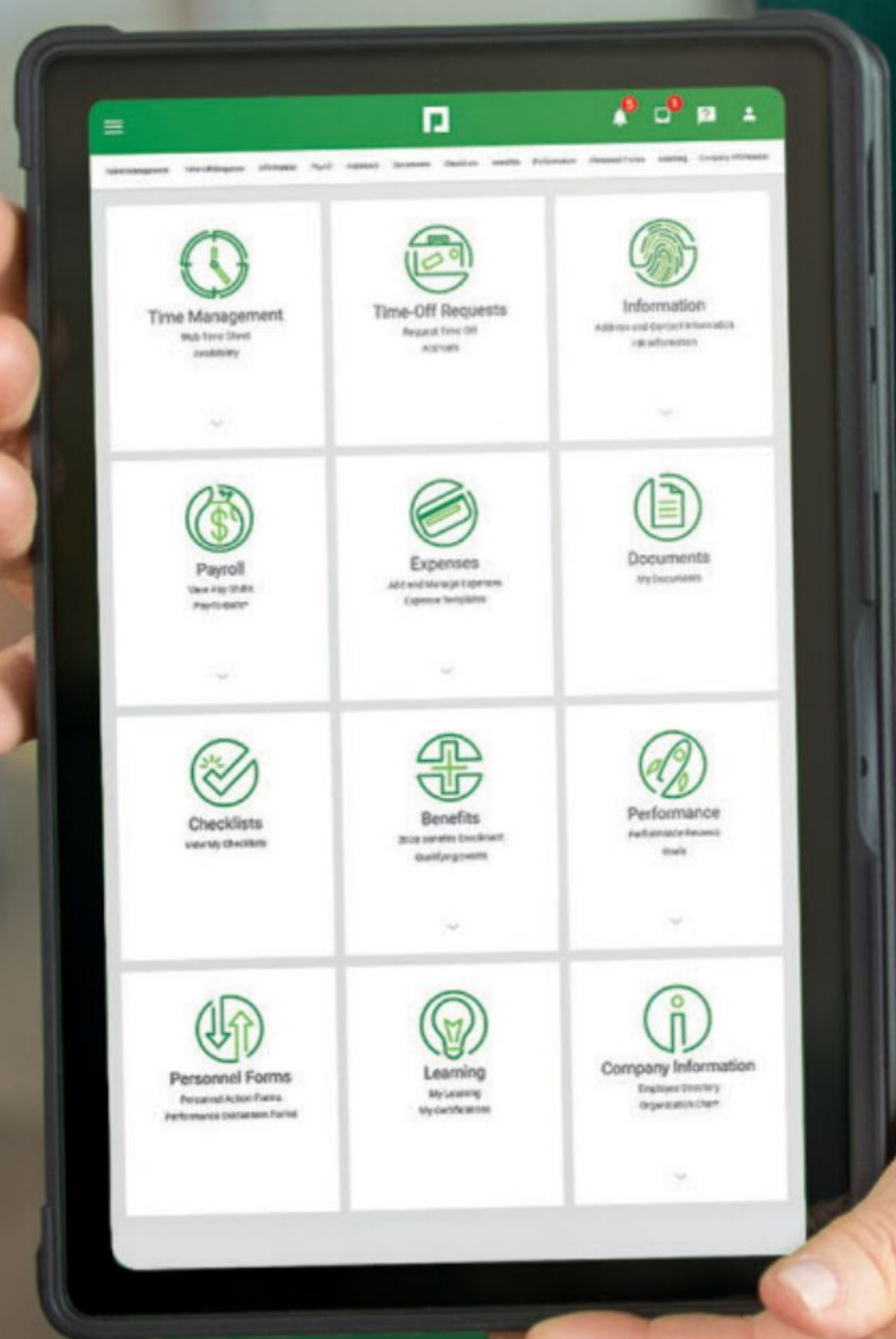
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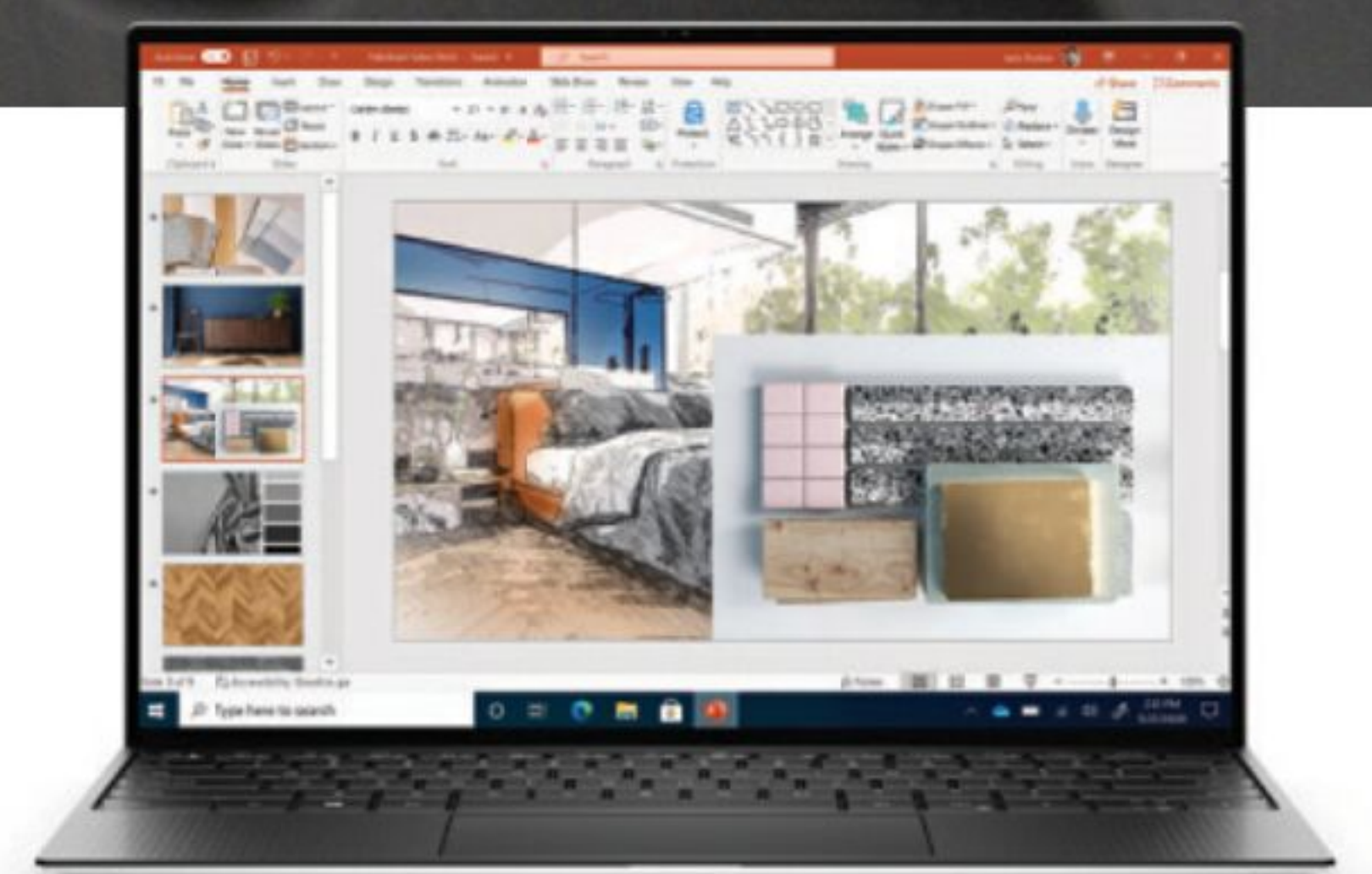
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ADVERTISING AND EDITORIAL
Entrepreneur Media Inc.
18061 Fitch, Irvine, CA 92614
(949) 261-2325, fax: (949) 752-1180

ENTREPRENEUR.COM
Printed in the USA GST File #r129677027

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Vol. 49, No. 5. **Entrepreneur** (ISSN 0163-3341) is published monthly (except for combined issues in Jan/Feb, Apr/May, Jul/Aug, and Oct/Nov) by **Entrepreneur Media Inc.**, 18061 Fitch, Irvine, CA 92614. Periodical postage paid at Irvine, CA, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Entrepreneur**, P.O. Box 6136, Harlan, IA, 51593-1636. One-year subscription rates in U.S.: \$19.97; in Canada: \$39.97; all other countries: \$49.97; payable in U.S. funds only. For customer service go to entrepreneur.com/customerservice or mail subscription orders and changes to **Entrepreneur**, Subscription Department, P.O. Box 6136, Harlan, IA, 51593-1636. For change of address, please give both old and new addresses and include most recent mailing label. **Entrepreneur** considers its sources reliable and verifies as much data as possible, although reporting inaccuracies can occur; consequently, readers using this information do so at their own risk. Each business opportunity and/or investment inherently contains certain risks, and it is suggested that the prospective investors consult their attorneys and/or financial professionals. **Entrepreneur** is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not rendering legal services or financial advice. Although persons and companies mentioned herein are believed to be reputable, neither **Entrepreneur Media Inc.** nor any of its employees accept any responsibility whatsoever for their activities. Advertising Sales (949) 261-2325. **Entrepreneur** is printed in the USA and all rights are reserved. ©2021 by **Entrepreneur Media Inc.** No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher. Unsolicited manuscripts and photographs will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. All letters sent to **Entrepreneur** will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication, copyright purposes and use in any publication or brochure, and are subject to **Entrepreneur's** unrestricted right to edit and comment.

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Go Where You Don't "Belong"

To get where you want to go, start out where you don't fit in. You'll be happy you did.

SHOW UP where you don't belong. Because one day, you will.

That's what I've learned repeatedly in my career as I've pushed through the impostor syndrome. Sometimes validation came quickly. Sometimes it took years. But cumulatively, I've learned that people can never truly feel empowered—and never truly grow—if they don't insert themselves into uncomfortable situations and reveal how much they belong.

It's something I was pleasantly reminded of recently when I interviewed an NBA star I'd nervously met a long time ago. Here's the story.

Back in 2010, I was a junior editor at *Men's Health*. A publicist emailed me with an invitation...for my boss. Was I his secretary? No. This was insulting. But the email was intriguing. The publicist was inviting my boss to have dinner with Chris Bosh, who at the time had just left the Toronto Raptors and was heading to the Miami Heat. I'd been a Heat fan since childhood. So when I shared it with my boss, I said, "If you can't make it, I'd be happy to go!"

"Go," my boss said. "I'm busy that night."

The publicist was displeased. I was just some kid, not the impressive magazine editor she'd hoped to score. But she was stuck, unable to rescind the invite. I went.

The dinner was at a fancy steakhouse in Manhattan. It was me; Chris; a major fashion designer; a major TV producer; Chris's then-fiancée (now wife), Adrienne; and some of her friends. I was deeply, comically out of place among these far wealthier, more successful people, who chatted about places I'd never seen and things I'd never afford. But I chimed in whenever I could, and everyone, Chris included, was gracious and welcoming. At the end of the dinner, we all agreed to stay in touch—though, of course, I never heard from any of them again.

Still, it was a career highlight. I felt like I'd snuck behind a secret door.

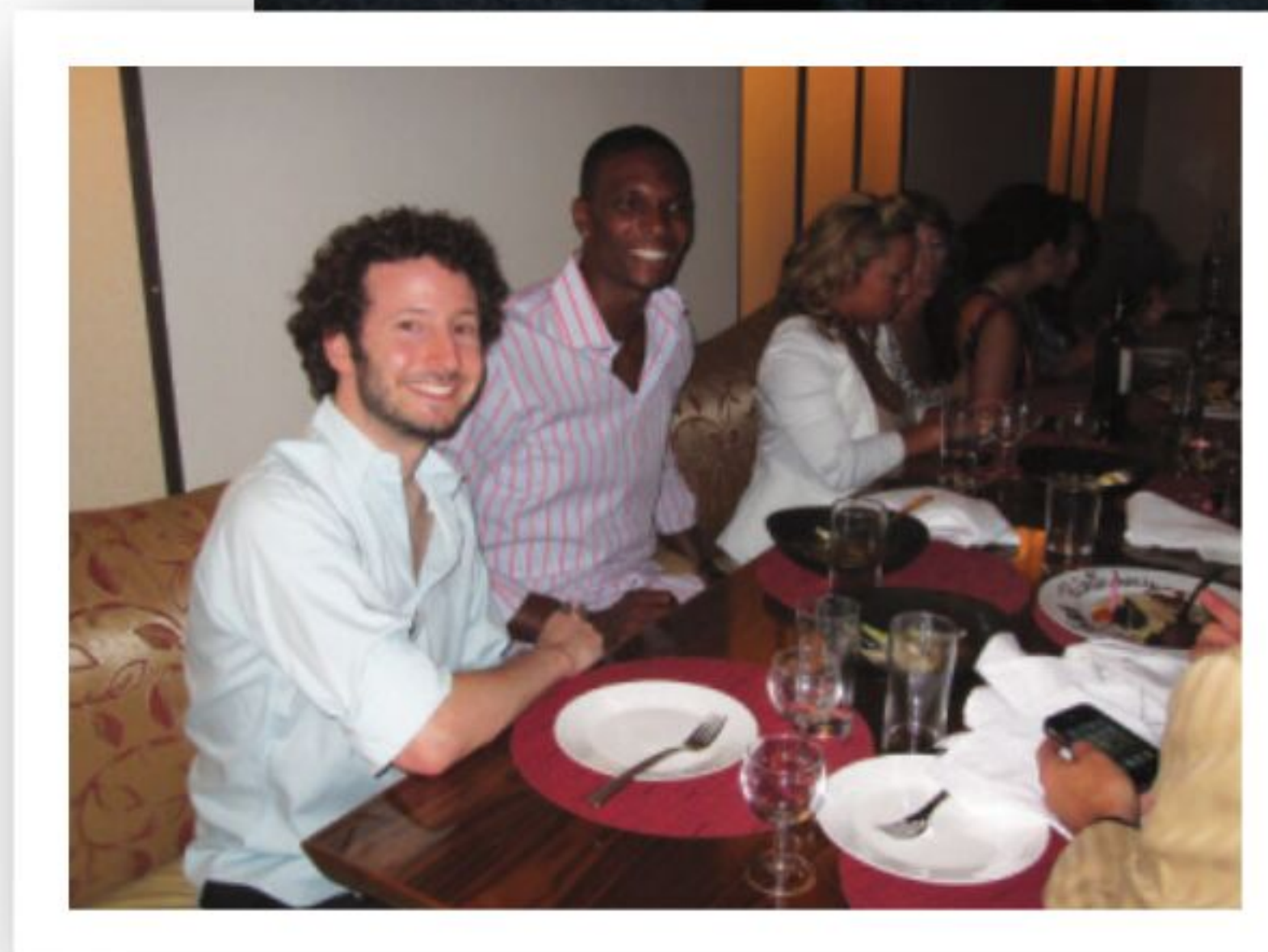
Life went on. Chris won two championships in Miami. I rose in magazines. Then Chris's basketball career ended abruptly in 2017 because of life-threatening blood clots. I interviewed him recently about life after basketball and began by reminding him of the dinner we had. When he realized I am now editor in chief of this brand, he said, "That's dope, man. Junior writer to the lead man. That's what's up."

"That's what we work for, isn't it?" I said.

"Absolutely," he said. "We



→ **SEAT AT THE TABLE**
My 2010 dinner with Chris Bosh (*below*).



in doing those things, and staying with it, things just started materializing." He ultimately wrote a beautiful book called *Letters to a Young Athlete*, which recently came out and is why I was speaking with him.

Like me back at that 2010 dinner, and like all of us at some point, Chris is now putting himself in new and uncomfortable situations. He also knows the purpose of it: When you work hard enough, you stop being the kid at the table who doesn't belong.

don't work to be average."

That's exceptionally true. We work to be extraordinary. Along the way, we will feel out of place, struggle to grow, make hard decisions, and face massive setbacks—like Chris, who lost the career he'd worked his life to achieve. But this, too, is why we work: It's so we build a stable foundation, upon which we can be extraordinary in ways we may never have imagined.

After leaving the NBA, Chris read a lot of self-help books. They suggested doing what he loved, which is music and writing. "I just kept doing it," he told me. "Did it make sense at the time? No. It was very foggy. But I just continued. And I feel that

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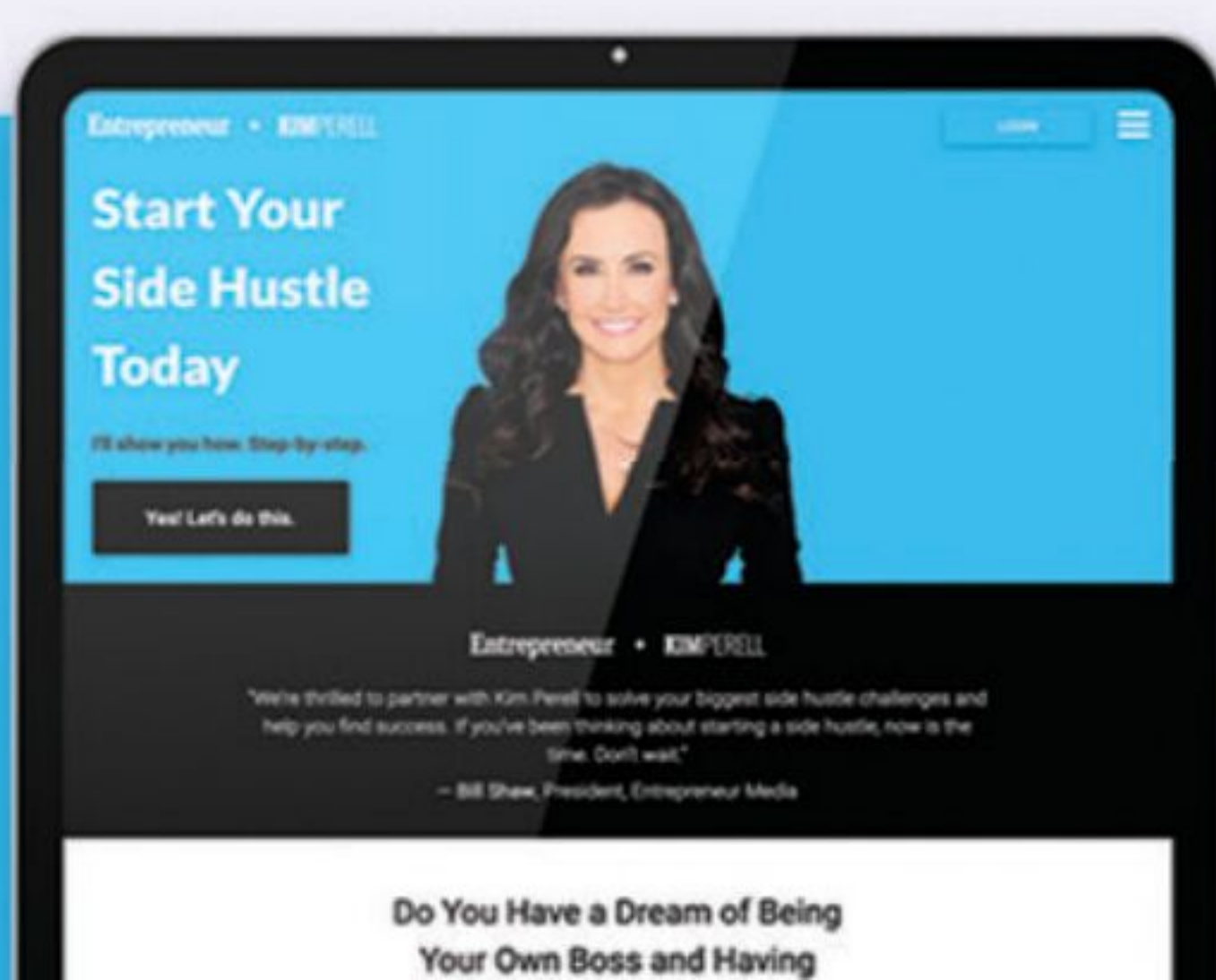
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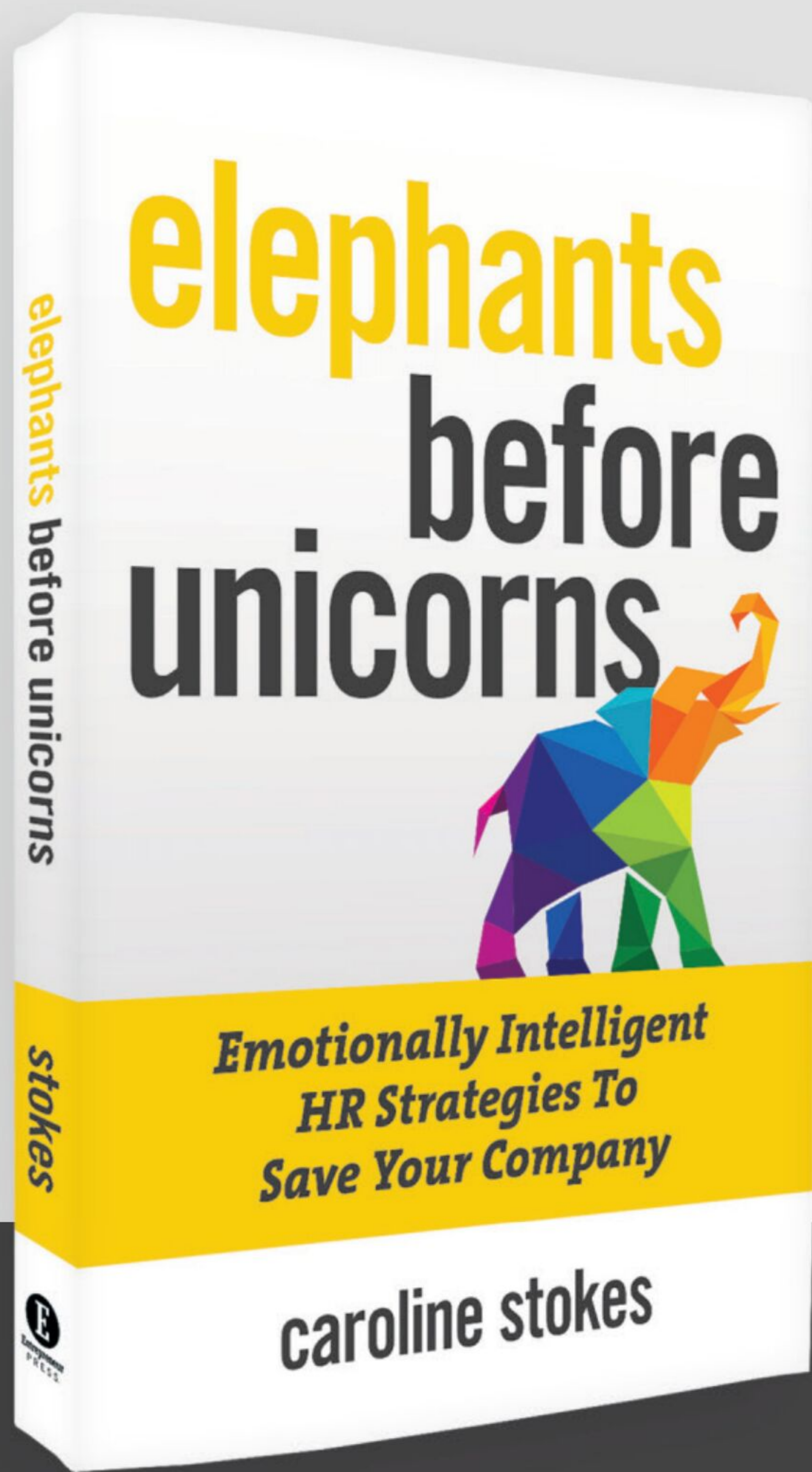


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When Brand Building Gets Personal

Dany Garcia has built billion-dollar brands around other people. Now she's building something far more personal—but remembering to never take things personally. **by JASON FEIFER**

PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS SHINN



What's the difference between building a brand behind the scenes and building one inspired by your own needs? Dany Garcia is learning that now. She's typically known as the woman fueling massive companies—as Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson’s manager and business partner, cofounder of the multi-platform production company Seven Bucks Productions, and the first female owner of a major professional sports league in the U.S. (she co-owns the XFL). But now she has launched a brand designed to solve her own problem: She is a professional woman and a bodybuilder, wants clothing that can work for her all day, and believes it’s an underserved market ready to explode. So now Garcia is taking what she learned from growing other people’s brands and applying it to her own.

Her clothing line is called GSTQ, which stands for God Save the Queen, the name of the British royal anthem. Garcia discovered the phrase at 16 while playing French horn in her high school’s orchestra, at a time when she was wrestling with a teenage cocktail of ambition and self-doubt. Those words gave her a powerful feeling, which she now wants to translate for others. “I want you to have an immersive experience,” she says. “It’s so much more than just one deliverable. And I get to lean on all the work I’ve done in the past to bring it to life.” Here, she discusses how she translated an ethos into a brand—but without being blinded by her personal attachment to it.

The story of this brand begins a long time ago. Give me the setup.

It’s the oldest brand idea I’ve held onto. When I was 16 in Succasunna, N.J., playing French horn in the high school orchestra, we were given sheet music of the British royal anthem. It’s called “God Save the Queen.” And when I saw that, I was like, *Oh my gosh*. I was filled with such aspirations, and then this question of, like, *How the hell am I going to get there?* I remember looking in the mirror and saying, “All right. This is what I have to work with?” You know? I was very, very highly aware. And so that sheet music came across, and I loved the phrase, and the idea that an entire kingdom and country were all saying, “God, please, save the queen.”

I decided to adopt that phrase myself and look at myself as the queen, and know at least I had God rooting for me. I would write *GSTQ* on all my books. If you look at my senior high school yearbook, there it is—*GSTQ*. The mindset became so important. It carried me forward. There was so much in my life I had to battle through. And eventually the idea became: Could *GSTQ* represent a brand?

You’re a strategic brand builder. How did you think about entering something as crowded as the clothing market?

I said, “Where’s the space between athleisure and power dressing? How can I duplicate what I’ve been

piecemealing for the past five to seven years as I'm going from the gym to all these meetings? How does the fabric move? How does it stretch? Most importantly, how are you wearing it 15 hours, not running home and then tearing it off your body because you're like, *I can't stand it?*"

For me, that was a white space. But so is the way I approach my consumer. Obviously, there's demos—words like *soccer mom*, *working mom*, and "20 to 30" and "35 to 50," etc. My demo is *mindset*. Who are the women looking to control their universe, or who already control their universe, or are students learning how to drive their universe? You know, I'm a filmmaker. I'm a franchise builder. I'm a universe builder. So my GSTQ proposition was not only the relationship and the interaction with the clothing but *Can I build a universe? A mindset universe?*

So many companies begin when a founder tries solving a problem for themselves—but that's actually a new thing for you. What lessons have you taken from your other brands that you found especially useful with this one?

There's an aspect to all the work I do where I never drink the Kool-Aid. I stay away from immersive moments so I never lose the perspective of what the brand is to the world as well as what the brand is to itself. With GSTQ, I worked to stay philosophically very, very high. Then I

could have experienced veterans on my team come in and execute off a principle.

For example, our Stadium jacket. It's based upon the large jackets football players wear on the sideline when it's freezing. I've always been like, *God, I love that jacket. How could I make that for myself?* So we created it, and we put straps in there so that when you take it off, it stays on your body. Your hands are free. You don't have to carry it. We had so much fun. So I'll come in deeply and play with that—and then I'll use data analytics to check myself, because at the end of the day, I'm not making art just for my room. I'm making something that needs to

you were to go to pure demographics, you would be missing so much of a mindset shift that's happened to every individual. Just because I am a "soccer mom"—a mom who has driven my daughter to soccer practice—you can't say I am therefore A, B, C, and D. You're going to miss the fact that I happen to be a professional bodybuilder, or I own numerous companies. So at GSTQ, I don't want to exclude consumers. I'm saying, "Where do you want to be? And let us be a tool to help you get there."

Now, I do believe you can use data to do that. It's easy to look at sentiment; social media analytics are so robust. You know, the CPG industry likes the

you're looking at mindset, you actually create more space for the brand or the individual—because you understand them, and they also understand you.

Here's another first for you: You appear in the initial billboards and digital advertising for GSTQ, alongside your brand ambassadors. What's that been like?

You know, it adds more hours to the day. The glam is a real thing! But it felt right because so much of GSTQ is an authentic story of what happened to me as a teenager. I wanted the brand to have real roots. I won't be as forward-facing in the future; the brand is going to be like any of my others. But at this moment,



I'LL COME IN DEEPLY AND PLAY—AND THEN I'LL USE DATA ANALYTICS TO CHECK MYSELF, BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY, I'M NOT MAKING ART JUST FOR MY ROOM. I'M MAKING SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE WORTHY ENOUGH OF THE TRANSACTION."

be worthy enough of the transaction.

I identify through the success of the companies, and that success is a relationship with the audience. That's where my success meters lie. So it helps me be more neutral.

You mentioned earlier that you aren't targeting your audience by demographic; you're targeting by mindset. That sounds powerful but also much harder to pull off.

It's much harder, and that gives me leverage, right? But the reality is that if

question "Where are people at?" As a filmmaker and as a storyteller, I like the question "Where can I take you?" That's a skill set I'm comfortable with, so it's what I look at with the launch of a clothing line.

Do you think that if you identify an audience by mindset, it becomes easier to communicate with them? After all, you now know how they think and the language they use.

I do. And you must make sure you create channels for open feedback. When

I think there was real value.

There is a truth where—for women in particular, or anywhere you have any diversity—if you're succeeding quietly, you're not doing the job. So for me, this felt like a real moment to put my money where my mouth is. This is a big deal. Let me be forward-facing about it. I am not a traditional model, but I am a traditional person working my butt off, so let me own that red carpet and my space and let that be an inspiration for other individuals. So, yeah, it was time to step.



Turning Catastrophe into a Strength

After a year of pandemic turmoil, we asked six entrepreneurs: What move did you make that'll protect your business from the next disaster?

1/ Diversified the supply chain.

"In early 2020, we found ourselves crippled. Our signature pink paper came from a supplier in Italy, our glassware came from another in China, and all our manufacturing was done at a facility in Los Angeles. Each of these critical partners was shut down at one time or another. We learned we had to diversify our manufacturing and supply-chain base. So we now work with four manufacturers in L.A. to make our fragrances and candles, and we have agreements with third-party logistics partners to ship our goods."

—MATTHEW HERMAN, founder, **Boy Smells**

2/ Expanded marketing.

"We were reliant on digital marketing as our primary growth accelerant. But when COVID hit, people had more on their minds than what cute baby photo was posted on Facebook. So we pivoted our media to traditional TV news, where their eyes were glued—and it worked. Our takeaway was to continually move our media to a balance of emerging and traditional channels that can sustain changes outside our control. It's already paying off: Because we're no longer depending on social, the iOS updates with regard to data privacy are less impactful to our business."

—JACOB ZUPPKE, president and COO, **AutoPets**

3/ Found virtual solutions.

"When our stores temporarily closed, we launched virtual fittings. Now the program sees more than 1,500 fittings a month at full capacity, and we plan on expanding it. We also embraced other virtual tactics, like warehouse sales and live swimwear shopping events, and discovered they reach a much larger audience. Our latest virtual warehouse sale made \$2 million in the first 20 minutes. As this virtual world becomes the new normal, we're already planning to introduce more products this way."

—JOANNA GRIFFITHS, founder and CEO, **Knix**

4/ Refocused products.

"As a wholesale fashion brand, in March 2020, we had to manage millions of dollars in canceled orders while maintaining our employees. The solution came from our nonprofit, The Laundry Truck L.A. One of its partners, the city of Los Angeles, asked us to make masks as a donation. We did it and ultimately produced hundreds of thousands of masks and PPE for government contracts, and then developed a premium scrubs line. This not only helped us survive; it helped us thrive. The shift to products that fulfill real human needs will remain central to Dolan."

—JODIE DOLAN, founder and president, **Dolan Group**

5/ Provided human support.

"While it's always been true, the pandemic has made it clearer than ever: Ensure your team feels valued, respected, and supported, and they'll help your business weather any storm. We've doubled down on employee support by improving benefits, embracing flexible schedules, and actively encouraging taking PTO. Our business is only as strong as the people who work here, and we're now stronger than ever."

—ALLI REED, founder, **Stratia**

6/ Made new relationships.

"From a marketing and retail perspective, the most important thing we did was diversify our activity. Previously, we relied heavily on in-person events and Facebook ads. As a result of the pandemic, we've explored other partnership opportunities, podcast and streaming advertising, and selling with other online retailers like Costco. All these steps will help ease any new shock waves in the future."

—STEPHANIE SCHULL, founder and inventor, **Kegelbell**

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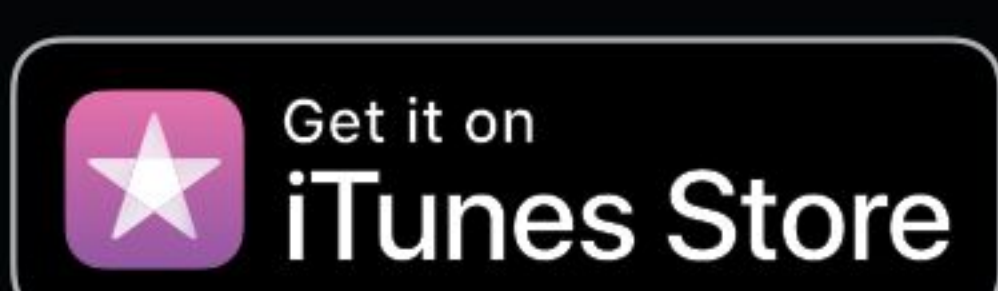
WAIT, YOU GET PAID TO DO THAT?

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Working in the Dog House

Dog ownership has boomed during COVID-19. That's made for some busy times at **Bark**, a leading canine lifestyle brand. But with pups everywhere, it's hard to get stressed. **Interviews by LIZ BRODY**

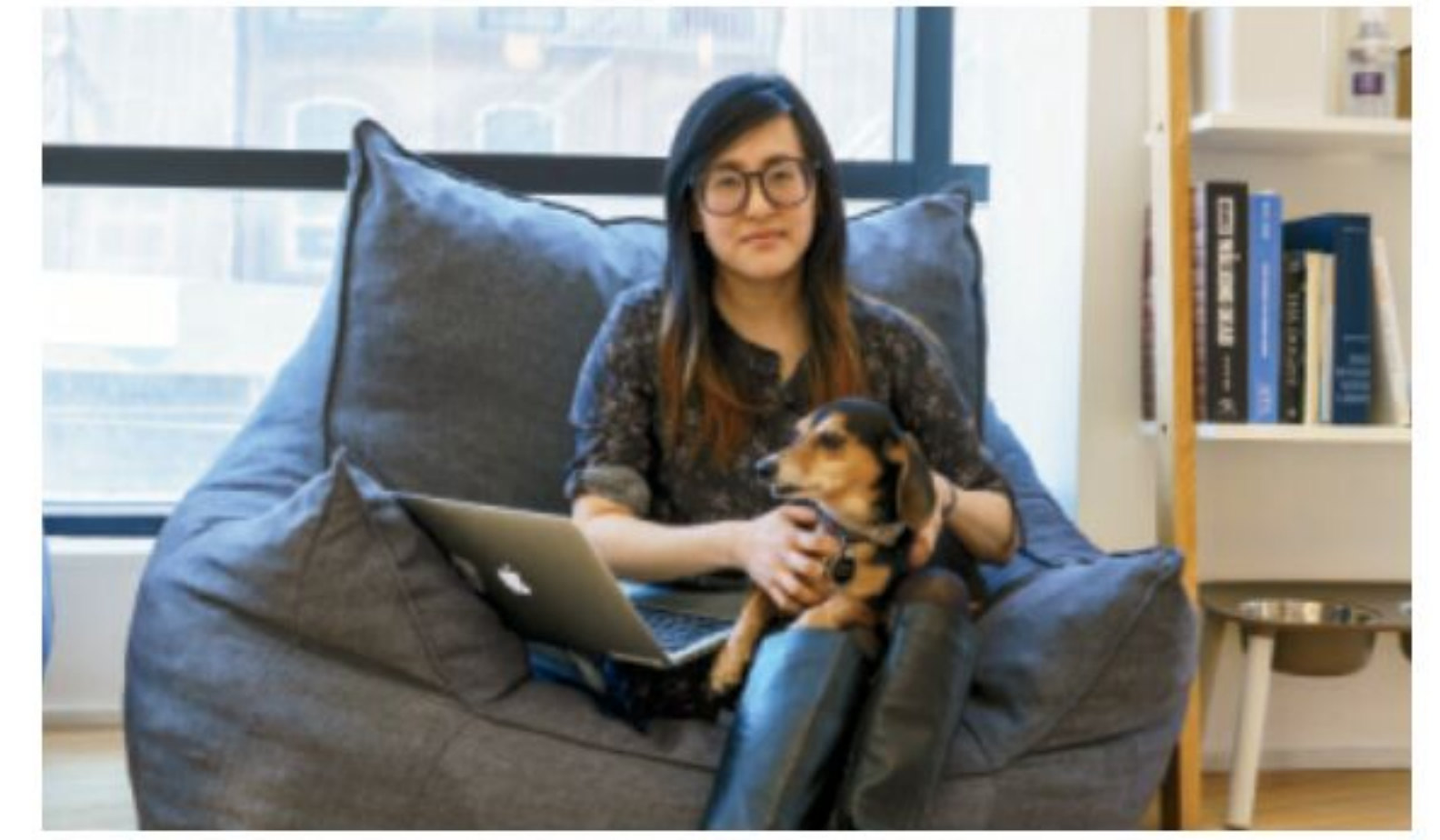
It's been a crazy time at Bark—but then again, the company was born out of a crazy time. Years ago, Henrik Werdelin checked into a conference on a cruise ship to find his room had a heart-shaped bed that was separated in two for a random roommate (he'd taken the cheaper option). As a joke, he pushed the “heart” together. Returning that night, he found Matt Meeker in it, already asleep. The two, both straight, shook hands over the duvet, discovered a mutual love of dogs, and in 2012 started the subscription BarkBox with Carly Strife, which they turned into a \$378 million-a-year, 440-plus employee, full dog lifestyle brand that went public via SPAC this year.

Bark's New York office is as quirky as its origin story. It has a toilet with a sink in its top and hidden cartoon doodles for employees to stumble on—“to rewire their brain so they'll think a bit differently,” says Werdelin—and, of course, everyone can bring their dog. There are rules (on leash till 4 p.m.) and special nooks for cozying up together, pooch bars, and paw washers; pet insurance is a benefit. The humans get ideas for products watching the pups play, and the pups? “It's just so de-stressing,” says Werdelin. “When you're sitting in a meeting and it's a tense moment, I guarantee you there's a dog that will fart or do something that nobody can help laughing at.” Here's what it's like working there.



CHRISTOPHER RIOS / NYC office coordinator
DOG / Merlin, a Pomapoo
(here with Lisa's dog, Andi)

"By bringing in your dog, you are also bringing another side of yourself to work. And the tension is eased because there is always a little ball of fluff sitting right next to you, looking up, amazed at the work you are doing. I don't think you will get that same reaction if you look over to your coworker like that."



LISA BERNIER / Program director of strategic communications and social impact

DOG / Andi, a dachshund mix

"As we transition back to work in the office, we've been keeping front of mind how to integrate all the new office dogs. My dog, Andi, comes in with me almost every day. She steals lunches a lot. Even dinners. I've had to pay for a lot of coworkers' meals."

MARY-ELIZABETH PIAIA / Employee experience manager
DOG / Olive, a rescue mix
(but "100 percent sweetheart")

"I bring Olive every time I come in. She's a great reminder to get out for a walk and break up a day of meetings and screen time. There are obviously challenges that come with an office full of dogs, but we have guidelines to help, like being on leash to cut down on any scavenging and to control interaction. And Bark employees know how to 'read the room,' if you will—which dogs get along, and how to avoid most problems."



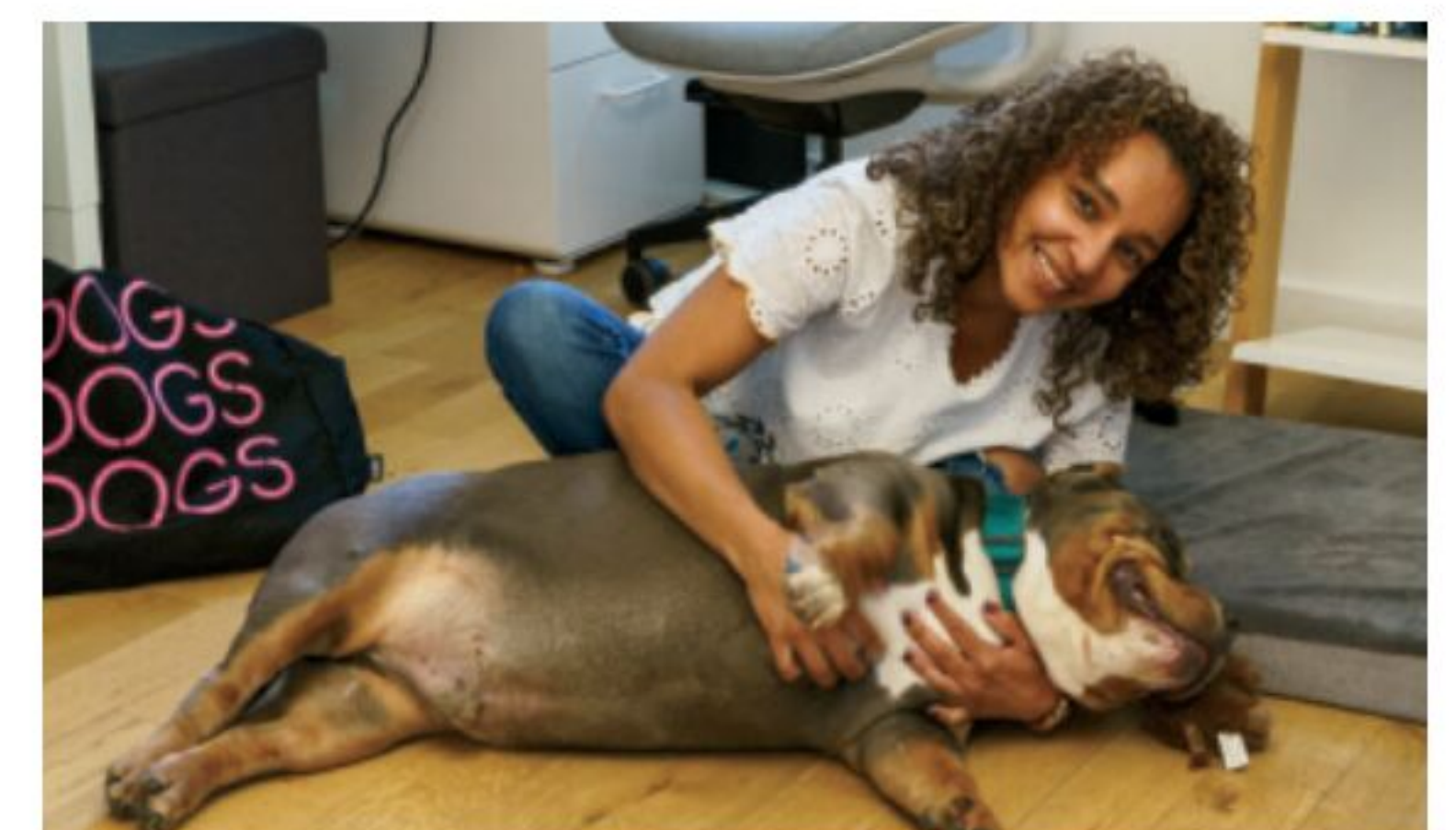
CRIS KIM / Engineering manager, platform engineering
DOG / Brownie, a Jack Russell terrier mix

"I adopted Brownie in 2014 as we were moving into our office. He used to come in every day, but now that he has diabetes and cancer, it's more for special occasions. Having dogs around makes the workplace a kinder place. They see the best in us."



KAT BEAUPRE / Art director
DOG / Quentin, a corgi

"Quentin is a very New York dog—full of anxiety, wears mostly black, a little bit of a dick but also sweet when you need him. He has friends around the office and then definite 'walk around to another aisle' dogs. Thankfully, nothing actually dramatic has ever happened—but there has been a fair share of loud barking matches. I have a photo of one conference room meeting where the chairs all had dogs in them and all the people were sitting on the floor. It's as if to remind us, *We're making dog toys here, people! This is supposed to be fun!*"



ALEXA MATEO / Accounts payable specialist
DOG / Mac Daddy, an American bully

"I've been here five years and seen a lot of celebrations. We've had a Bark Mitzvah, an all-corgi party, a 'Frenchie kissing' party. They take place over the weekend, so when you come in on Monday, you see tumbleweeds of hair all over the office."

EMILY GREITZER / Sample and merchandise operations coordinator
DOG / Jericho, a golden retriever mix

"We've seen incredible growth of the business since quarantine started and everyone started getting dogs while they were at home. It increases our workload, but it means we get to work on more and more cool products, with more retailers, more collaborations, all that good stuff. When we put health and wellness first, we set ourselves up for success in business and the rest of our lives. Sometimes that's really hard for humans to do, but dogs do it effortlessly, so we always have them setting the example for us."



Lean Into Your Existential Crisis

As I got older, I clung tight to the life I had before—until an opportunity to become an entrepreneur changed everything.

by **STACY LONDON**

I had a long, successful career in television. It began with my show *What Not to Wear* in 2003 and ran strong for 15 years. Then I got older. I reached menopause, and my perspective changed. Instead of talking about style, I wanted to talk about aging—to alleviate the shame and embarrassment so many women feel. So I did what I'd done many times before: I pitched a TV show about it. And it did not go well.

Networks told me the idea was unsexy and that nobody would watch. I felt like they were talking about me as well—that I was now past my prime. I felt worthless and stripped of my long-held identity as a public personality. But I clung to it anyway; I couldn't let go of this old idea of who I was. And as a result, I nearly missed the chance to transform myself and reveal a new passion as an entrepreneur.

This experience taught me something important: *You have to let go of who you were to become who you are.* I used to say that to people all

the time. Then I discovered how hard it is to do, but how rewarding it can be, too. I became the owner and CEO of a company called State of Menopause, which makes products to help women manage the symptoms. It's the mission I wanted to bring to TV—and now I know that there is more than one way to fulfill a mission.

Here's how I nearly passed up this opportunity, and what carried me through.

State of Menopause was created in 2019 and initially asked me to be a beta tester. I was so thrilled that this brand paid attention to the symptoms I'd been suffering, and I developed a real passion for it—so much so that in 2020, when its parent company decided to sell the brand, they asked if I wanted it.

I hesitated. Then I thought about it a lot during the pandemic, when I had the time to sit with myself and ask questions. *I don't want to be that person who holds on to an old version of themselves,* I told myself. But I struggled to let go...until I asked myself



the question that changed my perspective. It was this: *What is my kernel of truth?*

In other words, what did I already have that I could bring to this new identity? Being CEO would be new. Owning a business would be new. So what *wouldn't* be new? It was my need to tell a story that, while personal, is also universal. I was going through a massive personal change—and so are State of Menopause's customers. I can relate to them and serve them.

I realized that change doesn't mean fully abandoning what you were. It just means taking the best of you and putting it all to new use. That's when I was able to say yes, and to become CEO.

My hope is that women my

age also see new chapters and possibilities for themselves. Yes, there is a secondary grief in saying goodbye to youth. But as we live longer, we will be "older" for a lot more time than we'll be "young." You can call it transformation or change—but whatever it is, it can be a time of infinite possibility. I say, lean into the existential crisis. What feels like a midlife crisis can become a midlife renaissance, so long as you can look at things like success, failure, adversity, and luck as all the same thing: experience.

Taking on this company meant leaving a version of me behind so a new one could exist. But the way I see it now, I've already had a few careers in my life. Why stop growing?

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Anatomy of a Turnaround

Most companies at some point will need to turn things around. Here's why some succeed...and many fail.

by **HAMZA MUDASSIR**

At any point in time, one in three companies requires a turnaround. That's what research by Boston Consulting Group has found. And while you may not be able to predict whether you'll be one of those companies, you'll surely recognize the signs of distress: If your long-running business model collapses, your leaders lose focus of the company's mission, and your key talent

starts to leave, then you'll be facing an existential crisis. It's turnaround time!

Given how common this is, you might assume that most experienced entrepreneurs and CEOs are adept at managing it. That is, unfortunately, not the case. The same research highlights that 75 percent of turnaround attempts fail to improve performance over the long term.

Part of the problem is a lack of foresight. By the time

a company's leaders realize something has gone wrong, it is usually too late. That holds especially true for tech companies, which regularly deal with a winner-takes-all dynamic, where a competitor ends up dominating a whole industry versus just a part of it. But it can be true anywhere else, too. When you lose ground, it can be hard to regain it.

But there *are* solutions available, even when a situation looks dire. It starts with

leadership. When attempting a turnaround, most leaders focus on their finances—viewing a troubled organization as a profit-and-loss sheet that needs to “lose fat,” for example. When these leaders spend, they often do it in the form of bonuses to incentivize their team's better performance. That makes sense; when a leader focuses on finances, they're hoping to find certainty in an otherwise uncertain situation. But they miss something

in the process: culture.

When a leader plays the numbers game, they lose track of the culture of their business—and that blind spot can result in failure.

1/ Learn from religion.

Turnarounds, at their core, are about establishing a new way of working. As a result, old ways of working are often criticized and rapidly abolished. That may be necessary, but leaders often forget how much it leaves key employees feeling vulnerable and ostracized. In my consulting practice, I've had C-level executives break down while describing how their teams push back against change programs. The teams may understand the logic of the change, but they're angry and resistant to it anyway—and the executives can't understand why.

The answer to this problem can be found in the history of religion. Most large religions, in their early days, start off as a small group of contrarians led by a charismatic leader. Such a group also includes a handful of influential people from the incumbent religion who convert to this new way of life publicly. Slowly but surely, the group becomes the face of the movement and each success of the group increases the religion's following.

The same holds true for turnarounds. The protagonist of the turnaround cannot be a maverick CEO making dramatic moves—it must be the *turnaround group* that they put together to execute the change. The choice of whom to include in this key group can make or break a turnaround program. Leaders need a healthy mix of new and incumbent talent who all believe in the new mission.

They can help inspire the entire organization to follow along.

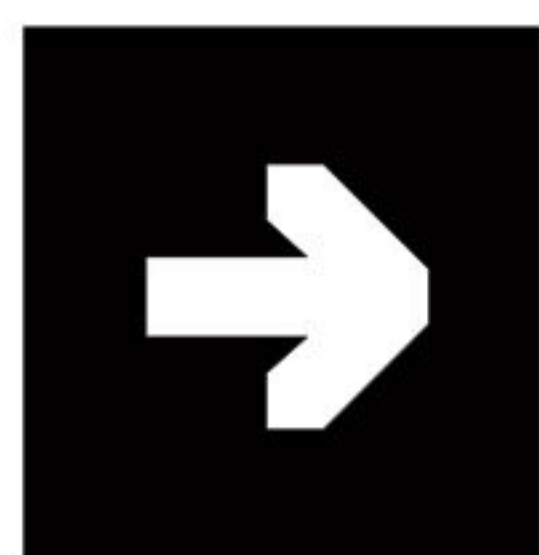
2/ Innovation is everyone's problem.

Vision alone cannot save a company, of course. A turnaround team needs to tackle both bloated costs and shrinking revenues, usually simultaneously. Reducing

small experiments that do not move the needle on revenues or customer sentiment. Over time, the group disbands as senior management and team members lose interest, and the company continues to languish in mediocrity.

Innovation cannot be containerized like this. Boards and CEOs should strive to

product or business model takes off by the second year. The company starts to feel like a newly renovated home, and financial results improve; as a result, leaders high-five each other on a job well done. Then, by the third year, the company's change movement loses steam. Inertia starts creeping in. Soon the company needs another



TURNAROUNDS MAY NOT COME NATURALLY TO MOST CEOs AND ENTREPRENEURS. AFTER ALL, LEADERS ARE OFTEN CELEBRATED FOR THEIR LONG-TERM VISION—AND TURNAROUNDS COME WITH TREMENDOUS SHORT-TERM PRESSURE.

costs is the easier of the two problems to solve; it's a matter of dropping unprofitable clients and laying off redundant employees. The second problem, bringing revenue growth back, is a different beast. It requires a deep understanding of customer pain points as well as a coherent vision of where the industry is headed—which then justify the risk of creating new products, policies, and procedures. This process in a nutshell is called *innovation*.

Innovation can be a hard problem to solve, especially for failing organizations, which are running short on both cash and inspiration. Perhaps that is why I've seen many CEOs make the same exact mistake: They treat innovation like a special, separate project.

Here's how the error often happens. Once CEOs establish their turnaround group, they then create an entirely *new* team, often called the "product" or "innovation" team, to deal with declining revenues. This new team, with little empowerment or vision, ends up doing a smorgasbord of

clearly understand and measure the problems plaguing their customers and then use scientific methods to build a vision of a future they want to aim toward. That vision should be repeatedly shared with the entire organization, with employees being empowered and rewarded to execute toward it. The turnaround group must be a big part of this, balancing their responsibilities between championing innovation *and* reducing costs.

3/ Prevention is still the best medicine.

Turnarounds may not come naturally to most CEOs and entrepreneurs. After all, leaders are often celebrated for their long-term vision—and turnarounds come with tremendous short-term pressure. In my consulting practice, I have found that during a turnaround CEOs struggle to plan more than two years ahead.

As a result, almost all turnarounds end up with a promising start and a disappointing end. Costs decrease materially in the first year, and a new

turnaround to make itself relevant again.

Top leaders and boards can prevent this—but once again, it requires focusing on the business's culture instead of just the numbers. Everyone has to believe that a turnaround is not a short-term fix. It is instead a long-term change movement that must continue in spirit, if not in methods, long after a company improves.

In other words, a turnaround is not just a prescription for the current ailments plaguing a company. It's also a preventive method through which future ailments can be avoided (or at least avoided for the same reasons that started the current one). Without this worldview, victory can be declared too soon—and have catastrophic results. Change must be knit into the very fabric of the newly reborn organization, and everything else must follow.

Hamza Mudassir is a fellow in strategy at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge, and founder of Platypodes.io.

Keep Some Old, Add Some New

The pandemic forced us to abandon many old things and create entirely new ones. Now that it's ending, what parts of each should we keep? **by NICOLE WALTERS**



There's no way I can get back to the office," a client recently told me. Over the course of the pandemic, he had picked up a side hustle as a graphic designer. He had an abundance of clients—and a personal life to balance, too. So when that "return to work" email from his 9-to-5 arrived, his new reality quickly collided with traditional corporate expectations.

He's far from alone. As business owners figured out how to navigate the pandemic's uncharted territory, they innovated—and sometimes found better ways of doing what they love. But now the divide between our new habits and our old ways of working has become a major stressor. As we face a "return to normalcy," it can be difficult to decipher what normal should look like. What aspects of our

pre-pandemic lives are worth bringing back, and how much of what we've discovered should we hold on to?

That question has become a primary source of conversations in my own consultancy. Here are some suggestions for what to keep.

KEEP / Pivoting quickly.

The pandemic forced many businesses to shift more quickly than ever before. They swiftly developed solutions that served their customers. Processes that once took months or years—like go-to-market strategy development—suddenly took days or weeks.

Just look at the virtual book launch or movie premiere. It was once commonplace for marketers to book venues, splurge on social-worthy atmosphere, and spend budget on media—but the quick

pivot became the "influencer gift box." Once exclusively for top-tier Kardashian-esque glitterati, a curated gift box became a new, widespread standard during the pandemic as an intimate, cost-effective way to engage audiences, support social chatter, and deliver visibility. It focused on what media marketing is actually about: getting the product to the clients quickly, and getting them talking about it.

Simple pivots like this remind us that even in complicated circumstances, we can run our marketing efficiently without sacrificing results.

KEEP / Building real relationships.

As the CDC's recommendations begin to allow more gatherings, it's worthwhile to resume in-person interaction with staff and customers alike.

While videoconferencing software served as a nice stopgap for getting business done, it's not the most effective way to have a meeting. Digital project management tools help automate our work, but they're not always as successful as live presentations to colleagues or clients.

We'll have to get back to a point where we realize that while we can (and should) automate systems, we cannot apply that same approach to building and maintaining relationships. Old-school tactics such as open houses, modest quarterly gifts, or team

retreats will help keep people from feeling detached or disconnected.

KEEP / Committing to something bigger.

In 2020, many businesses for the first time publicly stood up for social causes and proudly declared their values. The importance of having and sharing a clear corporate social-responsibility vision took an important leap forward and will likely become a requirement for all. Consumers are demanding that the businesses they support stand for issues that matter to them. Empty promises or "big check" presentations to non-profits won't cut it—customers want to see an organization itself embody these values. They want to see results.

Having a clear mission statement in the business, and merging it with messaging for your internal team and your consumers, is an age-old corporate strategy that 2020 amplified, and it is here to stay.

THE PAST YEAR will remain indelibly imprinted on all our minds and our businesses. We can make it so that the changes it brought, and the lessons we learned together, will shape the future for the better.

Nicole Walters is the CEO of Atlanta-based business education firm Inherit Learning Company and star of the USA Network show She's the Boss.

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Why Simplicity Is So Complex

Entrepreneurs should make things easy, for themselves and their customers. So why don't we? **by GREG MCKEOWN**

When a team of Apple's best product designers presented to Steve Jobs what became the iDVD—a now-defunct computer application that allowed users to burn video files onto a DVD—they expected their boss to be wowed. The design was beautiful and clean. The app performed numerous functions, even though the team had dramatically streamlined the original version, which had a thousand-page user manual.

But Jobs had something else in mind. He walked to the whiteboard and drew a rectangle. Then he said, "Here's the new application. It's got one window. You drag your video into the window. Then you click the button that says 'burn.' That's it. That's what we're going to make."

Simplicity is an art form. Entrepreneurs strive to create products that are simple to use, services that are simple to access, websites and apps that are simple to navigate, and customer experiences that are, simply, simple.

Then why is so much of what we do still riddled with complexity?

We've become so accustomed to complexity's presence in all the processes in our lives, we

barely even notice it. Worse, we unwittingly create it: Faced with what should be simple problems, we wind up finding complex solutions. Then we get frustrated, and we look for new ways to make that now-complex problem simple again. As this cycle continues, we add layer upon layer of unnecessary complexity.

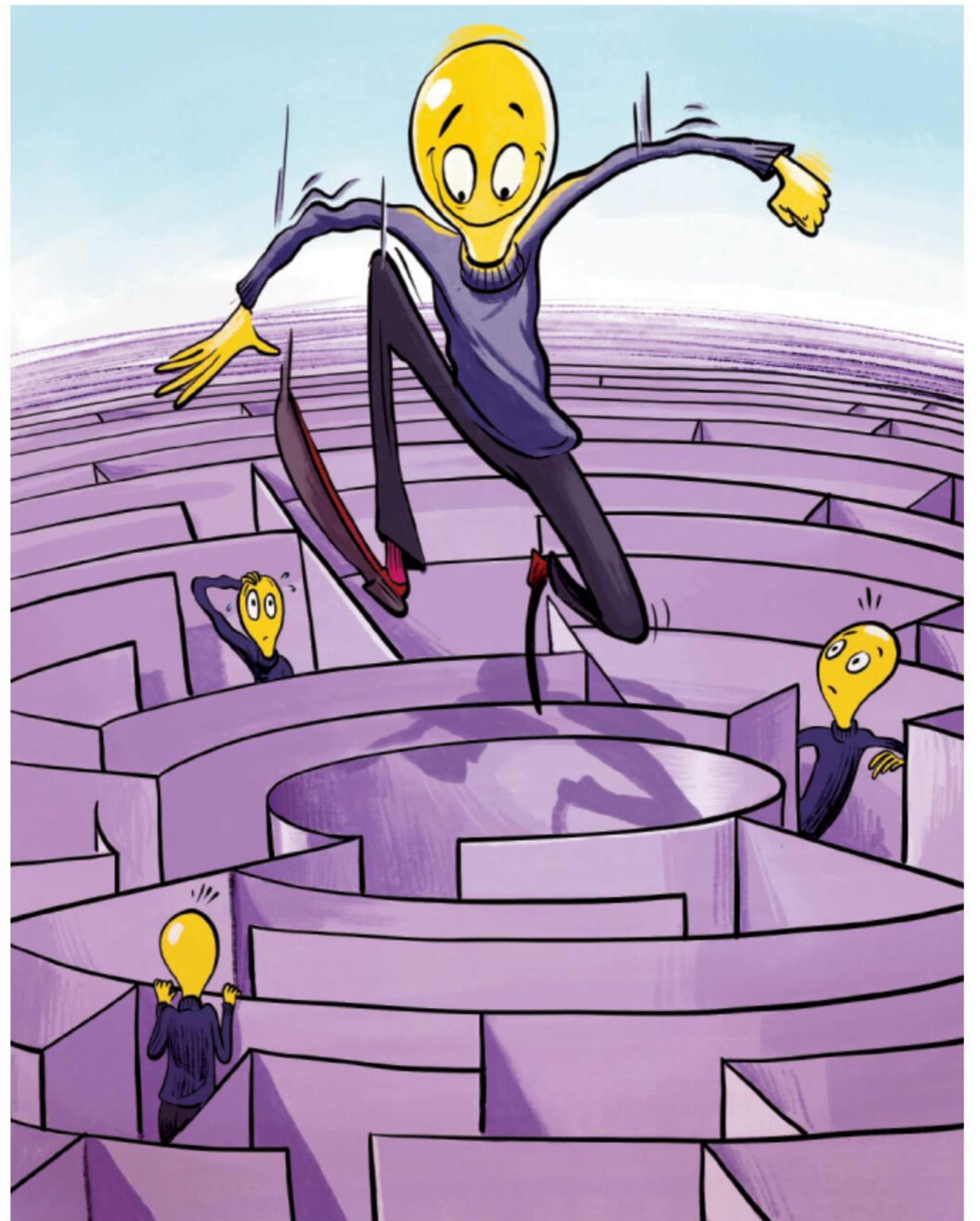
In my first book, I argued that identifying what is essential requires a system of ruthless prioritization. In my new book, *Effortless*, I explain that to actually get those essential things done, what is required is ruthless simplification. Here are a few tips.

1/ Start at zero.

When faced with immense complexity, our instinct is to try to pare it down. But what if we inverted the approach and started with a blank slate instead?

Last year, I launched a podcast. Originally, the instructions I was supposed to send to each guest consisted of 15 steps. They were overwhelming even for me to read, never mind for guests to follow. So I asked myself, *What is the minimum number of steps someone could take?* and soon found the answer: two.

You'd be surprised how few steps are needed to obtain a seemingly complex goal or complete a seemingly complex task. So start at zero, and determine the minimum from there.



2/ Lose the bells and whistles.

It has become a common reflex to dress things up, especially when it comes to pitches, presentations, and progress reports. Here's what the goal of those things usually should be: to just talk about your business—simply. Resist the temptation to add extra bells and whistles. They aren't a distraction only for you; they're a distraction for your audience. That's why when I do presentations, I use six slides, with fewer than 10 words total.

You already eliminate the unnecessary features in your product. Do the same for everything else.

3/ Maximize the steps not taken.

Too often, we try to simplify our

processes by simplifying the individual steps within them. But what if we removed steps instead? That allows you to channel all your energy toward getting the actual project done.

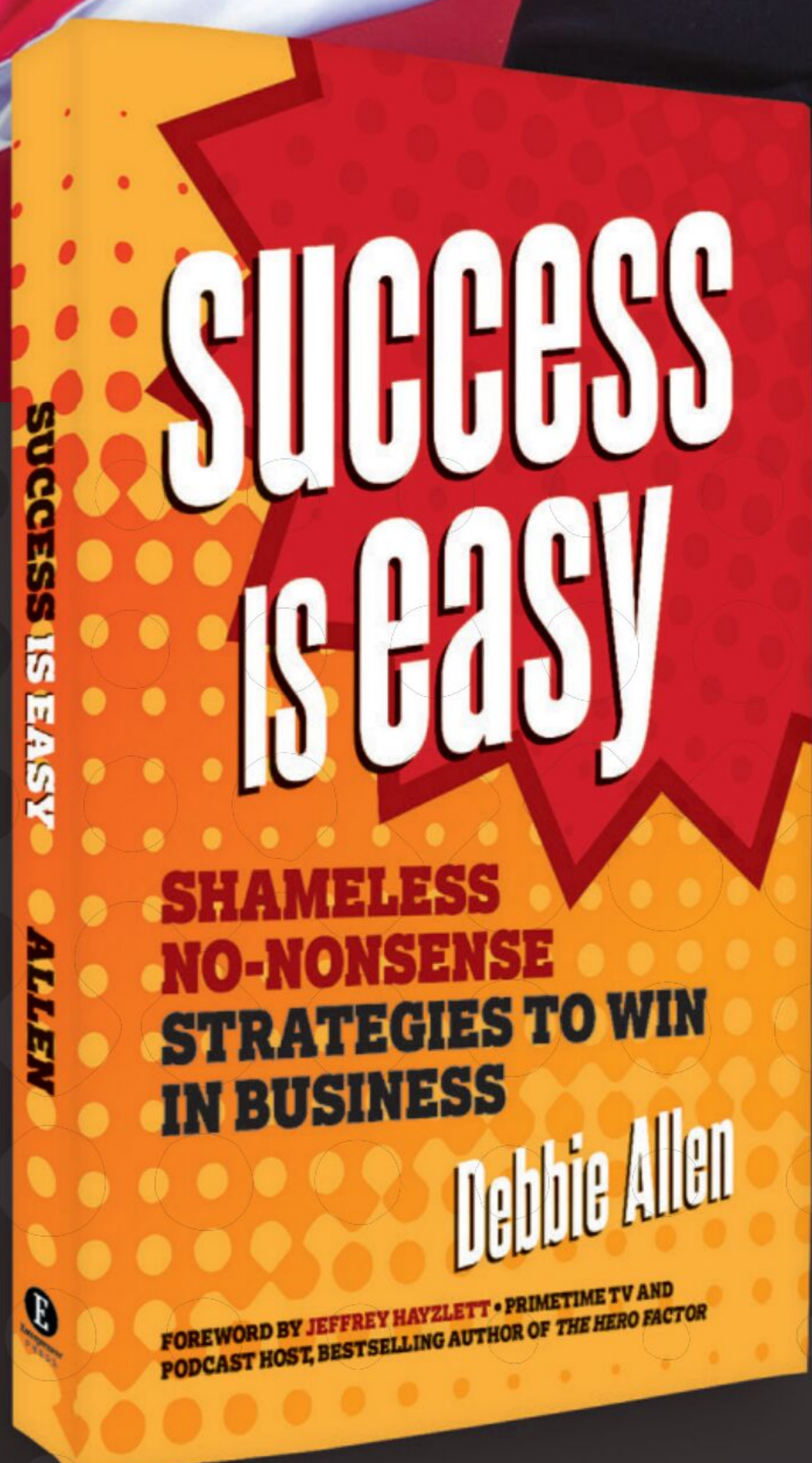
One of the 12 principles of the famed Agile Manifesto defines simplicity as "the art of maximizing the amount of work not done." It means the goal is to create value for the customer, and if that can be achieved with less work, that is what should be done.

This principle can be adapted to any everyday process.

Regardless of what your ultimate goal is, the simplest steps are the ones you don't take.

Adapted from Effortless: Make It Easier to Do What Matters Most (Penguin Random House), by Greg McKeown.

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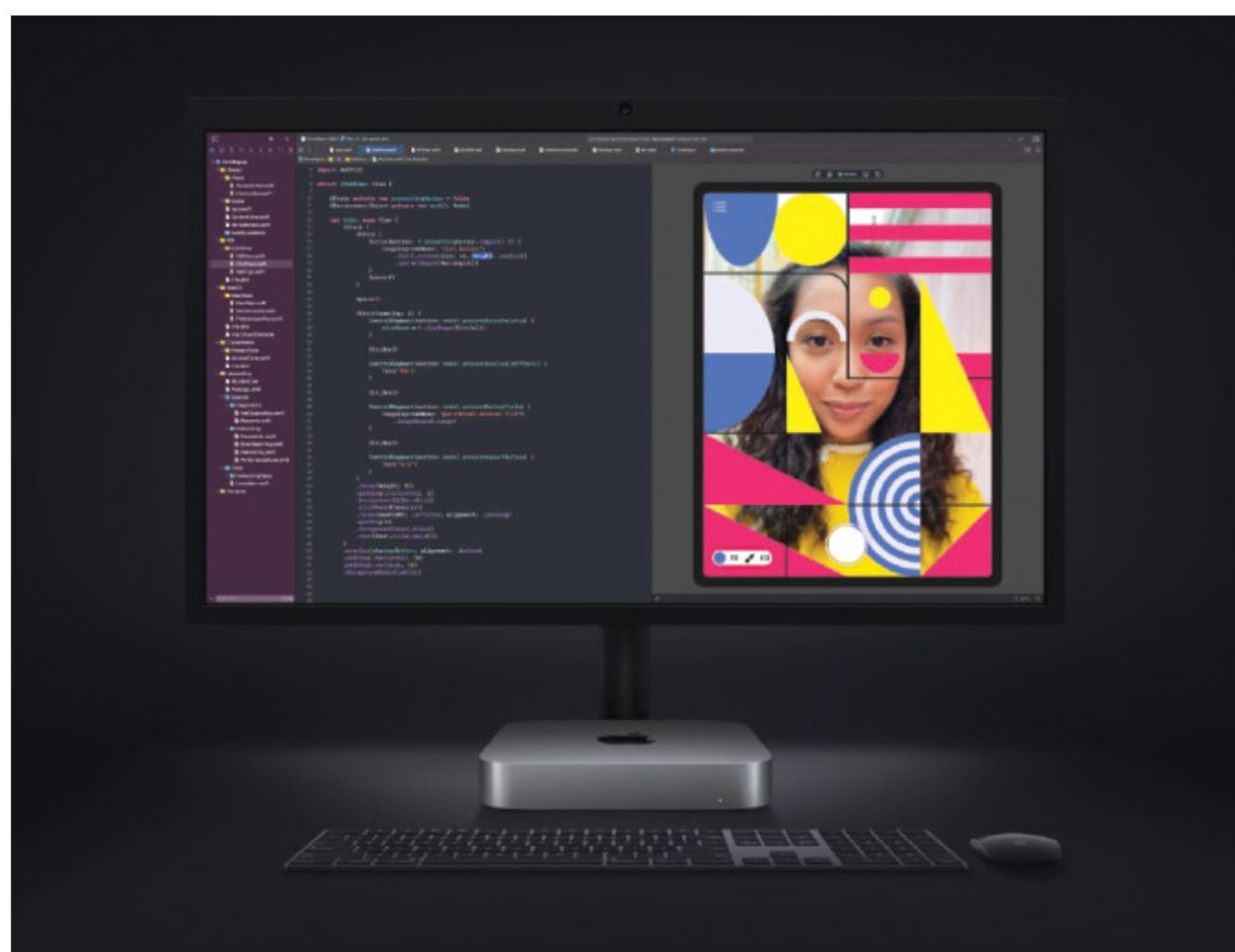


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Tiny Computer, Big Benefits

Having the right office setup can make your day more productive and enjoyable. Affordable minicomputers are often overlooked—but you may want to look again **by CHYELLE DVORAK**



Gabe Shepherd started a small business with lots of growth potential—and he did it on a computer that could also be described that way.

His company, which he launched with some buddies in December, is called Vegas Built, and it's a shopping app for locals to find great deals. He created it with the help of his Mac mini, a tiny (7.7 inches by 1.4 inches) computer that sits on his desk. It originally didn't have the memory capacity for Photoshop and Adobe XD, but that was no problem: Once he needed those programs, he purchased a 64GB upgrade from a third party and installed it himself. "Photoshop uses more processing power, so being able to afford the extra RAM helped

with efficiency," says Shepherd.

Many entrepreneurs love laptops, and they may have forgotten desktop computers even exist—but a new crop of ultrasmall machines make a compelling case for themselves. Unlike clunky old desktop computers, these are practically the size of a smartphone and generally cheaper than a laptop. (The Mac mini starts at \$699, hundreds less than the average MacBook.)

They also come with some headspace advantages. Small computers are easier to hide under a desk for security purposes, and they tend to consume far less power (green points for saving the planet). They also give workers a sense of *This is my workspace and my office setting* (even if you're at home).

"A computer you leave in your office allows you to have the kind of monitor you want, and a keyboard you're most comfortable with, which increases productivity," says Tim Bajarin, chairman of the tech consultancy Creative Strategies.

For years, minicomputers were dismissed for their lack of processing power. That's now less of a concern; the M1 processing chip in the Mac mini has three times the CPU performance and six times faster graphics than the previous version of the device. Apple isn't the only company to power-pack its minicomputer. HP has the Elite Slice G2 Partner Ready for \$1,199, while Acer's Chromebox CXI3 starts at \$214 (and can become more powerful with upgrades).

In other words, you won't waste time waiting on your computer. "The 10 seconds you spend each day waking up your device amounts to 20 minutes per year," says Linn Huang, research VP of devices and displays at IDC. The Mac mini comes to life almost immediately, plus you don't have to use a laptop bag or set up the device.

These are all reasons Shepherd, of Vegas Built, considers his Mac mini a major asset. "Now I have an ultra-wide monitor," he says, "with enough screen real estate to work efficiently."

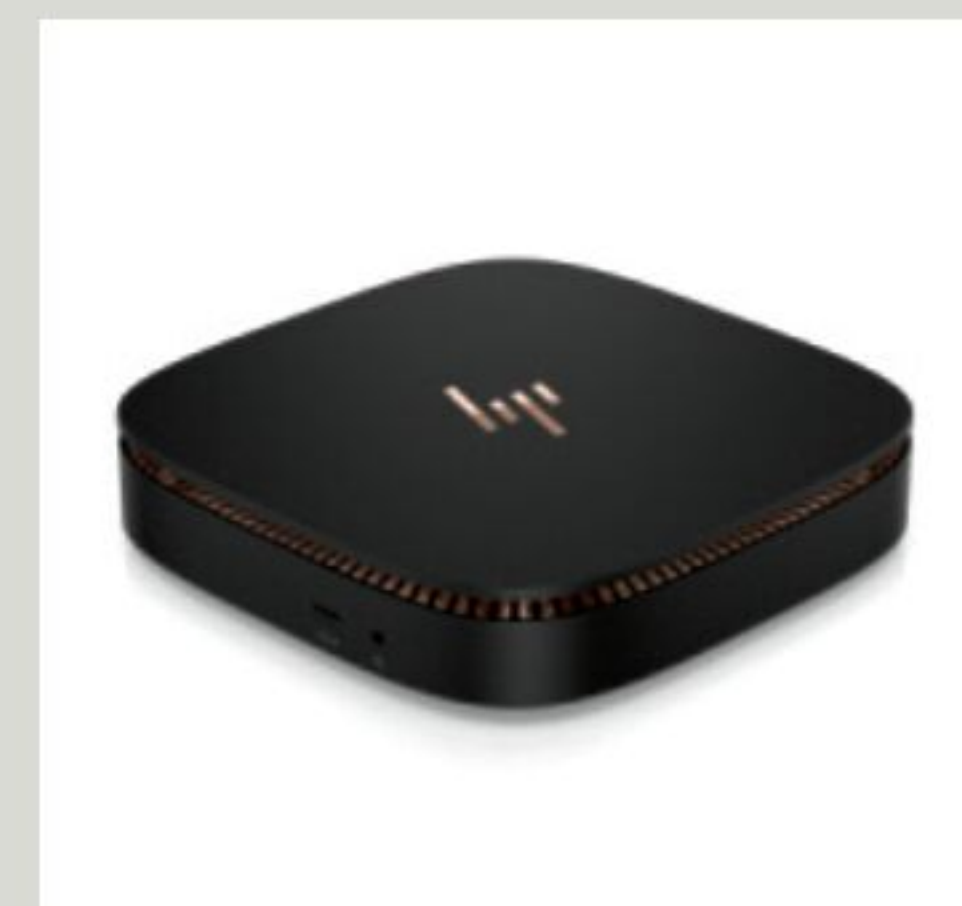
The Mighty Minis



Apple Mac mini

Price/ \$699

Best feature/ It wakes up from sleep mode nearly instantaneously thanks to the powerful M1 processing chip.



HP Elite Slice G2 Partner Ready

Price/ \$1,199

Best feature/ It is designed to connect with other room speaker systems.



Acer Chromebox CXI3

Price/ \$214

Best feature/ It can connect simultaneously with two external monitors to maximize your productivity.

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How Do I Tell My Story?

Creating content may be easy, but that doesn't mean you should do it. **by ADAM BORNSTEIN**



if the work doesn't add value, you just created a bad first impression. So how do you decide if content is right for you? Here are four questions to consider.

1/ What problem are you trying to solve?

Awareness should serve a purpose, and if you're looking to grow or amplify your story, content is only one tool to do that. Consider what else you have planned; maybe you're currently investing in more paid media, a sales team, or other marketing ideas. If you have a lot in the pipeline, you may not need content right now.

2/ Do you have the time or resources?

Blogs and podcasts are opportunities—but if you're unable to invest in their success with the right talent and production value, then you're better off without them. Assess the amount of time and money it will take to do them well, and stack that against what else might be sacrificed.

3/ Do you have the skill to succeed?

Podcasts and blogs *look* easy to make, but that's exactly why you need to be deliberate with what you create. The low barrier to entry means that both of these spaces are very crowded, and dominated by people who have been practicing and refining their craft for years. Content isn't just about competing with other businesses;

it's competing with other creators for people's *time*. That means you must have something to say—and a way to say it that people will prioritize.

If that feels daunting, then good. It means you're thinking about the competition in the right way, and it will force you to create something special.

4/ Do you know what's missing from your story?

Every good business has something that distinguishes it from the competition—but not every business knows how to bring that story, value, or purpose to life. Amazing content lives at the intersection of what I think of as three E's: education, entertainment, and emotion. That's not to say every piece of content requires all three, but that's the formula for greatest payoff for yourself and your audience.

No one needs to create a blog or a podcast, but everyone *does* need to control their narrative. The better you do it, the more powerfully you can transform your traditional business into something that meets people where they are. Maybe that's with content...but maybe it's not! Let your resources and needs drive your decision.

Adam Bornstein is the founder of Pen Name Consulting, a marketing and branding agency, and the creator of two12, a mentorship experience for entrepreneurs.

Q

So many brands have become content producers. Do I need to launch a podcast or a blog, too?

—AZIZ, TORONTO

ENTREPRENEURS feel a pressure to be everywhere, grabbing everyone's attention. You may think it's the difference between growth and decline. But that's not true. *How* you make an impression on someone is just as important—and arguably more significant—than simply getting on their radar.

I learned this early in my career, before I entered business, when I began as an aspiring journalist. People told me I needed “more clips,” which meant I needed more proof of my work. I hustled, taking every writing opportunity I could find regardless of quality. But I kept

getting rejected for full-time jobs. It was frustrating and confusing, until one potential employer finally explained his disinterest: “You're only as strong as your *weakest* clip,” he said.

In other words, people were aware of what I was doing—but what I created didn't make them excited about working with me. The same liability exists in business, and it's why you must be careful about the podcasts and blogs you create.

Content creates awareness and can be a powerful way to grow a business. But it comes with risks, too. First, it can be a lot of work for very little return. And second,

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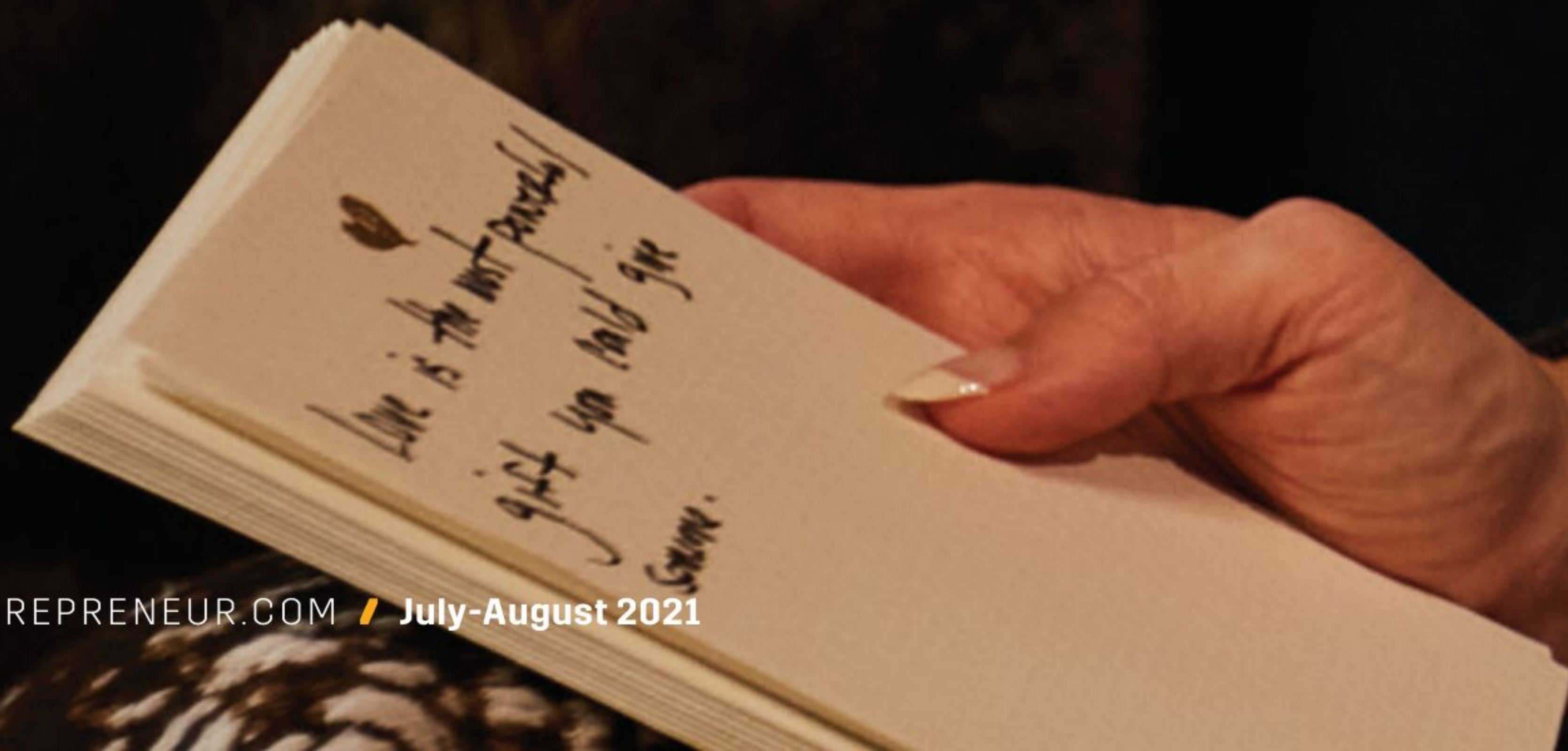
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“We’re Doing This for a Reason”

Kate Hudson

has launched three businesses
in very crowded industries
but knows what separates her
from the competition:
It’s not just the products.
It’s the mission.

by **ALYSSA GIACOBBE**





PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANNY FUJIKAWA

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ENTREPRENEURS LOVE taking “no” as a challenge, as if the right combination of savvy and stubbornness can overcome any obstacle. It’s why, against the odds, Kate Hudson went after an elusive herb called amla.

This happened early into Hudson’s latest business, InBloom, a line of plant-based powdered supplements she launched in August 2020. The amla plant is native to India and believed in Ayurvedic medicine to promote overall wellness and longevity, and Hudson’s team had spent months working on the formula for an amla-packed, immunity-boosting blend they hoped to introduce later this year. It had to fit all her criteria—safe, sustainably farmed, good tasting, easily dissolved in liquids, and “bioavailable,” the wellness industry buzzword for “It’ll work.” But try as they might, they couldn’t overcome a fact of nature: Amla is a seasonal crop, and even in the best of times, there is only so much of it to go around. No supplier could help them. That meant no amla, which meant her team had to reformulate everything, which meant a months-long product delay, which meant Hudson had to accept a less glamorous but equally true entrepreneurial ethos: Sometimes you just need to move on...for now, anyway.

“It’s not over,” she says. “In the back of our minds, we’re like, *We’re gonna get that plant one day. We’re gonna get it.*”

Hudson is, of course, known best for her Hollywood pedigree—an accomplished actor, daughter of Goldie Hawn. But she is also an experienced brand builder. She launched the activewear line Fabletics in 2013, the gluten-free vodka King St. Vodka in 2019, and now InBloom. With each, she has become more comfortable riding the unpredictability of business and turning shortcomings into strengths. Early this year, for example, InBloom faced its first major supply shortage and sold out of several of its SKUs, including its two most popular. Hudson’s Instagram comments were full of people asking when their favorite would be back, which stressed her out. So she had frequent calls with her cofounder and CEO, Tushar Adya, and then posted regular updates to her customers on Instagram—using the opportunity to educate people on how the products are made, the care with which the plants are grown and







harvested, and so on. Eventually, she came to realize how even a stumble can be an opportunity to fulfill a brand's mission.

"My whole thing is: How do we democratize wellness? How do we get people to understand it? And how do we make it sustainable?" she says now. "Because in this world, there's so much waste. You think something is supposed to be recyclable, but you have to take it to a special place to actually do it. The bags they say are biodegradable aren't. Or you have to compost them, and how many people are really doing that? To be successful, we need to educate consumers about why they want what we want. Why everything will take longer. Why I'm frustrated, too, but we're doing this for a reason."

AS FAR BACK AS THE late '90s, brands approached Hudson with opportunities—some collaboration offers but mostly endorsements. She promoted brands for a while (and still does, including WW, formerly Weight Watchers), but few of them felt right. "I love performing, but I'm not a model, and I always felt uncomfortable talking about a product when often I had no understanding of it," she says. She remembers working with the cosmetics brand Almay and saying, "I can't do this hair-flip moment, but tell me about the product." "And when we started talking about how Almay started," Hudson says, "and that this man created it for his wife, there was this amazing light bulb moment. Finally, it felt authentic. I was like, *OK, I can do this. But also, I want to build a business I can really speak to. I want to be the guy creating the product for his wife.*"

Launching Fabletics was a risk; athleisure was a crowded space dominated by national brands, and Hudson had no experience in it. But she started to wonder: If she bet on herself, what would be the downside? "Actresses and actors in my position were endorsing, but they were not founding businesses," she says, citing Jessica Alba and Gwyneth Paltrow as the exceptions, and her mentors. "But then I thought, you know, *I've wanted to do something in fashion. I've wanted to do something in healthy lifestyle.* So I kind of put it all together and realized, *Maybe this is exactly what I want to be doing.*" She also wanted to do something affordable, in the category her CEO Adya calls "mass aspiration," which meant finding a business model that could keep costs low.

In solving these problems, Hudson learned an important lesson: A brand can be differentiated by more than just the product. Her athleisure was cute and affordable, but other brands could claim the same. Fabletics ultimately clicked with consumers because of its sustainability model. Fashion brands can be wasteful; the excess materials pile up, and out-of-season models get trashed. Fabletics led with a different vision. It uses recycled packaging and shipping materials, as well as sustainably sourced clothing materials. It launched with a subscription model that enabled it to keep inventory low, and as it opened brick-and-mortar locations (it has 52 now), it built them to be carbon neutral. And it did all this while keeping costs modest.

That experience became a guiding insight for InBloom. The

concept—supplements in powder form—came out of Hudson’s own fear of taking pills, which she has had since she was 10, when she choked on a Fireball and had to get the Heimlich from a stranger in a CVS. (“It popped out of my mouth like a cartoon,” she says.) But she knew she’d need more than that to compete in a category so large that it’s expected to reach \$349 billion by 2026. Then Hudson noticed an opening: Most supplements were crazy-expensive to make—and also to buy—and offered little transparency regarding ingredients. Many were full of synthetics, or claimed to be natural but weren’t, which left consumers distrustful and confused. This meant that trust, in addition to product, could be her differentiator.

Hudson looked for a while to find partners who were on board with how seriously she took the idea of affordable, and sustainable, wellness. Eventually, she found it in Adya, a cofounder of a brand incubator called Syllable. On choosing a partner, Hudson says she follows what she calls “the no-asshole rule” because “there’s nothing worse than being in business with people who really aren’t very fun and don’t have a good moral compass.” A good partner also has to be OK with her constant involvement (and sometimes obsessive calling). “They have to be ready for me to roll up my sleeves,” she says. “Sometimes people don’t think that that’s how you’re going to be. They think you’re going to hide behind your people and that you just want to be the face of something. But I would take the investment over the dollar any day.”

InBloom launched right in the middle of the pandemic, with five SKUs and a bang, quadrupling its sales in the first few months alone, thanks in large part to Hudson’s 13.3 million social media followers and the attention she pays to them. Her Instagram posts are a master class in personal branding. They’re a mix of the purely personal and those that serve to promote her businesses, with snapshots of herself at home and with her family that feel private and revealing but never showy or self-serious. She comes across as so relatable that it’s easy to forget her fame, a beautiful but definitely not perfect every-girl who loves her family, working hard, getting sweaty, and a stiff drink come 5 o’clock on Friday. If this is a strategy, it’s subtle and it works. For the first video post to her personal Instagram account hinting at InBloom, some two months before launch, Hudson is in her kitchen, dancing in and out of the frame in a sports bra and leggings and vigorously shaking what looks to be a bottle of green juice. The video ends with her laughing at someone off camera—presumably her boyfriend, Danny Fujikawa, who films much of her content—as if she’s making fun of herself, which she is.

While all that may drive sales, it doesn’t win over every potential partner or investor—and Hudson knows that. She says that not being taken seriously as a female entrepreneur is something

“My creative mind is really important. I think it is for everybody. And we don’t nurture that enough.”

Hollywood well prepared her for, and that the best way around it is right on through it. “For sure, I have a little bit of PTSD from working in film,” she says. “You know you’re always being seen a certain way. You know some people just want to see you slip on the banana peel. In business, I’ve learned that, especially for women, it’s all about that agreement. When you’re doing a deal, make sure you’re comfortable with everything, and I mean everything, in that agreement before you sign. Ask as many questions as you need. Hold people accountable. Call them out. And if they don’t like you, they don’t like you, and you just keep going.” To put too much stock in what other people think of you is a very dangerous thing to do. That’s hard for Hudson, because she loves people. She’s not shy. “But sometimes,” she says, “you just gotta tune it all out.”

TUNING IT ALL OUT is something Hudson first learned to do sometime in her late 20s. When I ask how she manages to stay organized running three businesses, mothering three kids, and sustaining an acting career at the same time, she laughs. “I don’t,” she says. “I’m an Aries, babe. I’m a little wild by nature. I have certain friends, I open their drawers and I’m like, ‘I just don’t know how you do this.’”

Hudson grew up in a very creative, highly unstructured household, where self-sufficiency was praised and also necessary for survival. She became a mother in her early 20s and spent a few years feeling overwhelmed before deciding she needed to get a handle on her life; she wanted to understand what was important to her and how to go about getting it. “I’m a dreamer, and my creative mind is really important,” she says. “I think it is for everybody. And we don’t nurture that enough, because there’s so much happening in our lives all the time. We don’t allow for the sort of space to dream and imagine. So I’ve had to learn how to tell everybody to go away.”

That’s meant resisting being everywhere at once—and turning off her phone. “I saw such a major, major change once I set rules for when I needed to be on my phone and knowing when it couldn’t be a part of anything I was doing,” Hudson says. She has implemented a no-phone rule in creative meetings for all her businesses, too—no peeking at emails, no multitasking. It’s an idea she had after becoming “obsessed” with listening to productivity Blinkists on her commute to and from the set of *Truth Be Told*, the drama she is starring in on Apple TV+. “One of them I loved was about learning to become hyperfocused and how detrimental technology is to our being able to focus,” she says. “The first thing? You gotta turn off your phone.”

And you gotta have fun, despite the setbacks and impatient customers and the amla plant that just refuses to cooperate. She uses her kids as balance barometers. When they start acting out “in weird little ways, it’s a sign,” she says. “You know, *Why is Rani a little aggravated?* Well, it’s because I’ve been working all day. She’s right.” Above all, Hudson says, her family is what grounds her. “I still have days when my brain feels like it’s going to explode, but if I’m not having fun, I don’t know why I’m doing it,” she says. “I’d rather live in a cabin and make candles and sell them on Etsy than keep doing something that’s not making the quality of our happiness grow. I just don’t understand the purpose of that.” **E**

Alyssa Giacobbe is a New England-based writer and editor. When she was a kid, her father offered her \$20 to get over her fear of taking pills. It worked.

HOW TO BECOME A MASTER AT TALKING TO

STRANGERS

Entrepreneurs must become experts at connecting with anyone—and with a few simple strategies, you can. Here's what happened when I tried them myself.

BY JOE KEOHANE



A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I STARTED TO TALK TO STRANGERS.

That's not to say I hadn't talked to strangers before that, because I had. I'm the son and brother of highly social small-business owners, and I'm a journalist, so talking to strangers has been both a way of life and a livelihood for me. And yet, a few years ago I noticed I wasn't doing it much anymore—if at all. Between balancing a demanding job and a *really* demanding small child, I was often tired, distracted, and overscheduled. The prospect of striking up conversations with random strangers in coffee shops, or bars, or on the bus started to feel daunting. Eventually, I just stopped doing it.

This was a coping strategy, of course. I was overwhelmed, so something had to go. And talking to strangers *can*, as it turns out, be taxing. Psychologists have found that just making small talk with a stranger can be cognitively demanding, tiring, and even stressful. That makes sense. You don't know the person, you don't know where the conversation is going, so you must pay closer attention than you would if you were talking to someone you know well. But psychologists have found that talking to a stranger actually boosts your mental performance—for that same reason: It's a workout. I was saving myself a bit of effort, but I also noticed that my life was becoming less interesting, less surprising, maybe even a little lonely.

After my epiphany, I got to wondering: Why don't we talk to

strangers more, what happens when we do, and how can we get better at it? It turns out, many researchers are asking the same questions. I started flying around the world to meet them: psychologists, evolutionary scientists, historians, urban planners, entrepreneurs, sociologists, and—you guessed it—a ton of fascinating strangers I met along the way. They all taught me that talking to strangers can not only be fun but also enhance our sense of well-being, make us smarter, expand our social and professional networks, and even help us overcome some of our most intractable social problems. (I detail this all in my new book, *The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Connecting in a Suspicious World*.)

And as I researched the book, I kept coming back to the implications talking to strangers could have for entrepreneurs. Because I come from a family of small-business owners—and for a while served as executive editor at this magazine—I have seen firsthand how beneficial it is for businesspeople to hone those social skills. I have also spoken to a lot of college professors who lament that their students struggle to make the sorts of serendipitous social connections that will serve them so well once they start their careers. *And*, like all of us, I'm coming out of a year spent in relative quarantine. I'm rusty on these skills and need to get used to the sorts of fun, fruitful, and, yes, sometimes difficult freewheeling



SMALL TALK



social interactions we were deprived of for more than a year.

All of which is to say, I decided that I needed to become an expert at talking to strangers. How? I signed up for a class unlike anything I'd ever taken before and bought a plane ticket to London.

Our journey begins on a bright day in a small classroom at Regent's University. I'm sitting on a chair, limp with jet lag, clutching my third cup of coffee. There are four other people there, too. They appear to be functioning at a higher level than I am, thankfully. We have come to this classroom to learn how to talk to strangers.

Our teacher is an energetic 20-something named Georgie Nightingall. She's the founder of Trigger Conversations, an acclaimed London-based "human connection organization" that hosts social events and immersive workshops aimed at helping people have meaningful interactions with strangers. Since she founded it in 2016, Nightingall has done more than 100 events and many training sessions—with strangers, companies, communities, universities, and conferences, both in London and around the world.

Nightingall has learned that, for a lot of people, the hardest thing about talking to strangers is initiating the conversation: approaching someone, making them feel safe, and quickly convey-

ing the idea that you don't have an agenda, that you're just being friendly or curious. She found that older people are much more likely to initiate a conversation, for instance, whereas younger people require a little more assurance. But she also found that in all her own attempts to speak to strangers, the vast majority of those interactions were substantial, and many went great.

She came to believe, too—and this is important—that making a practice of talking to strangers could offer more than a jolt of good feeling for an individual. There was joy in it, profundity, real communion. If practiced widely enough, she believed it could help repair a fracturing society. "We're not just talking about a few individualized things," she says. "We're talking about a different way to live."

Nightingall stands before our class, bright, engaging, and articulate, and walks us through what to expect over the coming days. She wants to take us "from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence, and from conscious competence to unconscious competence," she says. In other words, we are currently bad at this and we're unaware of why or how. We will learn what we are lacking. We will improve on it. And we will, hopefully, become so proficient that it will become second nature to us.

IN A GOOD CONVERSATION, YOU MUST RELINQUISH CONTROL. YOUR JOB IS TO HELP YOUR PARTNER ARRIVE AT THEIR OWN CONCLUSION.

Our first lesson is small talk. A lot of people hate small talk, which is understandable, because a lot of small talk is deadly boring. Nightingall concedes the point. Yes, she says, small talk can be dull. But that's because most people don't understand what it's for. It's not the conversation. It's the opener for a better conversation. It's a way to get comfortable with one another and cast around for something you *want* to talk about. That, she says, is why it's important to be aware of your response when someone asks something like "What do you do?" You are failing to understand what that question is really asking, which is this: "What should you and I talk about?"

Nightingall came to this insight via a couple of sources. She had done improv comedy in the past, and in improv, you start a sketch with something familiar to everyone in the audience—something relevant, timely, or present in the room—to bind the room together. Only then can you really take the audience on a ride. That's small talk. But Nightingall has also followed the work of social anthropologist Kate Fox, who has studied, for instance, the seemingly inexhaustible English desire to discuss weather. While some critics have pointed to this affinity as evidence of a listless and unimaginative people, Fox argued that weather wasn't the point. Instead, it is a means of social bonding, a greeting ritual. "English weather-speak is a form of code, evolved to help us overcome our natural reserve and actually talk to each other," Fox writes. The content is not the point—familiarity, connection, and reassurance are. Once those are in place, a real conversation can happen.

When you recognize that small talk is just a door to a better conversation, Nightingall says, then it can be useful, because it's structured in a way that naturally leads you toward common ground. We have all experienced how these conversations, if given the time, can move in ever-tightening circles until you both zero in on something you have in common and want to talk about. With that in place, you can wander, get a little personal, go deeper. But it's probably on you to take it there, Nightingall says. "Everyone is interesting, but it's not up to them to show you—it's up to you to discover it."

The best way to discover that interesting stuff, Nightingall says, is by "breaking the script." That means using the techniques of small talk, but resisting the temptation to go on autopilot. For example, you go into a store and say, "How are you doing?" and the clerk says, "Fine; how are you?" and the conversation contains no information and goes nowhere. That's a script. We use scripts

to make interactions more efficient, particularly in busy, dense, fast-moving places like big cities. But in doing so, we deny ourselves the chance at a better experience and maybe a new contact, and we wall ourselves off from all the benefits that can come from talking to strangers.

So how do you break those scripts? With specificity and surprise, Nightingall says. For example, when someone says, "How are you?" she doesn't say, "Fine." Instead, she says, "I'd say I'm a 7.5 out of 10." She briefly explains why she's a 7.5, asks them how *they're* doing, and then just waits. This is when mirroring kicks in; it's a phenomenon where people naturally follow the lead of their conversational partners. If you say something generic, they will say something generic. If you say something specific, they are likely to as well. Thus, because Nightingall gave a number, her partner is likely to give a number themselves. If they say they're a 6, Nightingall will ask, "What'll it take to get you to an 8?" This specificity creates a light atmosphere and makes it harder for the other person to maintain the belief that you're of a lesser mind, because it instantly demonstrates complexity, feeling, and humor: humanity, in other words. "Straightaway, they're like, 'Oh, you're a human,'" Nightingall says. "You have that bond, and then, naturally, things open up."

Here are other ways Nightingall suggests breaking a script. When a shop clerk asks, "Can I help you?" you can reply, "Can I help *you*?" Or instead of asking people at a party what they do, ask them what they'd like to do more of, or what they *don't* do. Or instead of asking someone how their day went, ask, "Has your day lived up to your expectations?" All these things require a certain measure of confidence to pull off, Nightingall says. But they work. And when they do, they will reveal a little nugget of what it's like to be that person. That is meaningful, because that nugget is indicative of what is beneath the surface. "How you do anything is how you do everything," Nightingall says. That nugget tells you where to go next in the conversation.

Once you've established a little connection, what do you do? I normally start asking questions. Which makes sense: I'm showing an interest in the other person, and I demonstrate my interest by indulging my curiosity. But one paradox about talking to a stranger, Nightingall explains, is that while curiosity is indispensable, a barrage of questions out of the gate can feel like prying, or an interview. They don't quite know where you're coming from yet, and they don't know if you have some kind of agenda. Even one personal question asked too early can create an uncomfortable dynamic because you're asking something of someone. You're making a demand.

Nightingall suggests that statements, not questions, can be a better way to open a conversation. A question compels an answer, whereas a statement leaves it up to the other person to decide whether they want to talk. It's not a demand; it's an offer. You notice something about your shared surroundings, offer an observation, and leave it to the other party to respond. If they do, you respond with another statement that builds on what they said.

These observations should ideally not be moronic—"I noticed that the sun came up today!"—but they can be simple. Like weather talk in England, the point is to indicate a shared experience. Nightingall has found that proximity helps, too. If you are at a museum, walking right up to someone looking at a painting and blurting out "What do you think?" is very different from making an observation about a painting after standing next to them

PEOPLE WHO ASK MORE QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, ARE BETTER LIKED BY THEIR CONVERSATION PARTNERS.

for 30 seconds looking at it. That's because you have been in their proximity. They have adjusted to your being there, and you have demonstrated a measure of self-control. Then you can speak. It feels less like an invasion.

One day in class, my fellow students and I pair off to practice our technique. I'm partnered with "Paula," who tells me that one of her favorite things is making a cup of good coffee for herself on the weekends and just sitting alone. I try to remember Nightingall's advice about opening with statements, not questions, but now we're in a groove—so I dig in. After four questions, Paula is talking about how resentful she is at having to work for other people. I'm obviously quite pleased with myself as I trot back to Nightingall with this pheasant in my mouth. But she is less impressed. She delicately explains that while "it's clear you're a person who asks questions for a living," everything about my body language suggested I was looking for something to pounce on. I asked questions too quickly, she said. I was leaning forward. This wasn't a conversation; it was an interview. Possibly an interrogation.

Nightingall suggested asking simpler and more open-ended questions. Instead of saying, "Do you think this was because you were a control freak?" just echo, or say, "Why do you think that is?" That is the opposite of what I usually do, but it's what I must learn to do. In a good conversation, you must relinquish control. Your job is to help your partner arrive at their own conclusion and surprise you, not to ferret out whatever it is, slap a bow on it, and go, *Next!* There's a powerful lesson there: If you're interested only in things you know you're interested in, you will never be surprised. You'll never learn anything new, or gain a fresh perspective, or make a new friend or contact. The key to talking to strangers, it turns out, is letting go, letting them lead. Then the world opens itself to you.

Why don't we talk to strangers? The answer I heard, over and over again from experts, is simply that *we don't talk to strangers*. In many places, for many reasons, it has become a social norm, and social norms are really powerful. That is why Nightingall uses what she calls a foolproof method to not just violate the norm—but to openly acknowledge that you are violating the norm.

She asks us to imagine riding mass transit—which, as we know, is the last place anyone ever talks to a stranger. There is someone

who strikes us as interesting. We can't turn to that person and say, "Why do I find you so interesting?" because if you said something like that to a stranger on the subway, they're going to assume this is the initiation of a chain of events that will ultimately conclude with their becoming crude homemade taxidermy. So Nightingall suggests something called a *pre-frame*. It's an idea based in the field of neurolinguistic programming, which coaches people to "reframe" the possible negative thoughts of others—in essence redefining their expectations for the interaction to come. Ordinarily, we might be wary if a stranger just starts talking to us. We don't know who they are, or what they want, or whether they're right in the head. What a pre-frame does is reassure them that *you know all this*.

To do it, you acknowledge out of the gate that this is a violation of a social norm. You say something like "Look, I know we're not supposed to talk to people on the subway, but..." This demonstrates that you're in full possession of your faculties. You're not erratic, disturbed, or otherwise off in some way. It helps alleviate wariness and opens the possibility of a connection. Once that is established, Nightingall says, you follow the pre-frame with your statement—"I really like your sunglasses," for instance. Then you follow that with a justification: "I just lost mine and I've been looking for a new pair." The justification eases the person's suspicion that you have some kind of agenda and allows you to talk a little more openly.

That's when questions become more important, Nightingall says. Questions serve a multitude of functions, which is why, as I learned in my exercise with Paula, they can be so complicated. Yes, questions help you obtain information. And yes, on a deeper level, they help your conversational partner clarify the point they are trying to make. But they also help us emotionally bond with other people. In a series of studies in 2017, psychologist Karen Huang and her colleagues discovered that "people who ask more questions, particularly follow-up questions, are better liked by their conversation partners." Those who ask more questions, the authors found, are perceived as higher in responsiveness—which is defined as "listening, understanding, validation, and care." In other words, people like us because we are interested in them.

And yet, the researchers noted, people tend not to ask a lot of questions. Why? Several reasons. "First," Huang writes, "people may not think to ask questions at all...because people are egocentric—focused on expressing their own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with little or no interest in hearing what another person has to say. Or they may be so distracted by other aspects of the conversation that they do not realize that asking a question is an option." Even if a question does pop into someone's head, they may not ask it, because they worry it'll land badly and be "perceived as rude, inappropriate, intrusive, or incompetent." In these cases, people will probably just talk about themselves, which studies show they do twice as often as they talk about other matters—which, ironically, makes people like them less. (Good work, everybody.)

But what's a good question to ask? Nightingall has us complete an exercise in which we are given banal statements—the sort commonly offered in small talk—and tasked with coming up with good questions. For instance, one student says she ran along the Thames yesterday. There is almost nothing in the world less interesting to me than running, and usually I'd take this as my cue to begin plotting my escape. But, working from the idea that small talk is the means, not the end, the class brainstorms good



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questions to ask that might lead to something more personal or interesting: “Do you run every day?” “Is that a passion for you?” “What would you do if you couldn’t run every day?” I suggest, “What are you running from?” which is meant as a joke, but the class seems to go for it.

Then we move on to the flip side of question-asking: It is listening. When people do start talking, you must listen, make eye contact, and generally show you’re engaged. We know this, of course. But we are not always good at showing it. Two effective techniques to signal engagement are paraphrasing what people have just said—“It seems like you’re saying...”—and echoing—which is simply occasionally repeating things your partner just said—both of which are commonly used by therapists and hostage negotiators to foster connection and build trust. For instance, if they say, “I guess at that point I was frustrated,” you say, “You were frustrated.” This seems deeply weird and unnatural, and feels awkward to do, and if you overdo it, your partner is going to think something’s wrong with you. But I am here to attest that, done well, it is extremely effective. It’s like a magic trick. Researchers have concluded as much. According to the French psychologists Nicolas Guéguen and Angélique Martin, “Research has shown that mimicry...leads to greater liking of the mimicker” and helps create rapport during a social interaction.

Nightingall breaks down listening into three levels. There is listening for things you know about. That’s the most superficial level. That’s when someone says something about baseball and you jump on it and start talking about baseball. Then there is listening for information—you show curiosity about someone but your questions are about collecting factual data. That’s also more about you and your interests. And then there’s the deepest level of listening: listening for experiences, feelings, motivations, and values. That kind of listening is more than simply hearing, or self-affirmation. It’s paying attention and endeavoring to understand. It is demonstrated with eye contact, echoing, and paraphrasing, and it can be deepened by asking clarifying questions—*Why? How? Who?*—that help the person get to the heart of the matter.

In other words, at this level of listening, you are not simply listening for something you want to talk about, or offering advice, or trying to think of something smart to say in response. It’s not about your agenda. It is a level of engagement that is about helping your partner get to what they really want to talk about, and you going along for the ride. You still want to talk about yourself a bit, Nightingall says—to give a little, and not leave the person feeling like you’ve just rummaged around in the bureau of their personal life and made off with a watch. But you want most of the focus to be on them. It is, again, a form of hospitality. You are hosting someone. You are surrendering a measure of control. You are giving them space. You are taking a risk. That risk opens you to the potential rewards of talking to a stranger.

During lunch and after class, I try out some of these techniques around London. I ask a 20-something bartender at a pub if the day has met her expectations, and she confesses with very little prompting that yes, it has. She’s about to quit her day job. She feels she’s been sold a bill of goods about the merits of a straight corporate career, and she’s going to empty her savings and travel the world. She hasn’t told anyone this yet, she says. But she will soon.

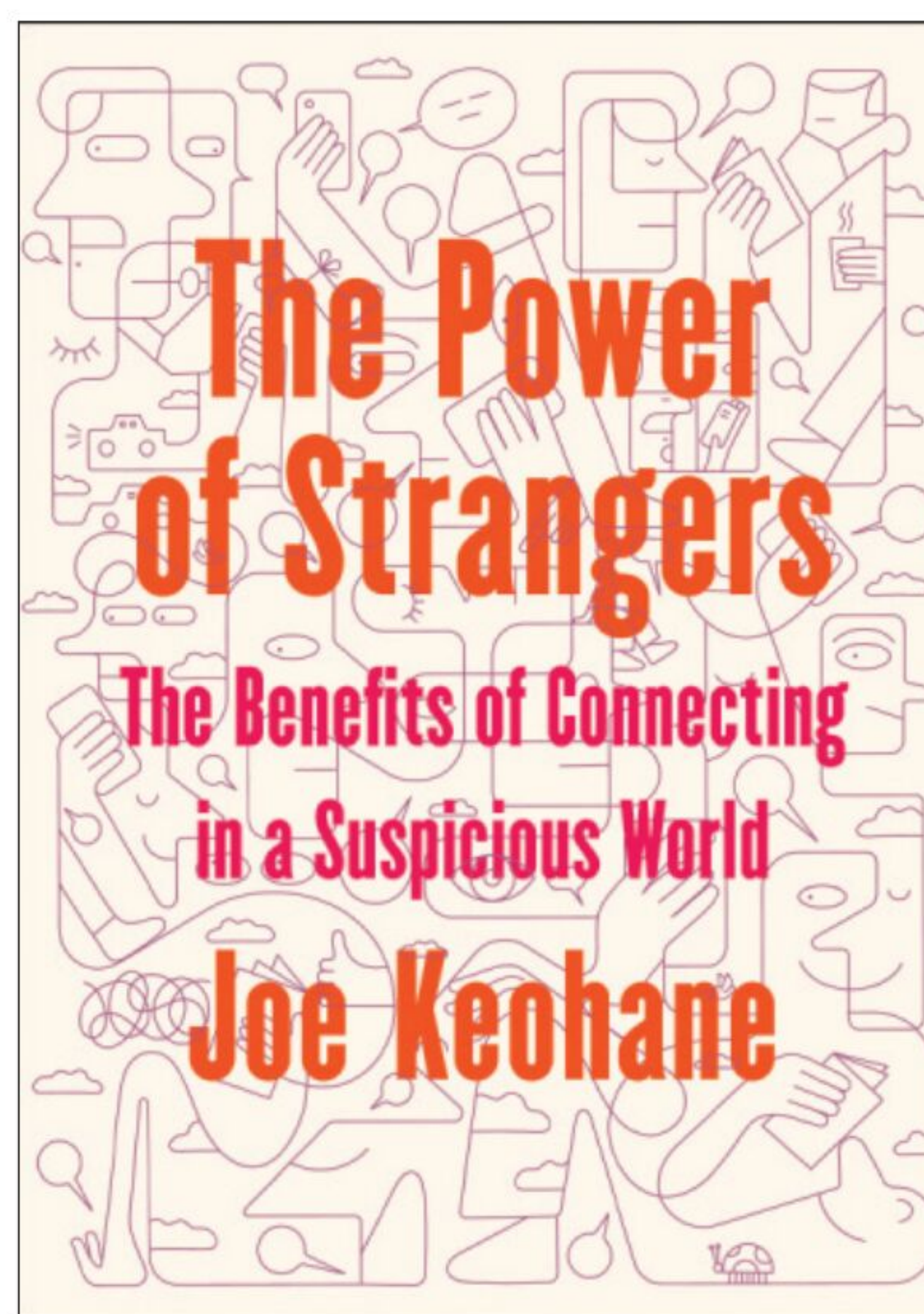
At lunch at a Lebanese takeout restaurant, I ask the owner

what menu items he’s most proud of—because that’s what I want. He starts taking bits of this and that and dropping them into my bag. I tell him I grew up in a white neighborhood, and when I was a kid, a Lebanese family moved in behind us and used to hand us plates over the fence of what was at that time very exotic food. Since then, Lebanese food has always been among my favorites. Curiously, when I eat it, I think about home. This, as Nightingall instructed, was me opening up the conversation with a statement, not a question. The owner tells me that in Lebanon, that kind of hospitality is a big deal; people always make a lot of food for visitors. While he talks, he keeps dropping more food into my bag. When he’s done, the bag weighs about five pounds and he charges me for maybe a third of it.

At the end of the final day of class, Nightingall tells us that practice will be everything. Some encounters will go poorly, she says, and some will be great, but in time, we will get more comfortable with doing this as we internalize the techniques we have learned. We will be able to get a little bolder or more playful. Our confidence, tone, and body language will alleviate people’s wariness at the flagrant violation of a social norm of long standing.

Indeed, Nightingall is something of a wizard at this. She once started a conversation with a man on the tube just by pointing at his hat, smiling, and saying, simply, “Hat.” She will randomly high-five people in the street, she says. She smiles at people going the opposite direction down an escalator just to see if they’ll smile back. She doesn’t order an Americano; she orders “the best Americano in the world.” And people respond. During a break one day, I walked into the campus Starbucks to get more coffee. Nightingall was already in there, talking animatedly with a barista she’d never met before. When she and I walked out, she told me he gave her the coffee on the house.

Nightingall’s free coffee, my Lebanese meal—these were not coincidences. As I learned repeatedly while testing techniques of talking to strangers, I’d often be rewarded with free food. There are, of course, far more fruitful, meaningful, and valuable reasons to talk to strangers. But the food stuck with me. Then I realized why: When you start a good conversation with a stranger, it’s like you’re giving them an uncommon gift. And more often than not, they want to give you something in return. **E**



→ Adapted from
The Power of Strangers:
The Benefits of Connecting
in a Suspicious World,
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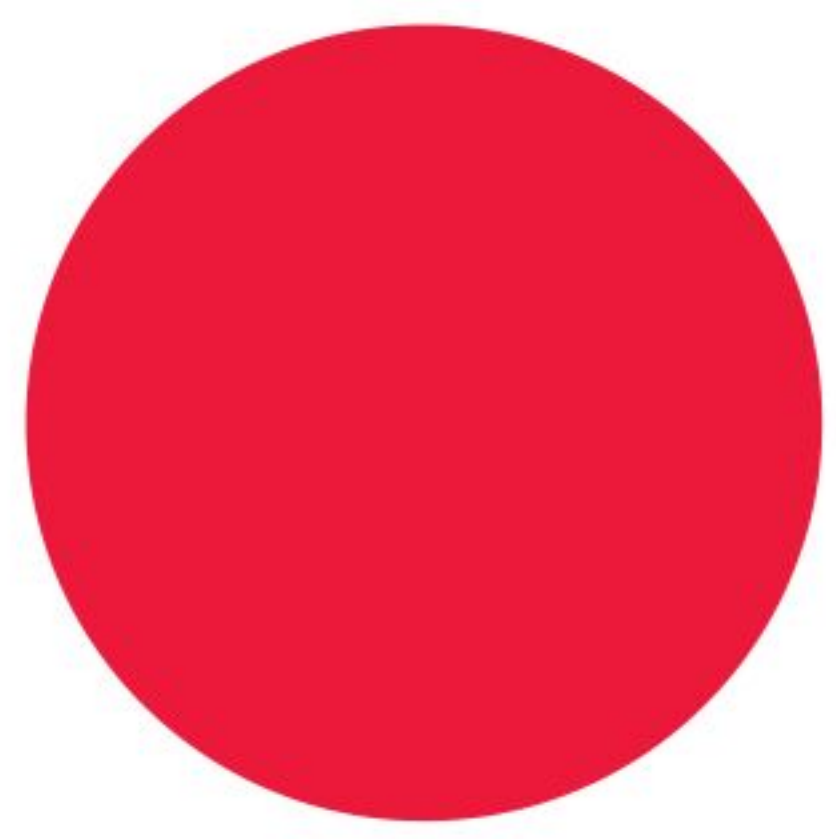
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LIVESTREAM SELLING



Amazon, Facebook, Google, and TikTok are getting involved, VCs are investing, and brands are interested in a new retail spin that takes online shopping live. But an upstart company in Alabama is already living what may be the future of retail—and helping 6,000 small retailers see their business soar. **by Liz Brody**

EAM

→ **SHOWTIME!**

Brandon Kruse at the \$1 billion company he built trying to help his wife, Amanda Halpin-Kruse (left), sell clothes.

COMMENT

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IS HERE!

M

ic Hensley won't put on a dress. His fans would die for him to wear one when he livestreams to more than a million phones and Facebook pages while making sales for Pink Coconut, which sounds like a club but is actually a women's clothing boutique he owns

with his wife, Sheri, in Olive Branch, Miss. "I'll put on a cardigan or a bunch of purses," Hensley says, laughing. "But I try not to even do that very often because they just get pumped and want more."

Though that's not all they want more of. Livestream selling not only saved the Hensleys' business from becoming a casualty of the pandemic; it has increased sales 20 to 30 percent every month, sending the Hensleys into a hiring frenzy that has now reached 48 employees and counting. "Once we started doing it," says Mic, "everything just kind of shot to the moon."

Widely referred to as QVC on steroids, livestream selling in the U.S. usually features a salesperson or an influencer, often in their living room (cords, tchotchkes, and pets in full view), demonstrating products and shooting the breeze with online shoppers in real-time video. Viewers can say hi or ask questions in comments that float across the screen, and the livestreamer responds to them personally. Meanwhile, everyone watches a bubble that displays the product's dwindling availability until it sells out.

It's already a craze in China, where livestream shopping sales will hit \$300 billion this year, according to Coresight Research. (There, the video productions are more sophisticated and staged.) But the U.S. market has been pretty groggy, estimated to be only \$6 billion in 2020. That may be about to change. Coresight, for one, predicts the market will more than quadruple by 2023 as the pandemic helps accelerate preexisting cultural shifts—especially since Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, Shopify, and TikTok have all ambled into the space in the past couple of years.

But none of these platforms is the one that catapulted Pink Coconut. The Hensleys and more than 6,000 other small businesses, mostly in fast fashion, partner with a little-known company called CommentSold, founded four years ago by a serial entrepreneur in Huntsville, Ala. Never in his wildest dreams—or, really, nightmares—did that guy, Brandon Kruse, think he'd be in the women's clothing business. But here he is, a pioneer out in front of the tech giants, trying to operate "under the radar," as he puts it, while generating a billion dollars in sales a year.

► **LIVESTREAM SELLING MIGHT** just be the future of online shopping. "And not in five years," predicts Suketu Gandhi, a partner at the global consulting firm Kearney. "It's a two-year journey, thanks to a virus called COVID." During the pandemic, we've all gotten even more used to spending hours on video—bingeing on Netflix, sweating on Peloton, or following influencers on TikTok. It's not a big leap to shop that way, Gandhi argues. Plus, on the business side, the connection between digital advertising and actual sales has been slowly weakening. Add to that "the death of the cookie"—with browsers like Safari, Firefox, and Google pulling their support of the hidden bits of code that let advertisers follow our online activity and target us, plus Apple letting iPhone users disable personal data tracking—and brands may be scrambling for new ways to reach customers.

Not everyone believes livestream selling will be the solution. "We are trying to shoehorn the type of commerce that works in

China into the U.S. market now, but it's not like users are asking for it," says Juozas Kaziukėnas, CEO of Marketplace Pulse, an e-commerce research firm. "I think to most people, it feels like a very blatant sale." It might work on a niche level, he says, but for anything at scale? "It's an uphill battle."

Still, it could be a rather lucrative climb. When a retailer hosts a livestream shopping event on its website, it can have conversion rates of 10 to 25 percent on average and even reach 40 percent, according to Ken Fenyo, president of research and advisory at Coresight, who says the conversion rates for digital ads are generally significantly lower. "People want to engage directly with the brand," he says. "And for that entrepreneur or store associate, it's a chance to come alive about their passion for what they're selling in an interactive way." That can add up to a lot, even for companies with little communities. "What's amazing about our livestreaming clients," says CommentSold's Kruse, "is how small the audience is compared with how much revenue they do."

► **HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR** a repo man and an overbooked flight, Kruse would have a very different life at age 31. The repo man showed up when he was 12 to take the family car after his dad lost his job. Seeing that, for Kruse, was like being drop-kicked out of childhood. "I wanted to control my own destiny," he remembers. He started his first business in high school. By the time he turned 21, he'd already sold DialMaxx, a telecom company, to MagicJack for \$2.6 million plus a generous earn-out, and went on to launch startups that did data storage for genomic sequencing labs, built call alert systems for the State of Alabama, and various other things he could never explain at a party.

The overbooked flight, however, would change that. In 2012, Kruse agreed to do some telecom work for Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. It meant teaming up with an old client who brought his assistant, Amanda Halpin, along for a visit to Huntsville. After five days of Halpin remaining oblivious to Kruse's attempts at courtship, it was only because her flight back home was overbooked that she accepted his invitation to dinner, where over her ahi tuna salad at the bougiest steak house he could find, she finally caught on. A year and a half later, she moved to Huntsville to be with him.

By then Halpin had become an ER nurse, but she had a weirdly thriving side hustle selling clothes on Facebook. She would buy things she liked wholesale from vendors on FashionGo, where the minimum order was typically six. She'd keep one for herself and sell the other five pieces at an \$8 or \$10 markup—still way below the retail price. After some experimenting, she started having success with what's now called "comment selling," where she'd post photos of the clothes in her Facebook group and followers would comment "sold medium" (or whatever size they were). She called her online shop Discount Divas, and soon so many of her coworkers had become customers, she took over a bank of lockers in the ER that

► **"You think I can't do it?" Halpin shot back. "I will kill myself proving you wrong."... "And she did," says Kruse fondly.**



she turned into makeshift mailboxes for their orders.

One day in 2014, Halpin showed up at Kruse's office to talk to him about growing Divas. He was working out of an old school building he'd converted into a startup incubator called Huntsville West. Halpin figured maybe she could be part of it.

Kruse couldn't picture it. He was a telecom guy—Huntsville West was for *tech* startups. "Do you have anything else?" he asked her. "Because women's clothes, that's going to be tough for me to get behind. I mean, you're literally going to be crushed by the big guys."

"You think I can't do it?" she shot back. "I will *kill* myself proving you wrong."

"And she did," says Kruse fondly. Halpin moved Discount Divas into an 80-square-foot closet in Huntsville West and hired her first employee for help invoicing, as well as a 16-year-old named Madeline Daye to come in part-time and put the clothes on hangers. As they got busier, one day Halpin took a striped dress with a tie around the waist to Daye and asked, "Can you try this on and make a video where you just talk about, like, how it fits and how it feels?" After that, she kept asking Daye to do more. "I literally hated it," says Daye. "I would go home at night and cry."

Halpin didn't know that at the time. All she knew was that the videos slowly started to work: That the whole first year, she had made \$8,000; now, sales jumped to \$30,000 a month. "Boxes of product were coming out of the closet and kind of infiltrating the coworking space," Kruse remembers. "If you see a company hustling and growing like that, it's super motivating to be around."

Kruse also noticed his girlfriend was up all night with her Google spreadsheets, trying to get a handle on who had paid, who hadn't, and if they weren't going to pay, who was next in line. He had always had a hard time passing up a problem he could solve (and he had fallen for her—there was that). "I kind of jumped into the entrepreneurial mode," he says. "I was like: 'Let me write a program for you.' The joke is I'm still working on it."

► **IN APRIL 2016**, Kruse built an e-commerce system for Halpin and the two got married. Soon Discount Divas was doing \$100,000 in sales a month—and Halpin, who changed her last name to Halpin-Kruse, quit nursing. Based on her success, in 2017 Kruse created a platform for multiple retailers and, in homage, called the company CommentSold. As Kruse thought about how to get other clients that year, Divas' sales soared to \$1 million a month.

"When I saw Discount Divas had an automated system, honey, I was on a detective spree trying to figure out where it came from," says Lorie Beth Thomas, who had a shop called Kaley Jase Boutique in Windsor, N.C. ("the middle of nowhere," as she puts it). She had been an ER nurse, too, and became one of CommentSold's first clients.

The company grew quickly. Kruse charged clients a subscription fee (now between \$49 and \$149 a month) and also took 3 to 5 percent of their sales. But in 2018, a hiccup nearly tanked it all, and then provided a pivotal insight. CommentSold—which, again, at this point was nothing more than an e-commerce platform—was primarily facilitating sales on Facebook. But during Facebook's broader investigation after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, of how outside parties were utilizing its data, the social network somehow blocked CommentSold from its system. "For a week, our customers' revenue was down 80 percent," says Kruse. "They have families to feed. They have mortgages. And they were very upset. It brought us to our knees."

Kruse gathered his 25 employees and told them to drop everything and start calling and emailing everyone they could find at



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Want to try boosting sales through livestream selling? You don't need an influencer; you just need to get over your own awkwardness on camera. Here's what CommentSold's retailers have learned works.

► **Be consistent.**

Think about livestreaming like it's an old TV show: You want to build viewers' habits of watching. Go live at least once a week, and do it on the same day and same time—say, Monday and Wednesday at 8 P.M.

► **Create FOMO.**

You have to create a reason for people to tune in—and buy! It doesn't have to be a discount or giveaways. Having new items each time is important, and limited amounts drive up sales.

► **Be yourself.**

The more authentic you are, the better. "Don't worry about having a set with cameras and multiple cut feeds and stuff like that," says Kruse. "If anything, we've actually seen that perform worse because it almost feels like you're being sold to."

► **Get personal.**

Make customers feel like they're hanging out with friends and shopping. "We'll see certain names and we'll holler at them, like, 'Oh, you're here!'" says Lorie Beth Thomas, owner of the Kaley Jase Boutique in North Carolina. "It creates a community."

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Facebook. He booked a ticket to San Francisco with dramatic visions in his head of even getting arrested in the company parking lot, if that's what it took to get someone's attention. Fortunately, his team found a random group chat with the email address of a Facebook employee, who got them back on.

That changed Kruse's approach to business. He'd built a mobile app for CommentSold, but only a few people were using it. Now he tried to quickly roll it out to all the retailers so they could sell directly to customers. His clients would no longer be beholden to Facebook's rules and unpredictabilities. He told them, "You *own* these consumers."

The app proved to be a smart move, but things were about to radically transform. In 2018, that same year, Thomas, the boutique owner in North Carolina, pinged Kruse with what would be a pivotal message: "Hey, I just did a live video with CommentSold on Facebook."

This confused Kruse, because the tool didn't *do* live video. But Thomas, it turned out, had seen someone do livestream selling on social media, and she wanted to try it. So she managed to trick the system using CommentSold's e-commerce platform to facilitate these sales. She suggested that Kruse might want to figure out how to make it easier.

Kruse knew livestream shopping was big in China, where influencers went in front of the camera for eight hours a day selling their favorite products from online malls. But would it work here? Who would actually watch a live video for even an hour and buy products?

Nevertheless, he developed a way for retailers to livestream on CommentSold to their Facebook fans, and Divas and Thomas' shop started doing it. They would go live, say, every Thursday at 7 P.M. and for an hour or two, gab about their families, keto diet progress, the latest pet bird mishap, and how they loved the way this particular dress they were wearing draped *and could be yours for \$38—and by the way, there are only three left*. They could see all the comments scrolling in ("How's the sizing?" "Can you wash it in the machine?") and answer right back. They'd also get an alert that, say, Sally was a new customer and Josie bought a lot, so they could call out, "Hey, Sally; welcome to the group" and "Oh, hi, Josie; good to see you again"—a feature Kruse added after realizing the one-to-one relationship was a key driver. They'd model one item after the other as people commented "Sold." Sales blew up.

► **AS COMMENTSOLD'S** livestreaming feature took off, Kruse often turned to his mentor, Jim Hudson, for advice. (The two met in 2012, when Kruse loved the energy of Hudson's genomics-research business hub so much that he lied and pretended to be part of a biotech company so he could have his office there. "When Jim found out," Kruse says, "he thought that was awesome.") "Jim was great at nailing what has to change when you get to certain milestones," says Kruse. "And that was invaluable to me because it's so hard to see when you're right in the middle of it." Hudson asked Kruse how many employees he had. "When I said 15, he was like, 'Oh, you're getting close to my number,'" says Kruse. The number was 21: When you have that many employees, Hudson believes, you can no longer rely on everyone at your company to know everything. You must hire specialists. "And sure enough," Kruse says, "at 21, I'm like, *Even the people who were previously perfect in the role now are messing up.*"

Hudson's next number was 75. This one was harder for Kruse to swallow. "Jim said, 'At this point, you have to have a COO—you *really* need somebody to be the operational mind, so you can step back as the visionary,'" Kruse recalls. "I said, 'But I love operating.' And he's like, 'No, you don't. You really love building.'"

Kruse felt like he was losing touch with his company, but he

followed Hudson's advice. The guy he hired as COO was Andy Smith, formerly cofounder and CEO of the workout company Daily Burn. They knew each other through the small Huntsville entrepreneur circle. At the time, Smith was taking a year off to play golf, and not getting any better at it. "I'll be the first to admit, 'Oh, man, I don't really get excited about selling women's clothes online,'" Smith says. "But what I liked was that there were no investors. And when I played with the tool, I thought it sucked—it was broken in so many ways. So I said, 'This is just a great opportunity.'" With the operational details handled, Kruse was able to zero in on his customers to really start kitting out the platform. Soon his retailers could run their entire social e-commerce business on CommentSold, with human experts to guide them.

All the while, Kruse tried to keep the company under the radar. "We wanted to get big and make sure we built the right thing and stay ahead of everyone," he says, "because someone could have raised a lot of money and definitely gotten to the market quicker."

But staying invisible started getting harder. In 2019, Amazon enabled livestream selling for influencers and brands in its marketplace. Since then, Facebook and Instagram have begun experimenting with it, too, and Walmart is partnering with TikTok for one-off shopping events. Google is also dipping its toes in. Brands like Nordstrom and Estée Lauder are playing with the medium. And other independent apps and platforms, such as TalkShopLive, Bambuser, and ShopShops USA, are hitting the market. "Just since December, we've seen more than \$100 million of capital flow into the space," says Chris Erwin, founder of RockWater, a market research and strategy advisory firm.

The pandemic only upped the appeal. For CommentSold, gross merchandise value grew 150 percent in 2020. Of the more than 6,000 clients on the platform today, some 150 do more than \$100,000 a month in sales; several do more than \$1 million. Now Kruse plans to expand to other kinds of businesses.

"I mean, there's no way this does not get hypercompetitive," says Smith. "But that's what keeps us up at night. We really want to win."

► **THIS MARCH**, Kruse had something else to keep him awake: a three-month-old son named Camden. Divas did \$2.7 million in sales that month. And Madeline Daye, the 16-year-old who cried over its first videos? She's now its director of sales and one of the best livestream sellers in the business; she just bought her first house at age 22.

"Compared to my other companies, this is so cool," Kruse says, "because I was just trying to solve the problem for one person: *What do I need to build to help make your life easier?*" That thinking still drives him, even at the scale CommentSold has achieved. It now has a Facebook group for its top 100 customers, where it posts designs for new features and asks for feedback. And Kruse just implemented a policy for his now 170 employees that requires everyone to spend a day per quarter doing things like onboarding calls and support strategy to make sure they know how the retailers operate.

People always ask when he'll start a new company. "I do miss it in a weird kind of sadistic way—the pain," Kruse admits, "because a startup is very exciting." But his focus remains on solving problems for those in the CommentSold community. "The customers know what they need," he says, "and you just have to listen to that pain and become obsessed with it." ■

Liz Brody is a contributing editor at Entrepreneur.

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Made for Times Both Good and Bad

After inaugurating its franchise program in a challenging year, **Outer Banks Boil Company** is eyeing future success. **by CHLOE ARROJADO**

Outer Banks Boil Company has been serving seafood boils for nearly a decade, but its original purpose wasn't to feed anyone. It was just to get Matt Khouri a good grade in college. The concept began as a senior project, which Khouri didn't think would work in the real world—but it had more potential than he imagined. Since opening its first brick-and-mortar in 2016, the company has grown to three corporate locations, and in 2020 the seafood catering-and-takeout business started pursuing franchise-driven growth. The concept turned out to be perfectly suited for the pandemic, thanks to its small real estate footprint and carryout and catering-only options. That helped stores continue operating on a 30 percent profit margin. Now that the company has sold five franchise locations, Khouri reflects upon the hectic year, and what's in store for the future.

Your company came from a senior project. That's not something many people can say.

It's funny; I didn't actually ever think [the business] was going to work. It was a flawed project. But I turned it in when I was at school, got a passing grade, and decided to start it right out of college. I moved to the Outer Banks in 2012 after graduating and started Outer Banks Boil Company out of my apartment. At first, I had two full-time jobs, and I was doing the boils on the side. That first year I maybe did 10 caterings. The next year was about 30 caterings. The year after that, it was about 60. And then in 2015, we did about 250 caterings. In 2016, I decided to actually make it a career and opened my first location.

How did you know when to start franchising?

Early on, I did corporate locations with college buddies and friends I had known through working together. To be honest with you, I ran out of homies who I wanted to do business with. Right around that 2019 mark is when we started to explore franchising, and we



→ SEE FOOD

Khouri lays out a seafood boil with a bride in Duck, N.C.

learned as much as we could. Then 2020 is when we started our sales push. The first two franchise stores we sold were Charlottesville and Virginia Beach, which happened at the end of February. Then literally two weeks later, the lockdown started.

What was the process of starting and adjusting the franchise program during the pandemic?

Trying to adjust last year, getting into the franchise space and closing our first deal with those guys—we were kind of learning on the fly. As soon as the initial lockdown let up, we were able to get our franchisees down here to the Outer Banks for their initial training. Luckily, our first franchisees were very familiar with our business, so they had the context prior to the pandemic. Once things opened back up, we were able to get them going.

How has this experience with your franchisees impacted you?

The pandemic opened my eyes to the necessity of being able to communicate, and not necessarily doing it in person. We've shifted to biweekly calls with all our franchisees. We call that our "boil banter." By being able to use different platforms and those different channels, everyone kind of got better at it.

As the business grows, how are you figuring out whom to franchise with?

I think the biggest thing in corporate or franchise expansion is finding the right people to be those ambassadors for the Outer Banks Boil Company brand. We often jokingly say, "Can you have a beer with anyone?" There's much more to the job than just cooking the food. It's connecting with people and making them want to come back.

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Be a Constant Learner

Sheila Stanley spent years as a schoolteacher. Now she runs a boating franchise. What do the two have in common? A love of learning. **by CHLOE ARROJADO**

Sheila Stanley has a background in education—and a career in educating herself. After working for four years as a teacher, she held jobs that included running a small business, working for the federal government, and even working in HR for an education facility. In 2018, she teamed up with her husband and son to purchase a Freedom Boat Club franchise in Nova Scotia. It's a members-only club that allows members to use boats for recreation. The pandemic challenged the business in some ways, but Stanley says she was able to stay afloat—in part by always learning and trying new ideas.

After such a varied career, what gave you the confidence to become a franchisee?

Confidence really comes from the fact that you have learned the kinds of things you need to know in order to be able to operate a business. Knowledge and experience in business are definitely important. A passion for the business you're getting into is also important. My husband, our son, and I have always had boating as a key part of our leisure activities.

Was it challenging to go into business with family?

We went into it somewhat blindly because we hadn't done this before. But it's been a really positive experience because each of us has different strengths. We each respect

our own areas of responsibility within the franchise. Our son takes care of the boat acquisition and maintains the fleet. My husband takes care of the operations side of the job. I've been doing the membership executive and reservations work. It's actually been a strengthening thing from a family perspective.

You opened the first Freedom Boat Club in your area. How did you go about spreading the word?

One of the first and most important things we got was support from corporate. We were able to tap into those resources for marketing and have done various things, from open houses to local mail drops to advertising in the newspapers and radio ads. All



those things are important. But one of the big things—and this is something you build over time—is support from our club's members. [For prospective members], there's nothing quite like hearing about the benefits of being a boat club member than from someone you know.

How have you gone about building a community among your members?

It's been a bit of a challenge with COVID. A lot of it is communication, obviously, through text or social media or newsletters to our members. But we can't have in-person socials. We haven't been able to have social spaces where members can get to know each other.

What skills from your previous jobs have especially transferred well into franchising?

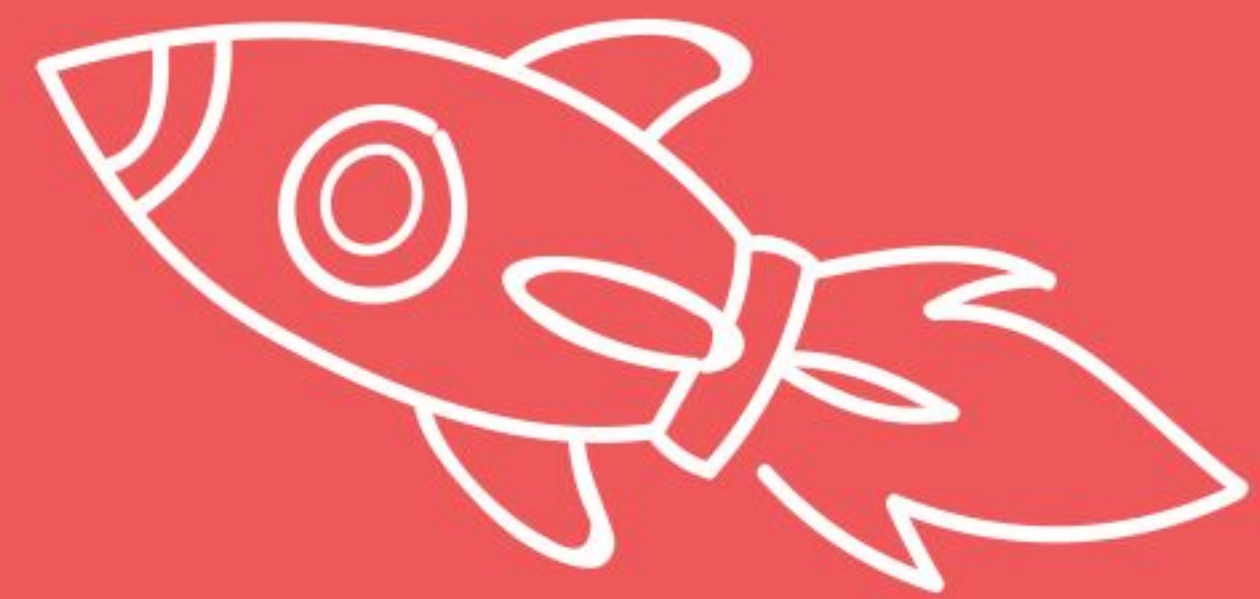
In terms of being an educator, you're naturally curious. You're always learning new things yourself and loving to share those new things with other people. I also ran my own small business for a while, so I certainly understood the finances and how to keep books and keep things organized. Working in employee relations, you learn a lot about what's important to employees, and if you're operating a franchise, you certainly need to make sure you have good staff as well as good hiring and management practices.

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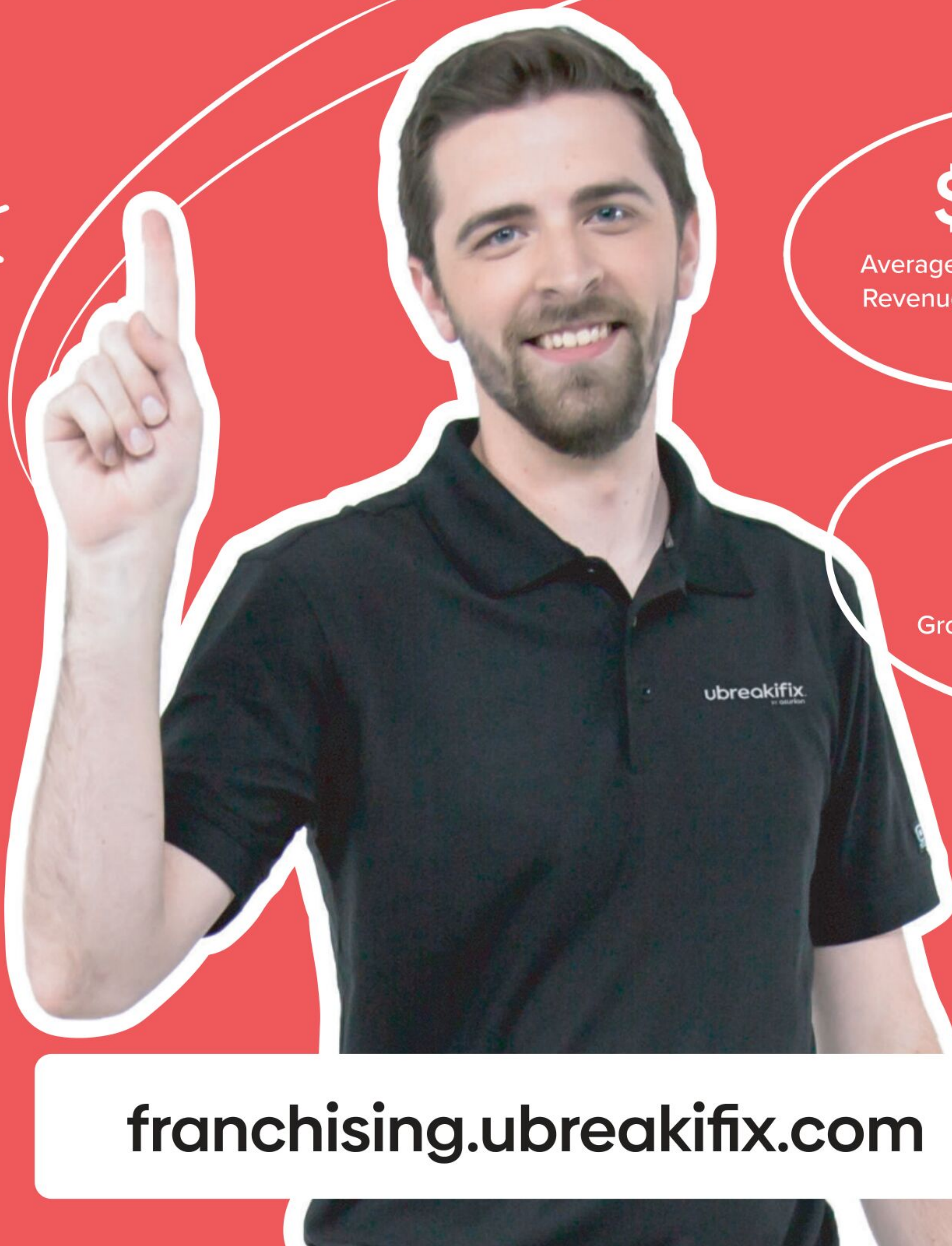
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Even Franchises Need Virtual Assistants

When you start building your brand, you may try to do everything yourself. I made that mistake, too. Then I discovered the power of outsourcing.

by RUTH AGBAJI

I am a very hard worker. I am a mom of two, a CEO, a franchisor, a black woman in STEM, and an immigrant, and there's a lot that comes with all those identities. I am no stranger to the do-it-yourself attitude. But do you know what else is true about me? I am an awful graphic designer—and an even worse bookkeeper!

When I started building my business, Code Wiz, I was determined to be resourceful and do as much as possible on my own. I hear lots of new franchisors say the same things. Most of us are self-funded, and we all want to avoid wasting resources on tasks that *seem* like ones we can just do ourselves. After all, how hard can some spreadsheets and social media posts be, really?

You may know where this is going. I ended up having some awful, sleepless nights working on half-baked projects and some truly *meh* graphics. I wanted to create a strong, Orangetheory-like brand and solid business strategies, but I didn't have the budget for a fancy marketing agency.

Then I discovered the world of virtual assistants.

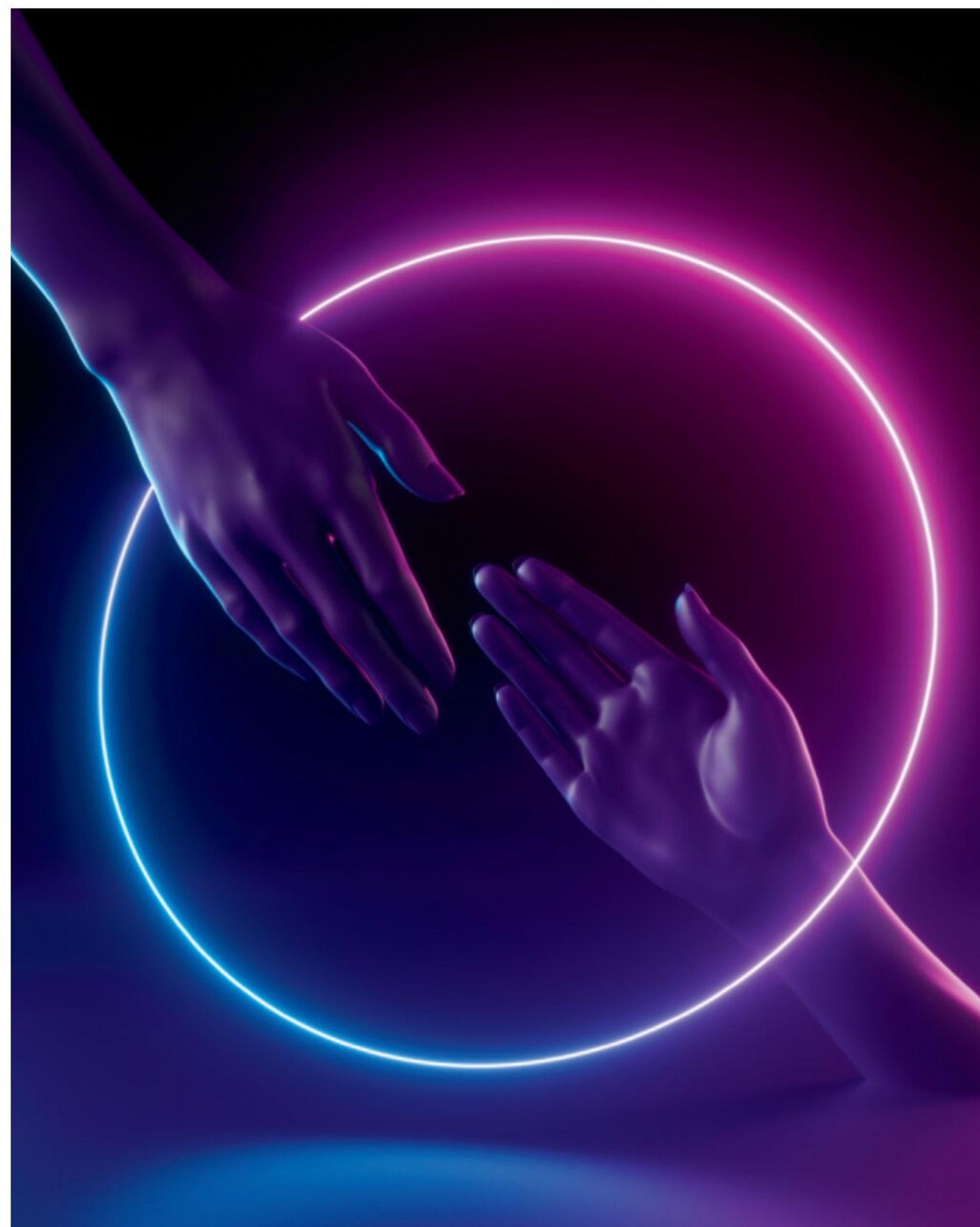
It started with those pesky graphics. I thought I wasn't that bad at graphic design until I hired my virtual graphics

assistant—and was floored at what they created! Why had I spent so much of my time and energy on this task when I could hire someone who could do twice as good a job in less than half the time?

I was hooked. I formed a virtual army of virtual assistants and freelance experts who support my business in social media, data entry, website design, SEO, video editing, copywriting, and more. I honestly can't imagine running my business without them.

Once this amazing team was onboarded and a part of my daily life, I realized I'd been overextending myself. I'd been using my valuable time on tasks that were not in my skill set when I could have been innovating and growing my business! I am now obsessed with outsourcing. Instead of trying to wear 20,000 hats (sometimes in one day), you can actually focus on your superpowers and let other experts—like professional website developers and home-cleaning services—use their distinct superpowers. The result is a collection of hyperfocused individuals working toward a common goal, and that is a beautiful thing.

Among the benefits I've found are:



1/ Increased productivity.

The overall productivity of your business will increase as you spend more of your valuable time on the tasks that will really move the needle. Plus, if you hire virtual assistants from across the globe, work will still be getting done even while you're sleeping!

2/ Decreased operational costs.

When you eliminate the need to hire a full-time employee for a small job (and there are plenty of them to start), you reduce your operational costs. That's especially true if you can hire inexpensive, international talent.

3/ Elevated branding.

You obviously want your business to stand out. One of the very best ways to do that is to

have an expert create your content, branding, website, etc. That leaves you with more time to create connections and sales.

This approach is not without its challenges. You could hire the wrong person and derail an entire project. But as with all things, you get better with experience. I like to use platforms like Upwork, where you can find talent that has been pre-vetted on someone else's dime and has a system in place to ensure quality work is done for your company.

The next time you have 20,000 things on your to-do list, ask yourself, *Is this something that really needs to be done by me? Can I afford to put someone else on this task for a few hours?* If you answer no and then yes, go find yourself a virtual general for your army.



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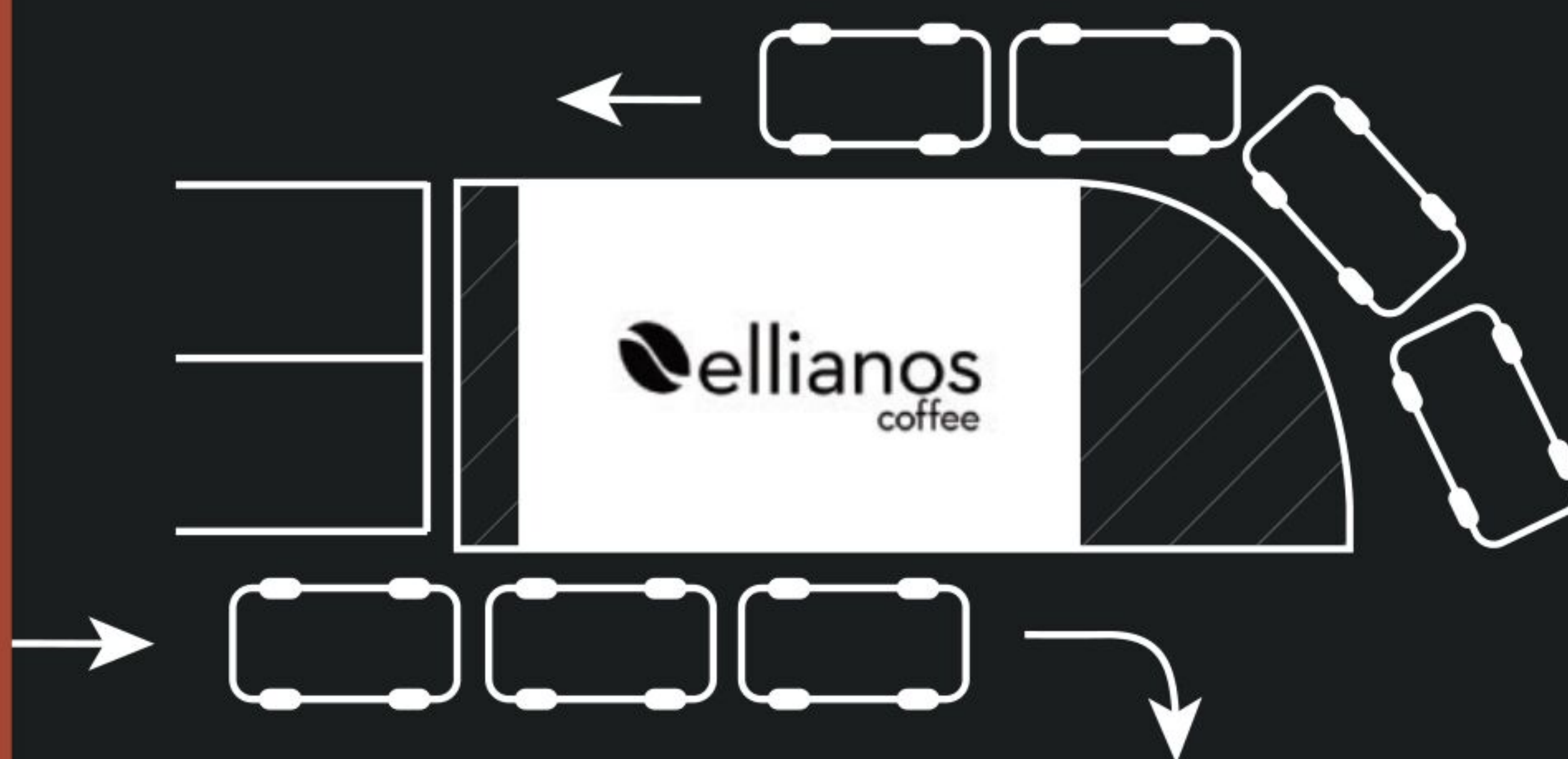
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If You Can Make

The French fast-food sensation

O'Tacos

is rapidly expanding across Europe, but it failed to find its footing with its first outpost in the U.S. What should its fellow foreign companies know about coming to the U.S.? And how can American partners profit from their unique ideas?

by **MAGGIE GINSBERG**



It There



What American fast-food connoisseur wouldn't love a massive tortilla pouch packed with meat, oozy cheese, and fistfuls of fries?

Overseas, "French tacos" are all the rage. The category is now just behind pizza and burgers across all delivery platforms in France, where Paris-based O'Tacos is gobbling up more than its share of the QSR market. Introduced in 2011 by two brothers in Bordeaux who were soon joined by a drywall contractor from Grenoble, O'Tacos has grown to 280 units across France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Germany, with annual revenue surpassing \$300 million. O'Tacos grand openings—often celebratory events featuring French rap stars and Instagram influencers—are occurring in France reportedly at a faster rate than McDonald's. Fans line up for hours to get their hands on the beefed-up poutine in a wrap.

"In the beginning, it was a product that was very popular in the suburbs," says Patrick Pelonero, the drywall contractor turned cofounder, though he means "suburbs" in the French sense, a more urban, working-class setting than the American definition. (We spoke through a translator.) "Now everybody knows it and everybody eats it."

In 2017, O'Tacos opened 72 new locations in France. That March, it also decided to come to America. To do so, it set its sights where countless entrepreneurial dreamers had before: New York, that glittering melting pot of big ideas, fusion foods, outsize portions, and quick, tasty, eat-it-with-your-hands grub. O'Tacos

seemed perfect for the market. But just 14 months later, as O'Tacos' success continued to skyrocket overseas, its only U.S. location closed.

Now that failed experiment could serve as a stark lesson—for O'Tacos, and for any other aspiring franchises—about just how complicated international expansion is...and how much work must be done to find success.

THE APPEAL OF entering the American franchise market is obvious. The U.S. is, for instance, about 18 times bigger than France, which is about equal in size to Texas. And so, according to research from the advisory firm FranData, each year roughly 30 brands from outside the country try to stake a claim stateside.

"It's not a simple path, but it's a clearly defined path," says Darrell Johnson, franchise economist and CEO of FranData. Because modern franchising began in America nearly 100 years ago, Johnson explains, information and expertise are more readily available here, and the legal regulatory structure is solidly in place. There are at least 3,500 franchise brands operating in the U.S. today, more than any other country by a long shot. (Australia, the next closest, has about 1,100.)

"There's plenty of opportunity," Johnson says, pointing to success stories like Pollo Campero out of Guatemala, Bonchon out of South Korea, and Tim Hortons out of Canada. "I think the daunting part of it for most franchise brands internationally looking at the U.S. market is 'How do I get started with this?'"

There are clear best practices, says Ray Hays, managing



partner of FranLaunch USA, which focuses on bringing franchise concepts to America. "It's not as much a matter of getting it the way you think is right," Hays says. "It's about avoiding doing things the wrong way when you enter the U.S. market."

Hays says that when brands stumble in the U.S., it's typically because they struggled with one of four key principles: demonstrating proof of concept, creating a realistic financial plan, enlisting boots on the ground, or seeking legal guidance early on for both federal regulations and the abundance of state-specific laws.

"Finding U.S. partners and franchise experts on the ground in the U.S., I can't stress that enough," Hays says. "It's absolutely critical, even for a very seasoned and established franchise that's gone into 10 countries across Europe."

No matter what, companies will also need to contend with the sheer scale of the United States—which can seem like a blessing from afar but a curse up close. For a 2018 article in *Global Franchise* magazine, Hays polled a handful of franchise CEOs from the United Kingdom—which is arguably closest to America's franchise market in terms of culture and language—about what they didn't realize before entering the U.S. "They say, you know, 'This may sound really stupid, but I didn't realize how big the United States was. I didn't realize how diverse it was,'" Hays says. "Miami is a completely different market from Boston or New York or Chicago." Instead of entering one country, it can feel like entering 10.

"The harsh reality is that very few Latin American and even European brands are

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actually ready or prepared to get into the U.S.," says Fernando Lopez de Castilla, founder of Peru-based GNF Worldwide, which has guided nearly 3,000 franchises into more than 40 countries over the past decade.

De Castilla says it's about discipline: Stick to an expansion-and-development plan, hire a good franchise lawyer, enlist consultants, and above all, resist shortcuts.

"What happens in many cases, even for the big brands, is they receive an attractive lead from an exotic place, or maybe a great place like New York or L.A., and it's amazing how easily they disregard their previous homework and their plan and just want to have, let's say, an overnight success. Just hitting the jackpot in that fabled place," he says. "I don't think life is like that, and franchising is definitely not like that."

OPENING A restaurant in one of the most dynamic cities in the United States was the furthest thing from Patrick Pelonero's mind in 2007. He was just looking to make money when summer drywalling jobs dried up in the winter off-season in Grenoble, in the French Alps region that is credited with creating French tacos.

Pelonero began experimenting with his version of the recipe with a shop he called Tacos des Allies. Meanwhile, two brothers—Silman and Samba Traore—were essentially doing the same thing. The brothers opened the first O'Tacos location in Bordeaux, in 2011, before combining forces with Pelonero for O'Tacos in 2013.

They weren't the only ones developing the market. Le Tacos de Lyon's website says it

created French tacos in Lyon in 1999 and now has four locations. Tacos Avenue is also eyeing international expansion, and there are other competitors, too. But the O'Tacos trio swiftly built a loyal following of young, working-class locals, who appreciated hearty food that didn't eat up their paychecks. (Today the starting "medium" size goes for around €5, or roughly \$6, and typically includes a choice of seven meats, 12 sauces, french fries, and a dozen or so add-ons.) Early fans also liked that the meat was (and still is) certified halal, appealing to suburban Muslim youth.

Perhaps most influential of all, Pelonero had also opened a marketing agency in 2010. O'Tacos became known for viral stunts like the five-

location in Paris. That's when all the ingredients really came together.

"It had people queuing up for hours, for more than 100 meters, to try the product. As of that moment, the whole brand was off for exponential growth," Pelonero says. O'Tacos' social media accounts gained 30,000 fans in six months, and as the brand grew, it deliberately focused on its roots. "It's important, that connection, that link with urban youth, with the suburbs, that's real," says Pelonero. "Especially in this type of environment, people see whether it's real or fake, and the moment you are not real, you lose a lot of credibility. So that's a big part of the brand."

In 2015, franchising began in earnest with 21 openings

nically and culturally diverse. Pelonero flew to New York, and the two hit it off. "It was not something that had been planned very much in advance or a deliberate choice," Pelonero says. "It was a nice opportunity. There was a good feeling between [me] and the partner from New York." The Brooklyn location opened in the Crown Heights neighborhood in March 2017. Its storefront was slate-black with a clean O'Tacos logo—more spare French café than neon American chain store. The welcome was warm enough; the press, positive.

Pelonero returned to France, where O'Tacos was becoming more mainstream. The urban youth base was still strong, and the popularity had spread to city central office workers and families



IT'S NOT AS MUCH A MATTER OF GETTING IT THE WAY YOU THINK IS RIGHT," SAYS RAY HAYS, MANAGING PARTNER OF FRANLAUNCH USA. "IT'S ABOUT AVOIDING DOING THINGS THE WRONG WAY WHEN YOU ENTER THE U.S. MARKET."

pound, meat-laden "Gigataco" (free, if eaten by the two-hour deadline—a feat rarely accomplished) and emphasized the "experience" of the brand, not unlike America's own Taco Bell. Rap music became embedded in the brand's culture, in part because of Pelonero's personal connections in the music industry. Today, the O'Tacos France home page features an interactive keyboard highlighting 42 available ingredients, each miked with sound. Users can choose a backdrop beat and record a 15-second rap.

In 2013, O'Tacos decided to franchise and opened a tiny

that year. By 2017 to 2018, O'Tacos had 220 locations. Yet on the development side, it was still just Pelonero and two interns. "It was a very lean structure, very entrepreneurial," he says. "It's the beginning of a startup that I think nowadays you mostly see within the tech industry, where things go very quickly, exponential, very small teams and a dedicated founder."

It was around that time that a message from America arrived. A French native who'd been living in Brooklyn for 11 years wrote to the O'Tacos team, certain the brand would find a similar fan base there: urban, young, and driven; eth-

with kids. In 2018, Kharis Capital, a master franchisee for Burger King, staked majority ownership in the company, ushering in its expansion to Belgium and the Netherlands. O'Tacos moved its headquarters to Paris. It has also added the dessert subsidiary brand O'Sucre, which includes O'Taglance and O'Shakes.

Meanwhile, back in Brooklyn, people seemed to like the product. Sales were moderately steady, at \$1,000 to \$1,500 per day. But Pelonero says there were constant operational issues. The manager struggled to manage the lunch rush, and there wasn't much the brand



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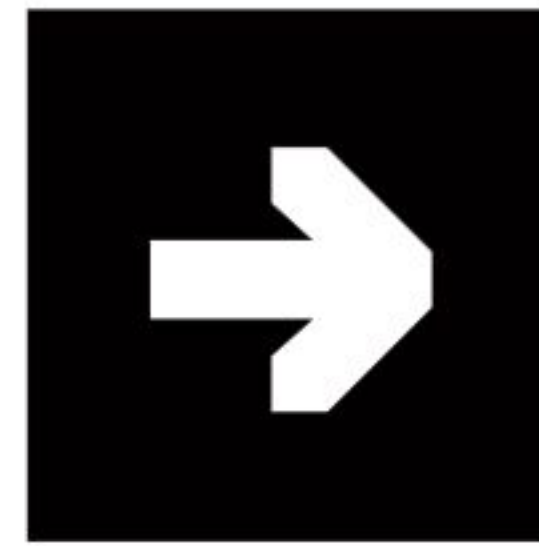
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could do about a single location in a foreign country thousands of miles from headquarters. “It’s like raising a child on the other side of the Atlantic,” Pelonero says of the shuttered American location. “If none of the parents are there, it’s a bit more challenging.”

By May 2018, just more than a year after opening, O’Tacos closed its only U.S. location. It decided it was best to focus entirely on growing the business closer to home.

OF THOSE 30 or so foreign brands that enter the U.S. market each year, FranData doesn’t track how many “succeed.” The factors are too nuanced and complex. “‘One and done’ is not a good way of assessing the market,” Johnson says. A single location isn’t a case study, nor is New



A SINGLE LOCATION ISN’T A CASE STUDY, NOR IS NEW YORK REPRESENTATIVE OF THE U.S. MARKET. BUT IF YOU CAN MAKE IT THERE, “IT’S REALLY A HUGE VALIDATION OF YOUR BRAND IN JUST ABOUT ANY MARKET,” SAYS FRANDATA CEO DARRELL JOHNSON.

York representative of the U.S. market. But if you can make it there, “it’s really a huge validation of your brand in just about any market,” Johnson says.

Hays, too, believes that international franchises can do more than *make it* in the U.S. market—they can even dominate. He offers an example from outside the QSR realm: the 29-year-old Australian pool-cleaning concept, Poolwerx. Founder and CEO John O’Brien studied the U.S. market for nearly two decades before entering

in March 2015. He selected key markets and expanded regionally by acquiring small, independent competitors to test the model. Only then did Poolwerx start franchising, adding 59 U.S. locations and becoming, per the company, the only global franchisor in the pool-and-spa aftermarket sector, with hundreds of retail and mobile units in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. The catch is it required deep pockets, which is one reason global brands may benefit from a U.S. partner; Poolwerx

chairman of the Australian and U.S. boards Troy Hazard, himself an Australia-born serial entrepreneur, connected with the company in 2012 and became a U.S. citizen last year.

“They made mistakes, and it took longer than they expected and cost them more money, but fundamentally they did the right thing,” Hays says. “In the end, I do believe we’re going to see more and more foreign concepts in the U.S.”

This creates huge opportunity not just for global brands, says de Castilla, but for

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“There are amazing brands out there, amazing concepts and value propositions that experienced franchisors in the U.S. or experienced franchisees, especially multi-unit franchisees, could help develop and enter the States,” says de Castilla. Whether seeking U.S. partners or simply customers, he says, international brands would be wise to play up those cultural differences to stand out—a concept he refers to as a “country brand franchise” in his 2019 book *La Biblia de las Franquicias (The Franchise Bible)*. That’s what GNF Worldwide client Juan Valdez has done in bringing its 400-unit, cooperative-owned Colombian coffee into almost 20 units

across Florida, New York, and Washington, D.C., as it attempts its U.S. expansion.

“The brand’s pitch is that when you enter the Juan Valdez coffee shop, you aren’t just buying a coffee, you are buying a little taste of Colombia,” says de Castilla. Expertise is essential, but so is a specific, new vision. “That magic, or uniqueness, there are tons of brands that could actually bring that and make the melting pot richer and more tasty.”

Though de Castilla, like Johnson and Hays, was unfamiliar with O’Tacos before we spoke, it seems that the company’s urban, blue-collar identity could be a great asset, should it give America another go. “I think that [O’Tacos’] concept is so

good—actually, I got very hungry looking at the Instagram pictures,” says de Castilla. “But at the end of the day, you can have the best product in the world, but if you don’t do your homework, there is no luck in this industry.”

IF HE HAD IT to do all over again, Pelonero says he’d get right back on that airplane to New York. But next time, he plans to do a few things differently. “We need the right partner to make it happen, and for real this time,” he says.

Pelonero also has three more years of international expansion under his belt since the Brooklyn location closed, and he’s confident in the product and how to market it. “The way of doing business is universal,” he says. With

more than 2,500 employees serving 40,000 customers a day across five countries, he believes that successful reentry into the U.S. would require a strong local team that treats the business as if it were their own, better awareness of the market, and a “significant” number of locations. From there, the French tacos will take care of the rest.

“We’re actually more convinced than ever that it would be a great fit and a huge opportunity to go back to the U.S.,” Pelonero says. “So that’s definitely the plan, and one of the American dreams to still be realized.” **E**

Maggie Ginsberg is an associate editor at Madison magazine and a regular contributor to Entrepreneur.



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Your CBD Store franchisees and affiliates have access to a staff of expert leaders in all areas of business, science, and marketing support. With over 500 stores, franchisees and affiliates can expect a protected territory around their store. To take our support an additional step further,

you can participate in our internal social media platform to engage with and learn from other store owners and their successful strategies and practices.

Owners First is Your CBD Store motto! We invest all our time, energy and resources in supporting you.

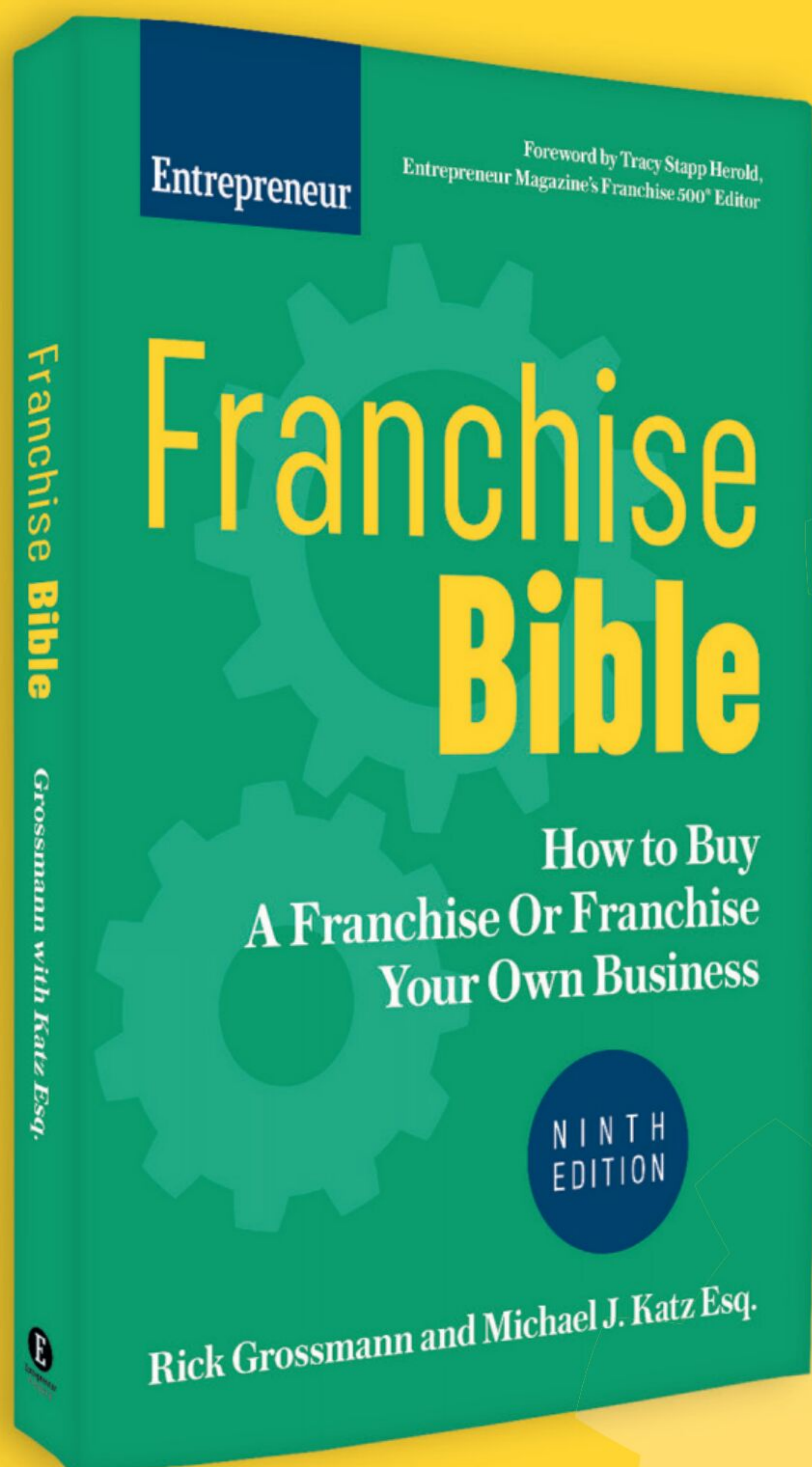


For Your CBD Store® Information:

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About Pillar To Post Home Inspectors®

North America's leading home inspection company with nearly 600 franchisees in 49 states and 9 Canadian provinces.

Pillar To Post Home Inspectors® Facts

- ✓ Franchise Fee: \$24,500.
- ✓ Provides flexibility and financial security
- ✓ Helps your work/life balance
- ✓ Allows you to take control of your financial future

Canadian Pillar To Post Home Inspectors® Franchisee Builds New Career After Life-Altering Injury

Three years after falling off the roof of his family's cottage and breaking both of his legs so severely that he was told he would be wheelchair-bound and possibly lose his legs, Geoffrey Gonneau today is a Pillar To Post Home Inspectors® franchisee and an incredible testament to dedication, perseverance, family support and modern medicine.

After suffering 80 fractures, 50 breaks and having five kilos of titanium implanted in his legs, Gonneau is not only walking, but he is doing every other activity required of a franchise owner with Toronto and Tampa, Florida based Pillar To Post Home Inspectors®, the No. 1 home inspection company in North America. With his family and the franchisor supporting him every step of the way, the 57-year-old Gonneau began serving homebuyers, sellers and agents throughout Etobicoke, North York, East York, The Beach, and West Toronto in March 2020. "I met my goals and now I can

walk, bend, kneel, and yes, climb ladders and look at roofs," Gonneau said.

In his former career, Gonneau had been a property loss appraiser for major restoration companies. You could say such work was in his blood. He got into the business working with his father and Gonneau is a fifth-generation contractor. But in an instant, none of that mattered when Gonneau fell three meters to the ground in September 2018. "It was obviously life-changing for me," Gonneau said. "I could no longer walk-through major debris, which I had to do with many of the homes I was estimating. I could no longer earn a living doing what I had done all my life. I had to focus on my recovery and what my next steps were for my career."

"After six months of healing, I flew across North America training insurance adjusters and contractors," Gonneau said. "I had to carry this amazing amount of medical equipment and I always set off alarms due to

the amount of steel in my legs.

Both my wife, Loreal, and a friend of mine recommended I look into Pillar To Post Home Inspectors®. We always thought that home inspection was a great future career for me and during my due diligence I decided this was the right home for me."

Speaking of homes, the company rolled out new technologies during COVID-19. PTP360 is an interactive 360° virtual home inspection tour that allows users to revisit a home anytime and anywhere from a smartphone, tablet or desktop and even share the tour with family and friends. Clients can also receive a floor plan of the entire home, with measurements to help with furniture fit and placement.

Pillar To Post Home Inspectors® has achieved the highest standing in various rankings of "Best in Category," "Top 20 Franchises to Buy," "Top 10 Global Franchises" and "Top Franchises for Veterans," in addition to achieving 5-Star status with VetFran, a program offered by the International Franchise Association that provides discounted franchise fees to veterans. A professional evaluation both inside and outside the home is at the core of Pillar To Post Home Inspectors' service.

"To overcome my fear of going back on roofs I climbed back onto the roof that I fell off of – while still wearing my casts," Gonneau said. "It was a dumb move, which I reminded my wife of since I had taken a selfie while doing it. Boy, did I get an earful after that conversation."



For Pillar To Post Home Inspectors® Information:

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- Marine Protection Films
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For Franchise info contact:

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**This information appears in the Tint World® Franchise Disclosure Document 2021 Item 19*, your results will vary depending on how well you faithfully follow the franchise system.*



THE TOP 200 GLOBAL FRANCHISE BRANDS

Who is going global in a big way? Here's our annual ranking of the strongest brands across borders.

compiled by **TRACY STAPP HEROLD**

Despite the unprecedented challenges of the past year, many franchise brands have continued to expand their reach—not just in the U.S. but around the world. We recognize those that are doing it best on the following pages in our top global franchises ranking. The 200 companies on this list represent more than 415,000 franchise units worldwide—and more than half of those are outside the U.S.

To qualify for this ranking, companies had to have at least five franchise units open outside the U.S. and indicate that they are seeking new franchisees internationally. From there, all qualified companies were run through a modified version of our Franchise

500 ranking formula, adjusted to give extra weight to international units and growth. Other factors considered by the formula include costs and fees, brand strength, franchisee support, and financial strength and stability.

Remember as you read through this list that it is not intended as a recommendation of any particular company. Whatever region of the globe you're in, one fact is universal—you should always do your homework before investing in any business opportunity. That means reading the company's legal documents, consulting with an attorney and an accountant, and talking to existing and former franchisees to find out whether the franchise is a good fit for you and your corner of the world.

1
McDonald's
 Burgers, chicken, salads, beverages
STARTUP COST
 \$1.3M–\$2.3M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 36,371/2,649

2
KFC
 Chicken
STARTUP COST
 \$1.4M–\$2.8M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 24,067/327

3
7-Eleven
 Convenience stores
STARTUP COST
 \$69.7K–\$1.2M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 66,572/2,372

4
Pizza Hut
 Pizza, pasta, wings
STARTUP COST
 \$367K–\$2.1M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 17,130/97

5
Dunkin'
 Coffee, doughnuts, baked goods
STARTUP COST
 \$199.7K–\$1.7M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 13,125/0

6
Taco Bell
 Mexican food
STARTUP COST
 \$575.6K–\$3.4M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 7,019/474

7
Century 21 Real Estate
 Real estate
STARTUP COST
 \$24.7K–\$456.4K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 11,435/0



RE/MAX / No. 14

RE/MAX IS IN MORE THAN 110 countries and territories around the world, and that global presence only continued to grow last year despite COVID-19 restrictions, as the company expanded into Belgium, Bonaire, Moldova, North Macedonia, Qatar, and St. Lucia, and added more than 7,000 agents outside the U.S. and Canada. The brand offered virtual conferences, recruiting events, and business coaching to help franchisees and agents around the world, and with corporate's support, RE/MAX South Africa's owners successfully petitioned to have real estate recognized as an essential business.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF RE/MAX

8

Kumon Math & Reading Centers

Supplemental education

STARTUP COST
\$64.5K-\$139.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
26,338/27

9

Anytime Fitness

Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$96.1K-\$523.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
4,739/4

10

Smoothie King

Smoothies, healthful snacks, health products

STARTUP COST
\$269.6K-\$845.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,155/39

11

Baskin-Robbins

Ice cream, frozen yogurt, frozen beverages

STARTUP COST
\$123.95K-\$558.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
7,981/0

12

Circle K

Convenience stores

STARTUP COST
\$189.3K-\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,954/9,189

13

Ace Hardware

Hardware and home-improvement stores

STARTUP COST
\$292K-\$2.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
5,191/194

14

RE/MAX

Real estate

STARTUP COST
\$42K-\$284K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
8,405/0



Arby's / No. 15

IN THE U.S., Arby's commercials boast "We have the meats." In Mexico, which last year became the eighth country to open an Arby's restaurant, the tagline is "Carne en serio" (or roughly, "Meat seriously"). Whatever your preferred language, the exclusive menu at the brand's first Mexico restaurant in a Guadalajara mall is designed for meat lovers, with 10 "stack" sandwiches featuring ingredients like pork belly, pulled pork, smoked beef, and crispy chicken, alongside classic menu items like curly fries and jamocha shakes.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ARBY'S®

15

Arby's

Sandwiches, fries, shakes

STARTUP COST
\$628.95K–\$2.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,315/1,190

16

Dairy Queen

Ice cream, burgers, chicken

STARTUP COST
\$1.1M–\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
7,030/2

17

Cinnabon

Cinnamon rolls, baked goods, coffee

STARTUP COST
\$232.7K–\$475.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,646/2

18

Chem-Dry Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning

Carpet and upholstery cleaning, tile and stone care, granite countertop renewal

STARTUP COST
\$68.1K–\$191.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
3,577/0

19

The UPS Store

Postal, business, printing, and communications services

STARTUP COST
\$137.8K–\$566.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
5,268/0

20

Hampton by Hilton

Midprice hotels

STARTUP COST
\$7.7M–\$20.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,582/0

21

Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen

Fried chicken, seafood, biscuits

STARTUP COST
\$383.5K–\$2.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
3,336/41



Cinnabon/ No. 17

CINNABON'S sticky sweet treats are a mall staple, but after 35 years, the brand is looking to accelerate its expansion into airports, colleges, food trucks, and street-side locations. The company's third-largest franchisee group, United Beverage and Food, which owns 38 stores in the Middle East, was the first to open a street-side location in 2005. And now it may just be paving the way with another innovation—Cinnabon's very first drive-through, which opened recently in Cairo, Egypt, as part of the country's first drive-through mall.



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22
Snap-on Tools
 Professional tools and equipment

STARTUP COST
 \$169.2K–\$382.2K

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 4,570/202

23
Eye Level Learning Centers
 Supplemental education

STARTUP COST
 \$52.3K–\$121.7K

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 839/799

24
Doubletree by Hilton
 Upscale hotels and resorts

STARTUP COST
 \$22.9M–\$79.2M

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 473/0

25
Carl's Jr.
 Burgers

STARTUP COST
 \$1.6M–\$2.2M

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 1,594/59

26
Planet Fitness
 Fitness clubs

STARTUP COST
 \$968.1K–\$4.1M

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 1,960/99

27
Right at Home
 Home care, medical staffing

STARTUP COST
 \$80.2K–\$147.2K

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 611/3

28
Hilton Garden Inn
 Upscale midprice hotels

STARTUP COST
 \$13.1M–\$27.1M

TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchises / Co.-Owned)
 861/0



Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen / No. 21

THE BUZZ AROUND Popeyes' chicken sandwich goes beyond borders, and just this year the brand entered agreements to expand into the U.K., India, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia to the tune of 1,000 more restaurant openings over the next 10 years. While the iconic Popeyes sandwich is available in 26 countries already, the company's culinary and innovation teams have worked to adapt its recipe to local tastes around the world. For instance, in some Asian countries, thigh meat is used instead of white meat, and in Vietnam and Singapore, extra spice is added to the breading to increase the heat.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF POPEYES LOUISIANA KITCHEN

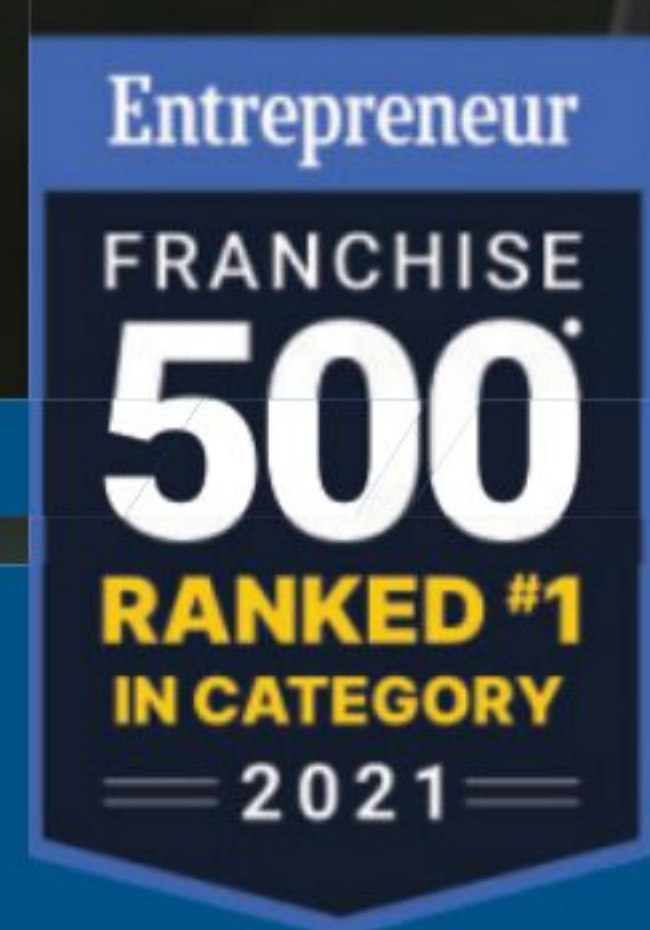
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Garry Norris, Franchise Owner



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29
Interim HealthCare

Medical home care, medical staffing

STARTUP COST
\$125.5K–\$198.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
597/0

30
Hardee's

Burgers

STARTUP COST
\$1.5M–\$2.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,987/207

31
Super 8 by Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$233.2K–\$4.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,925/0

32
Pearle Vision

Eye care and eyewear

STARTUP COST
\$77.7K–\$644.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
444/108

33
Hilton Hotels and Resorts

Upscale hotels and resorts

STARTUP COST
\$30.6M–\$128.99M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
451/61

34
F45 Training

Fitness studios

STARTUP COST
\$313.2K–\$485.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,298/0

35
Denny's

Family restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$305K–\$2.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,613/66

36
Matco Tools

Mechanics' tools and equipment

STARTUP COST
\$78.1K–\$274.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,808/1

37
Firehouse Subs

Subs

STARTUP COST
\$57.5K–\$868.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,140/37

38
Keller Williams

Real estate

STARTUP COST
\$183.4K–\$336.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,055/0

39
Dogtopia

Dog daycare, boarding, and spa services

STARTUP COST
\$668.3K–\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
152/6

40
uBreakiFix

Electronics repairs

STARTUP COST
\$98.4K–\$303K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
526/59

41
Crunch

Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$255.5K–\$2.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
274/26

42
Novus Glass

Auto glass repair and replacement

STARTUP COST
\$55K–\$264.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,024/29

43
Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ Restaurant

Japanese barbecue restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$1.2M–\$2.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
775/26

44
SmartStyle

Family hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$149.4K–\$305.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,210/751

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Signarama / No. 53

IN ITS 35-YEAR HISTORY,

Signarama has expanded into more than 20 countries. The wide variety of services and products offered by the brand allows it to be easily customized to meet the needs of different markets and cultures. In fact, the pandemic gave rise to a whole new product category for the company—and one that every market had a need for—in the PPE and safety space. Franchisees around the world were trained on how to repurpose their sign-making equipment to create face shields, sneeze guards, custom signage, and even intubation boxes for use in hospitals.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SIGNARAMA



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45
Jan-Pro
Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$4.2K–\$56K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
10,118/0

46
**ServiceMaster Clean/
ServiceMaster Restore**
Commercial/residential cleaning, disaster restoration

STARTUP COST
\$76.5K–\$274.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
4,928/9

47
9Round Fitness
Kickboxing fitness circuit-training centers

STARTUP COST
\$94.2K–\$196.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
672/5

48
Pirtek
Hydraulic and industrial hose service and supply centers/mobile services

STARTUP COST
\$201.4K–\$869.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
520/6

49
Sport Clips
Men's sports-themed hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$233.8K–\$388.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,809/70

50
Petland
Pets, pet supplies, boarding, daycare, grooming

STARTUP COST
\$300.5K–\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
216/19

51
Anago Cleaning Systems
Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$11.3K–\$68.3K

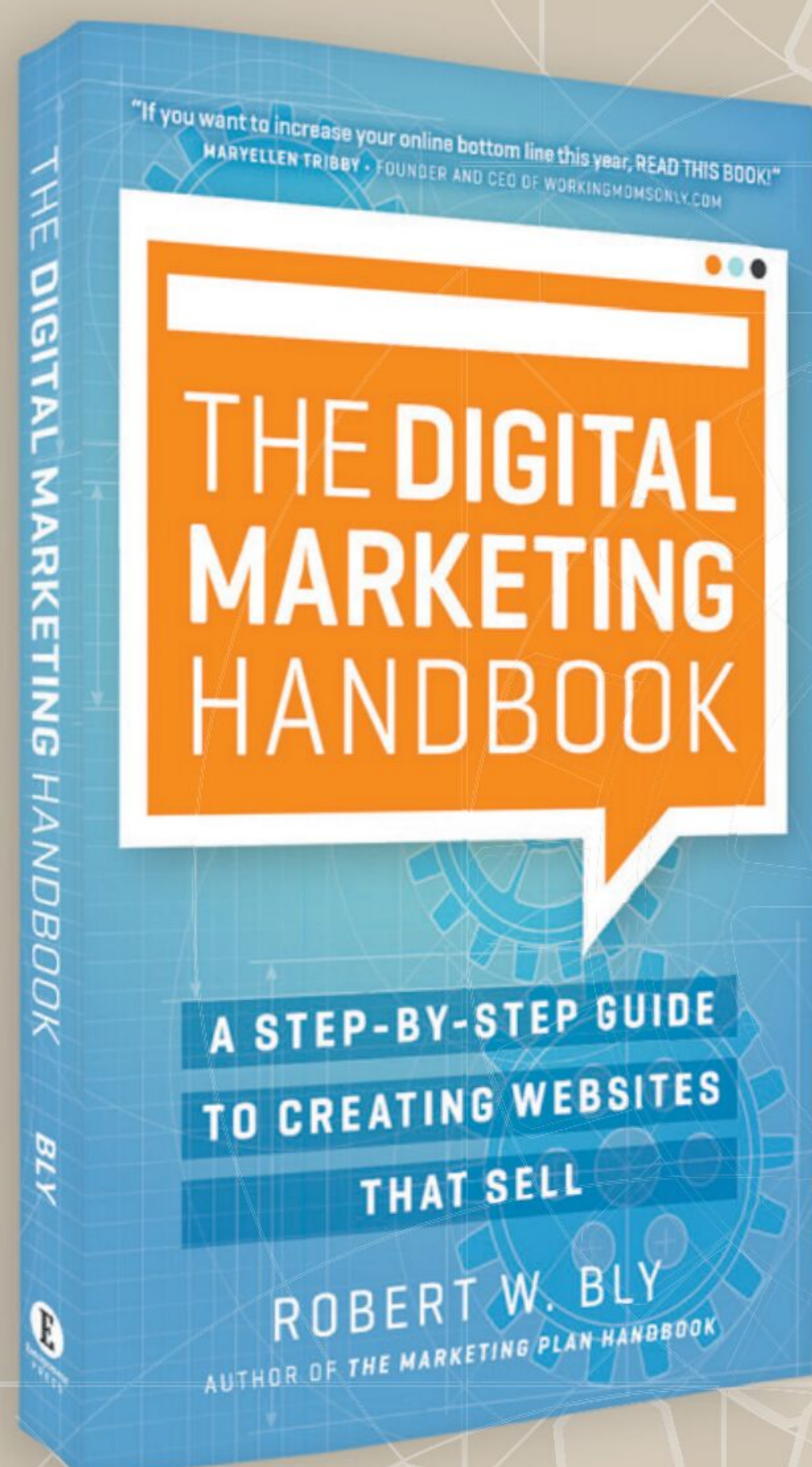
TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,711/0



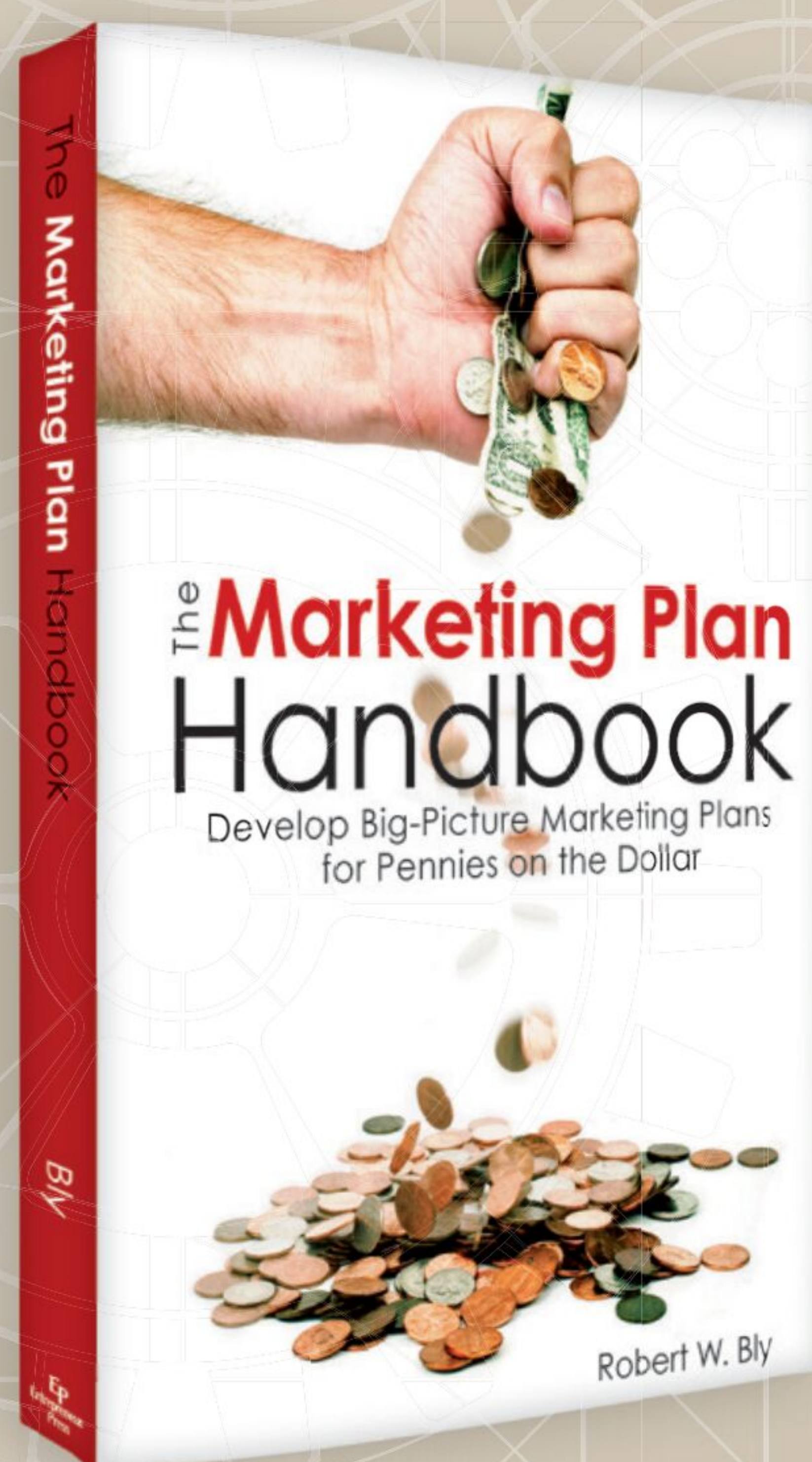
Home Instead / No. 63

HOME INSTEAD STRIVES to offer international franchisees what it calls “freedom within a framework.” The flexibility of its model allows it to expand into countries like Canada, Ireland, Germany, and Australia, where senior care providers partner with government agencies rather than offering private pay services. Its international franchisees can adapt the model to fit cultural differences as well. For instance, in Germany, “whole family care” that serves multiple generations under one roof is popular, and in China, demand led to massage services being added to its offerings.

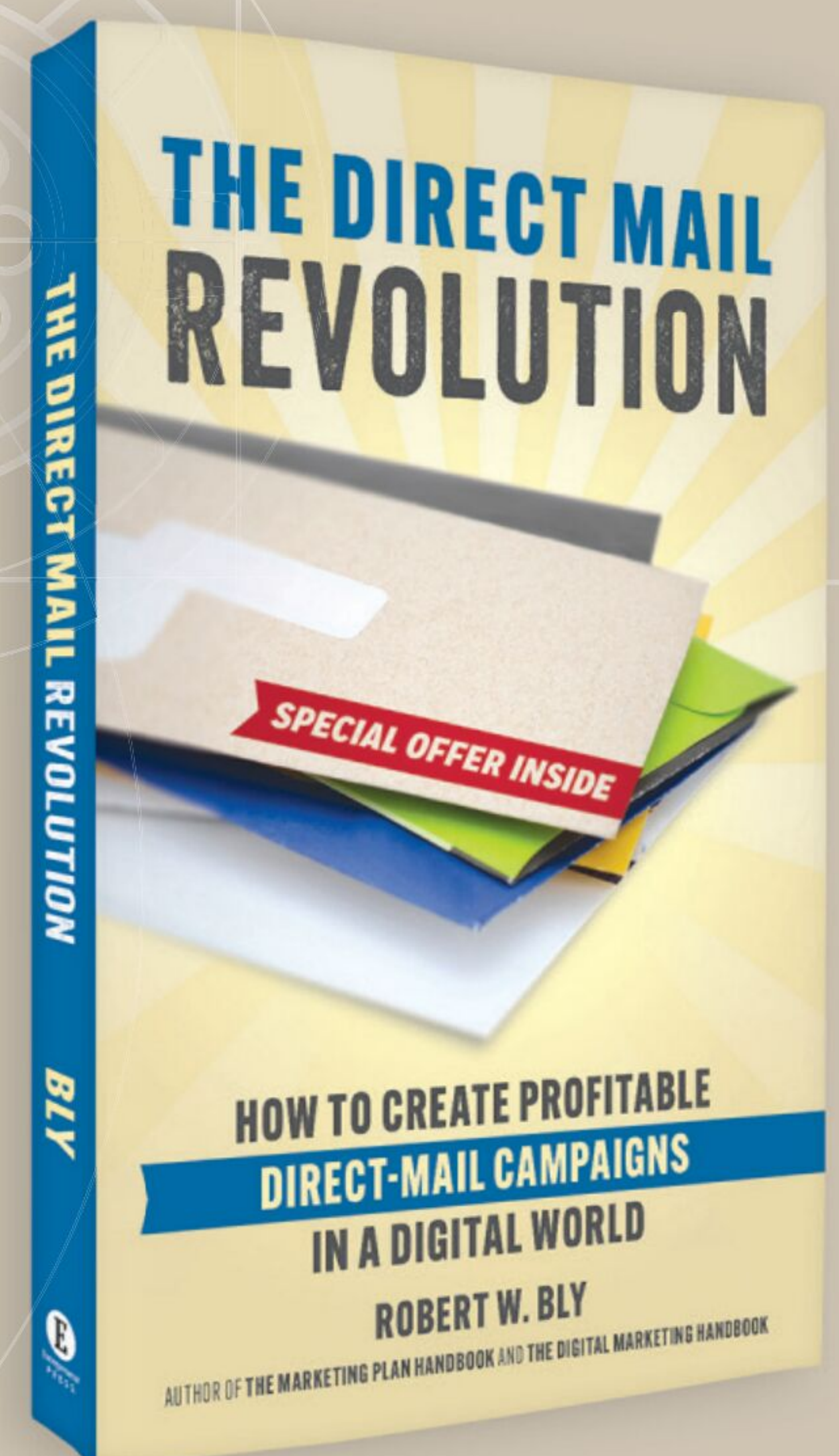
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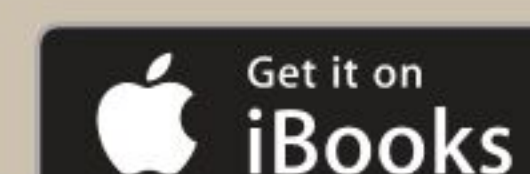
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52
Snapology

STEAM education programs

STARTUP COST
\$40.9K-\$220.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
163/1

53
Signarama

Sign products and services

STARTUP COST
\$106.5K-\$308.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
727/0

54
The Alternative Board (TAB)

Business owner advisory boards, coaching, strategic planning

STARTUP COST
\$58.0K-\$103.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
316/19

55
Budget Blinds

Window coverings, window film, rugs, accessories

STARTUP COST
\$125.3K-\$254.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,273/0

56
Merry Maids

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$89.6K-\$125.0K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,705/3

57
STEM For Kids

Biomed, coding, business, and engineering programs for ages 4 to 14

STARTUP COST
\$49.5K-\$83.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
117/5

58
Transworld Business Advisors

Business brokerages; franchise consulting

STARTUP COST
\$74.9K-\$97.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
321/1

59
Papa John's

Pizza

STARTUP COST
\$130.1K-\$844.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
4,749/598

60
Mac Tools

Automotive tools and equipment

STARTUP COST
\$131.6K-\$287.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,122/1

61
The Maids

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$64.1K-\$154.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,299/174

62
Jazzercise

Group fitness classes, conventions, apparel, and accessories

STARTUP COST
\$2.4K-\$21.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
8,456/2

63
Home Instead

Nonmedical senior care

STARTUP COST
\$108.9K-\$124.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,091/3

64
Kinderdance

Children's dance, gymnastics, fitness, and yoga programs

STARTUP COST
\$18.2K-\$47.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
173/2

65
N-Hance Wood Refinishing

Wood cabinet and floor refinishing

STARTUP COST
\$52.4K-\$168.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
546/0

66
Supercuts

Hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$151.4K-\$321K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,604/210



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67
CPR Cell Phone Repair
Electronics repairs and sales

STARTUP COST
\$79.9K–\$205.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
544/0

68
Curio Collection by Hilton
Upscale hotels

STARTUP COST
\$3.6M–\$112.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
91/0

69
Marco's Pizza
Pizza, subs, wings, cheese bread

STARTUP COST
\$183.4K–\$552.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
961/42

70
Aqua-Tots Swim Schools
Swimming lessons

STARTUP COST
\$502.1K–\$1.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
123/1

71
FastSigns
Signs, graphics

STARTUP COST
\$233.6K–\$307.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
754/0

72
Midas
Auto repair and maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$198.7K–\$539.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,017/0

73
SafeSplash/ SwimLabs/ Swimtastic
Child and adult swimming lessons, parties, summer camps

STARTUP COST
\$52K–\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
150/21

74
Servpro
Fire, water, and other damage cleanup and restoration

STARTUP COST
\$167.6K–\$221.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,841/0

75
Expense Reduction Analysts (ERA)
Business financial consulting

STARTUP COST
\$66K–\$85.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
678/0

76
PostNet
Packing, shipping, printing, signs, marketing solutions

STARTUP COST
\$185.6K–\$227.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
681/0

77
Regus
Flexible/virtual offices, coworking spaces, meeting and training facilities

STARTUP COST
\$549K–\$998K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
33/918

78
H&R Block
Tax preparation, electronic filing

STARTUP COST
\$31.6K–\$149.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
3,581/6,590

79
Express Employment Professionals
Staffing, HR solutions

STARTUP COST
\$150K–\$239K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
822/0

80
A&W Restaurants
Root beer, burgers, hot dogs, chicken, sides, ice cream

STARTUP COST
\$276K–\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
932/4

81
Holiday Inn and Holiday Inn Express
Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$8.99M–\$20M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
4,134/3

82
Blaze Fast-Fire'd Pizza
Assembly-line pizza

STARTUP COST
\$541.5K–\$1.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
330/12

83
Wingstop
Chicken wings

STARTUP COST
\$376.3K–\$724K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,406/30

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84
The Exercise Coach

Personal training

STARTUP COST
\$119.3K–\$332.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
148/2

85
AbraKadoodle

Art-education programs for children

STARTUP COST
\$38.1K–\$81.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
490/2

86
Church's Chicken

Chicken

STARTUP COST
\$681.5K–\$1.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,402/162

87
Paul Davis Restoration

Insurance restoration

STARTUP COST
\$186.4K–\$510.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
262/0

88
Sculpture Hospitality

Bar and restaurant management solutions

STARTUP COST
\$40.9K–\$69.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
320/12

89
YESCO Sign & Lighting Service

Sign and lighting service and maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$65K–\$352.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
57/39

90
Two Men and a Truck

Moving, storage, and junk removal services

STARTUP COST
\$100K–\$595K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
304/3

91
Buffalo Wild Wings

Wings, bar food, alcohol

STARTUP COST
\$2.7M–\$4.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
589/682

92
Multivista

Visual documentation services for the construction industry

STARTUP COST
\$213.5K–\$635.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
77/3

93
IDEA Lab Kids

STEAM enrichment classes, camps, and parties

STARTUP COST
\$155.5K–\$368K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
19/0

94
Home2 Suites by Hilton

Midprice extended-stay hotels

STARTUP COST
\$9.1M–\$17.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
411/0

95
Homewood Suites by Hilton

Upscale extended-stay hotels

STARTUP COST
\$12.3M–\$25.99M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
507/0

96
Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies

Childcare centers

STARTUP COST
\$4.4M–\$5.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
176/0

97
Pop-A-Lock

Mobile locksmith and security services

STARTUP COST
\$96.9K–\$130.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
593/7

98
MaidPro

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$57.6K–\$222.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
275/0

99
Freedom Boat Club

Membership boat clubs

STARTUP COST
\$175K–\$486K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
236/43

100
Snap Fitness

24-hour fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$144.8K–\$478.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,248/19

101
Mathnasium Learning Centers

Math tutoring

STARTUP COST
\$112.8K–\$149.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,068/6

102
Once Upon A Child

New and used children's clothing, equipment, furniture, toys

STARTUP COST
\$254.7K–\$396.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
392/0

103
Furniture Medic

Wood restoration, repair, and maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$80.8K–\$90.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
342/0

104
Canopy by Hilton

Upscale hotels

STARTUP COST
\$44.9M–\$114.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
19/0

105
Coldwell Banker Real Estate

Real estate

STARTUP COST
\$30.6K–\$489.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,404/602

106
The Little Gym

Child-development/fitness programs

STARTUP COST
\$223.4K–\$466.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
358/0

107
Sola Salon Studios

Salon studios

STARTUP COST
\$532.3K–\$1.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
497/27

108
Tutor Doctor

Tutoring

STARTUP COST
\$84.3K–\$129K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
686/0

109
Rainbow International Restoration

Indoor cleaning and restoration

STARTUP COST
\$193.7K–\$287.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
410/0

110
Coverall

Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$16.5K–\$51.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
8,278/0

111
Fully Promoted

Branded products and marketing services

STARTUP COST
\$85.1K–\$124.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
280/0

112
Enviro-Master Services

Health and safety products for businesses

STARTUP COST
\$244K–\$344.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
86/0

113
Plato's Closet

Teen- and young-adult-clothing resale stores

STARTUP COST
\$250.7K–\$389.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
481/0

114
Doc Popcorn

Kettle-cooked popcorn

STARTUP COST
\$53.9K–\$353.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
95/0

115
Real Property Management

Property management

STARTUP COST
\$101.2K–\$154.97K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
337/0

116
Experimax

Electronics resales and repairs

STARTUP COST
\$139.5K–\$351.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
93/0

117
Embassy Suites by Hilton

Upscale all-suite hotels

STARTUP COST
\$17.95M–\$85.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
238/0

118
American Poolplayers Association

Recreational billiard leagues

STARTUP COST
\$20.99K–\$29K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
326/5

119
Jiffy Lube

Oil changes, preventive maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$207K–\$422.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,104/0

120
Mr. Appliance

Residential and commercial appliance installation and repairs

STARTUP COST
\$65.8K–\$144.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
296/0

121
Image360

Signs, graphics, displays, digital imaging

STARTUP COST
\$196.5K–\$370.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
302/2

122
Carstar

Auto collision repair

STARTUP COST
\$298.2K–\$804.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
700/2

123
School of Rock

Music education

STARTUP COST
\$271.5K–\$494.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
220/49

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124 Dale Carnegie

Workplace training and development

STARTUP COST
\$93.4K–\$245.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
230/1

125 Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$1.4M–\$69.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
134/0

126 Ziebart

Auto appearance and protection services

STARTUP COST
\$297.8K–\$469.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
375/12

127 The Cleaning Authority

Environmentally friendly residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$76K–\$169K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
218/3

128 Minuteman Press

Printing, graphics, and marketing services

STARTUP COST
\$74.9K–\$180.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
967/0

129 Slim Chickens

Chicken tenders, chicken wings, salads, sandwiches, wraps

STARTUP COST
\$841.9K–\$1.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
71/22

130 Soccer Shots

Soccer programs for ages 2 to 8

STARTUP COST
\$41K–\$55.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
234/8

131 SuperGlass Windshield Repair

Windshield repair, glass scratch removal, headlight lens repair

STARTUP COST
\$18.7K–\$84.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
336/0

132 Bonchon

Korean fried chicken

STARTUP COST
\$503.9K–\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
344/3

133 Radisson Blu

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$21.2M–\$121.95M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
327/1

134 First Choice Haircutters

Family hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$177.8K–\$302.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
336/26

135 Great Clips

Hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$146.9K–\$282.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
4,473/0

136 Cold Stone Creamery

Ice cream, sorbet, ice cream cakes, shakes

STARTUP COST
\$310.4K–\$476.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,249/3

137 Made in the Shade Blinds and More

Window coverings

STARTUP COST
\$55.95K–\$64.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
115/0

138 Merle Norman Cosmetics

Cosmetics and skin-care products

STARTUP COST
\$39.5K–\$180.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,049/1

139 InXpress

Shipping services

STARTUP COST
\$85.6K–\$166.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
371/0

140 30 Minute Hit

Kickboxing circuit-training programs for women

STARTUP COST
\$122.4K–\$212.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
68/0

141 Sir Speedy Print Signs Marketing

Printing, signs, marketing services

STARTUP COST
\$279.98K–\$304.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
211/0

142 Ben & Jerry's

Ice cream, frozen yogurt, sorbet, smoothies

STARTUP COST
\$152.2K–\$546.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
544/18

143 D-BAT

Indoor baseball and softball training, batting cages, merchandise

STARTUP COST
\$494.7K–\$967.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
101/0

144 AmeriSpec Inspection Services

Home and commercial inspections, ancillary services

STARTUP COST
\$53.6K–\$72.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
267/0

145 Challenge Island

Educational enrichment programs

STARTUP COST
\$48.3K–\$62.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
144/7

146 Title Boxing Club

Boxing and kickboxing fitness classes, personal training, apparel

STARTUP COST
\$171.95K–\$514.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
181/2

147 Color Glo

Leather, vinyl, fabric, carpet, and surface repair and restoration

STARTUP COST
\$56.3K–\$61.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
137/0

148 Visiting Angels

Nonmedical home care

STARTUP COST
\$123.5K–\$161.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
578/0

149 Sky Zone

Trampoline parks/entertainment centers

STARTUP COST
\$1.3M–\$2.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
162/26

150 Quesada Burritos & Tacos

Mexican food

STARTUP COST
\$239K–\$320.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
137/3

151 Mezza Lebanese Kitchen

Lebanese food

STARTUP COST
\$436K–\$671.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
6/8

152 Leadership Management International

Leadership and organization training and development

STARTUP COST
\$20K–\$27.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
462/0

153 Oxxo Care Cleaners

Dry-cleaning and laundry services

STARTUP COST
\$169.5K–\$672K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
51/3

154 Qualicare

Medical/nonmedical home care, concierge services, and patient advocacy

STARTUP COST
\$84.6K–\$194.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
62/3

155 Stratus Building Solutions

Environmentally friendly commercial cleaning and disinfecting

STARTUP COST
\$4.5K–\$79.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,030/0

156 Tapout Fitness

Fitness and martial arts

STARTUP COST
\$158.4K–\$736.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
25/3

157 Take 5 Oil Change

Oil changes

STARTUP COST
\$216.5K–\$905.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
76/475

158 Ramada by Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$220.7K–\$9.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
855/0

159 101 Mobility

Mobility and accessibility equipment sales and services

STARTUP COST
\$118.4K–\$216.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
175/8

160 Kid to Kid

New and used children's and maternity clothing and products

STARTUP COST
\$300.8K–\$488.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
102/10

161 Days Inn by Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$231.2K–\$5.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,691/0

162 Style Encore

Women's clothing and accessories resale stores

STARTUP COST
\$250.8K–\$390.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
67/0

LIVE



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F/ The List

163 AAMCO Transmissions and Total Car Care

Transmission and general auto repairs, diagnostic services

STARTUP COST
\$223.6K–\$330.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
556/13

164 Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts

Family camping resorts

STARTUP COST
\$63K–\$5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
78/0

165 ComForCare

Nonmedical home care

STARTUP COST
\$79.3K–\$150.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
206/0

166 Chronic Tacos

Mexican food

STARTUP COST
\$294K–\$801K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
49/2

167 Qdoba Mexican Eats

Mexican food

STARTUP COST
\$475.5K–\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
390/346

168 Liberty Tax Service

Tax preparation, electronic filing, bookkeeping, payroll, loans, insurance, credit repair

STARTUP COST
\$60.7K–\$73.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
2,668/135

169 1-800-Got-Junk?

Junk removal

STARTUP COST
\$241.8K–\$289.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
152/1

170 Microtel by Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$5.7M–\$6.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
346/0

171 Mr. Rooter

Plumbing, drain, and sewer cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$79.98K–\$187.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
290/0

172 Travelodge by Wyndham

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$184.96K–\$8.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
450/0

173 Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa

Massage and facial services

STARTUP COST
\$567.6K–\$674.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
471/2

174 AlphaGraphics

Printing, marketing communications, signs and graphics

STARTUP COST
\$267.95K–\$359.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
281/3

175 Wyndham Garden

Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$446.8K–\$14.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
127/0

176 Senior Helpers

Personal, companion, and Alzheimer's home care

STARTUP COST
\$109.3K–\$150.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
313/4

177 Carvel

Ice cream, ice cream cakes

STARTUP COST
\$308.6K–\$499.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
348/5

178 milliCare

Flooring, carpet, and textile maintenance and hygiene services

STARTUP COST
\$113.8K–\$163K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
61/0

179 Metal Supermarkets

Metal stores

STARTUP COST
\$216.5K–\$403K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
86/10

180 Allegra Marketing- Print-Mail

Printing, marketing, mail, signs, promotional products

STARTUP COST
\$29.8K–\$369.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
277/1

181 Escapology

Escape rooms

STARTUP COST
\$119.2K–\$686.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
51/4

182 Tint World

Auto accessories, mobile electronics, security, window tinting, appearance services

STARTUP COST
\$124.7K–\$299.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
78/0

183 Wild Birds Unlimited

Bird-feeding supplies and nature gift items

STARTUP COST
\$185.2K–\$311K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
347/0

184 Wetzel's Pretzels

Soft pretzels, lemonade, hot dogs

STARTUP COST
\$179.95K–\$478.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
310/21

185 Padgett Business Services

Financial, payroll, consulting, and tax services

STARTUP COST
\$20.2K–\$99.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
321/0

186 HouseMaster Home Inspections

Home inspections and related services

STARTUP COST
\$61.1K–\$106.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
305/0

187 Vanguard Cleaning Systems

Commercial cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$5.5K–\$37.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
3,118/0



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AUG 31-SEP 03, 2021 | LAS VEGAS, NV

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



KEVIN O'LEARY
Investor on ABC's *Shark Tank*,
Chairman of O'Leary Financial
Group & Bestselling Author



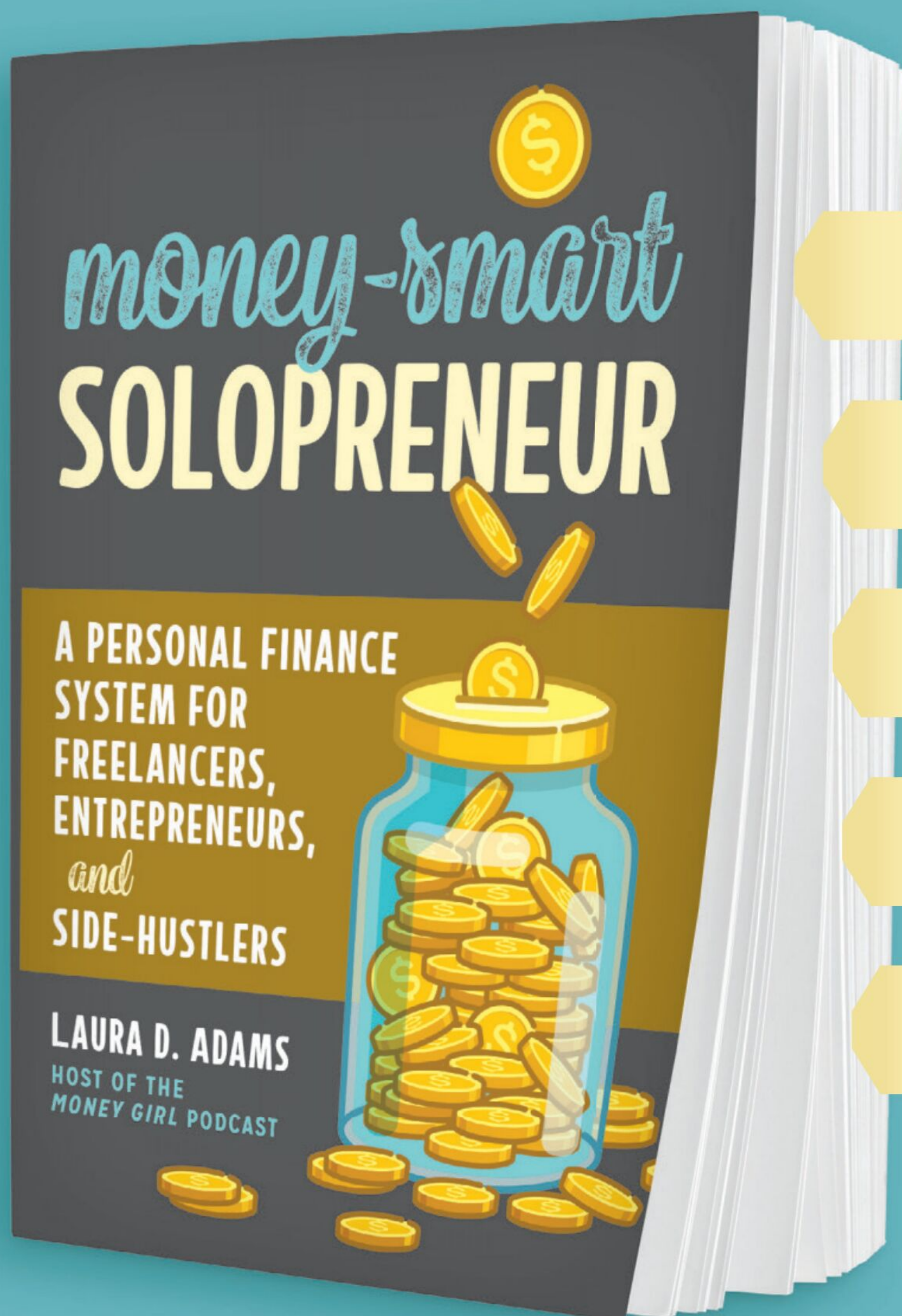
CAPTAIN SCOTT KELLY
History-Making NASA Astronaut; First to
Complete a Year-in-Space Mission



NIGEL TRAVIS
Chairman, Dunkin' Brands Inc.,
Author of *The Challenge Culture*

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188
Maid Brigade
Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$110.3K-\$130.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
406/18

189
Club Pilates
Reformer Pilates classes

STARTUP COST
\$178K-\$365.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
594/3

190
Comfort Keepers
Home care

STARTUP COST
\$91.2K-\$144.96K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
682/100

191
Little Kickers
Preschool soccer programs

STARTUP COST
\$27.5K-\$41.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
343/2

192
Chester's
Chicken

STARTUP COST
\$12.4K-\$277.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,347/0

193
CertaPro Painters
Residential and commercial painting

STARTUP COST
\$133.3K-\$169.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
373/0

194
Mr. Handyman
Residential and commercial repair, maintenance, and improvement services

STARTUP COST
\$117.5K-\$149.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
249/0

195
Oxygen Yoga & Fitness
Yoga and fitness classes

STARTUP COST
\$321.5K-\$411.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
62/0

196
Charleys Philly Steaks
Philly cheesesteaks, fries, wings, lemonade

STARTUP COST
\$253.2K-\$637.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
569/57

197
PuroClean
Property damage restoration and remediation

STARTUP COST
\$78.8K-\$204.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
331/0

198
La Quinta by Wyndham
Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$3.8M-\$12.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
657/271

199
Motel 6
Economy hotels

STARTUP COST
\$221.9K-\$7.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
1,025/215

200
Howard Johnson by Wyndham
Hotels

STARTUP COST
\$336.6K-\$9.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchises / Co.-Owned)
322/0

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Ben Chestnut, Mailchimp



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Brian Kelly, The Points Guy

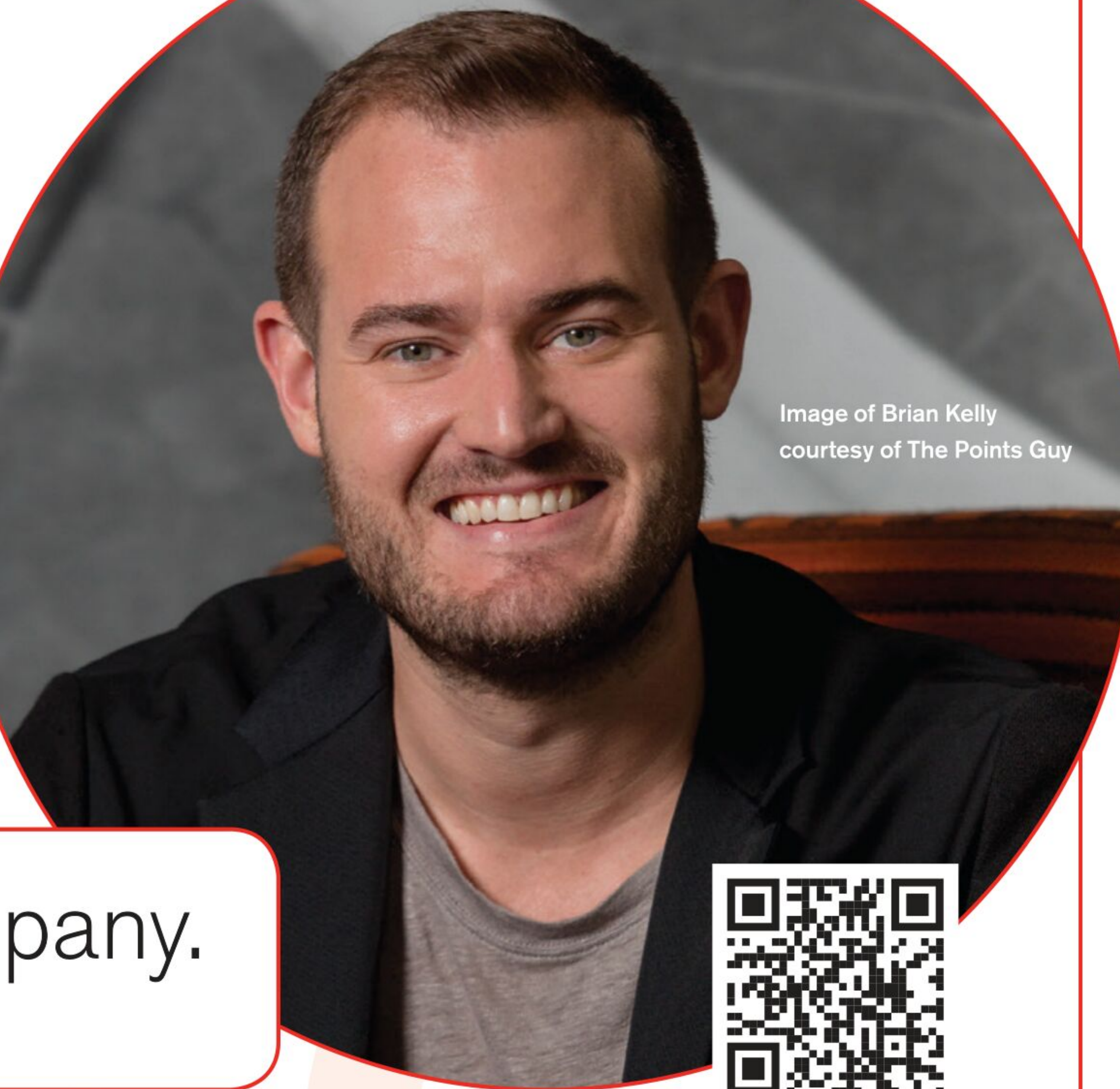


Image of Brian Kelly
courtesy of The Points Guy



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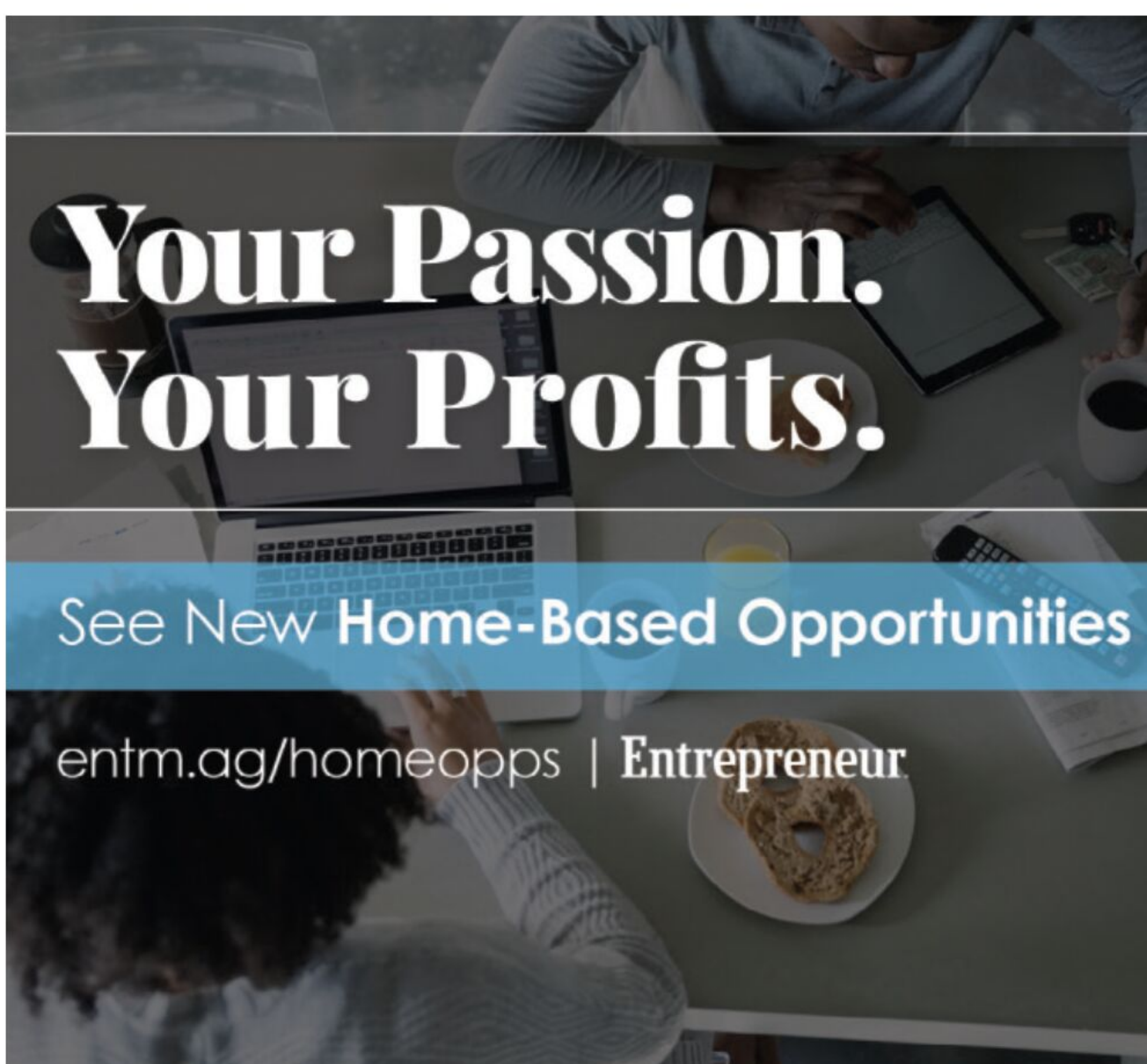
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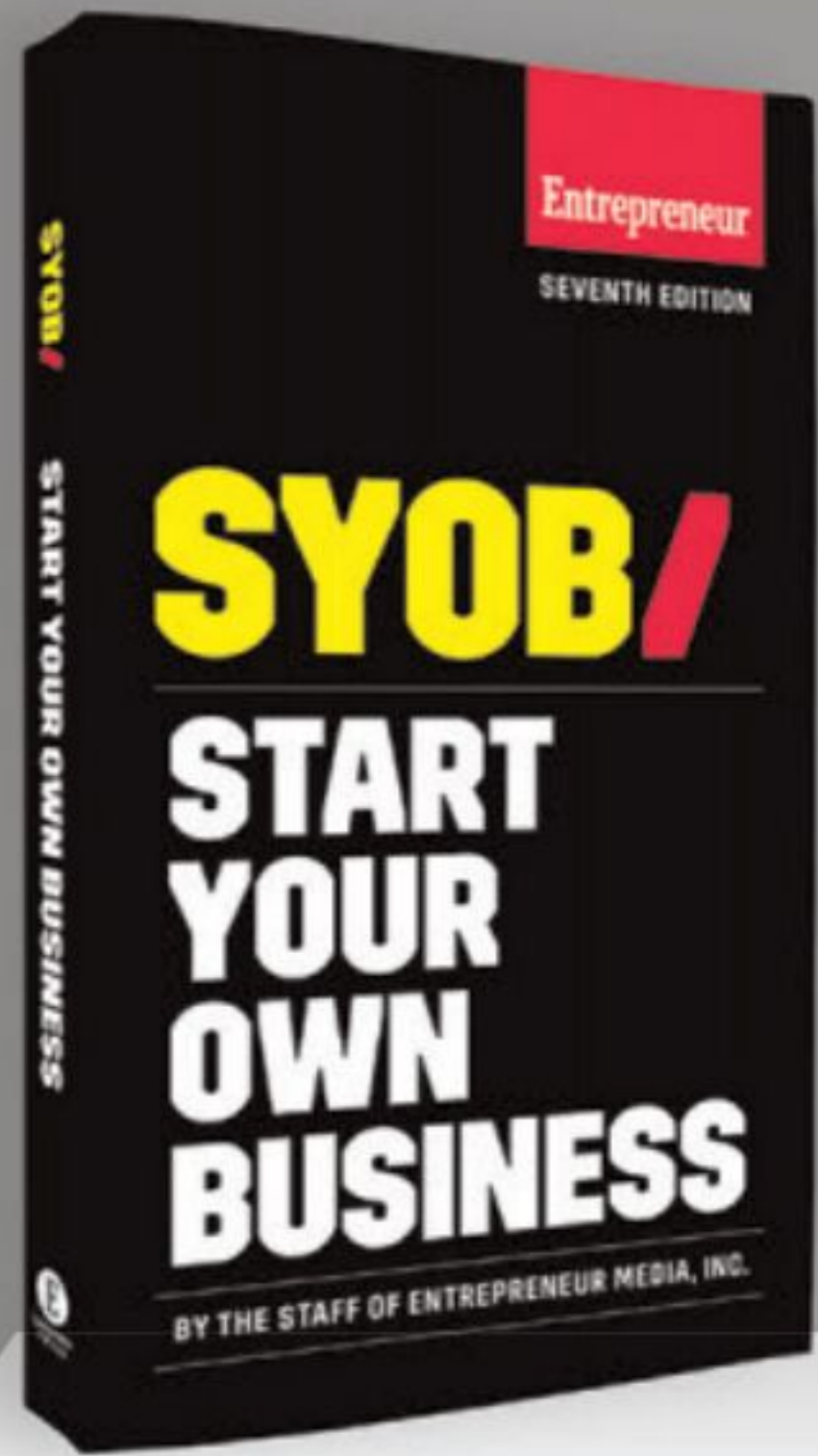
**Your Passion.
Your Profits.**

See New Cleaning Opportunities

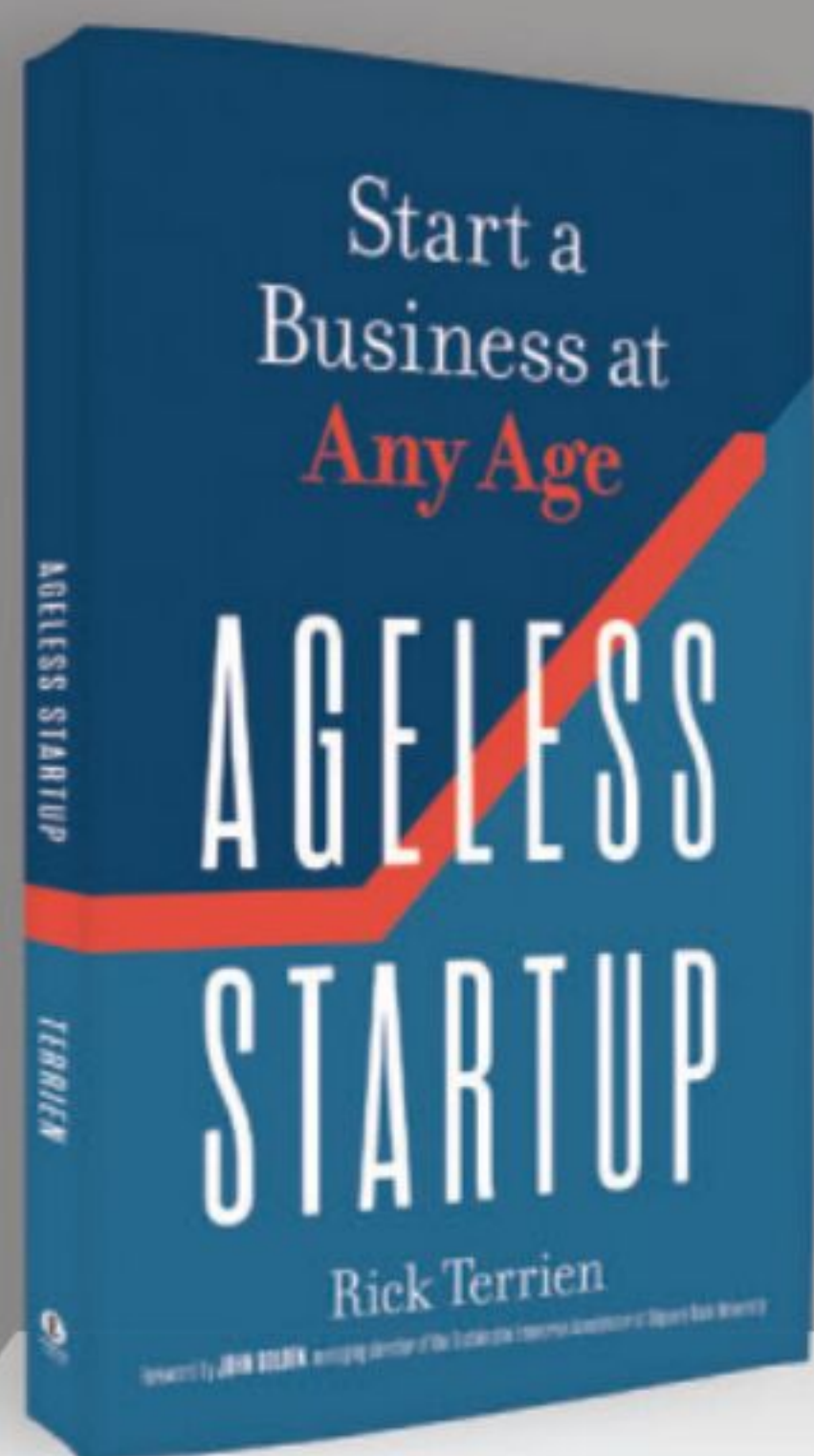
entm.ag/cleanopps | Entrepreneur

Start a Business

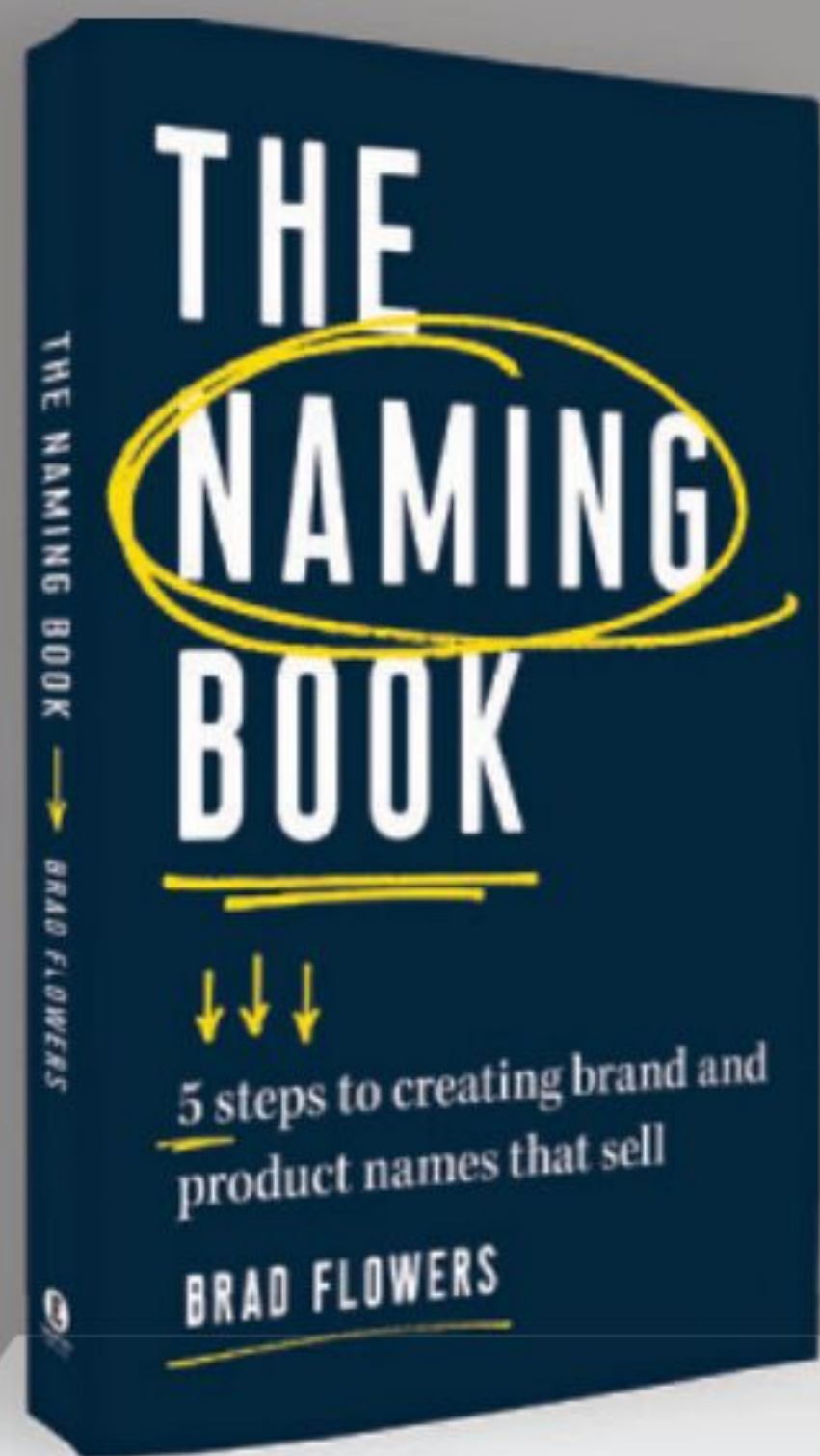
You've got the idea and the passion; now learn what you need to know to hit the ground running



Start Your Own Business



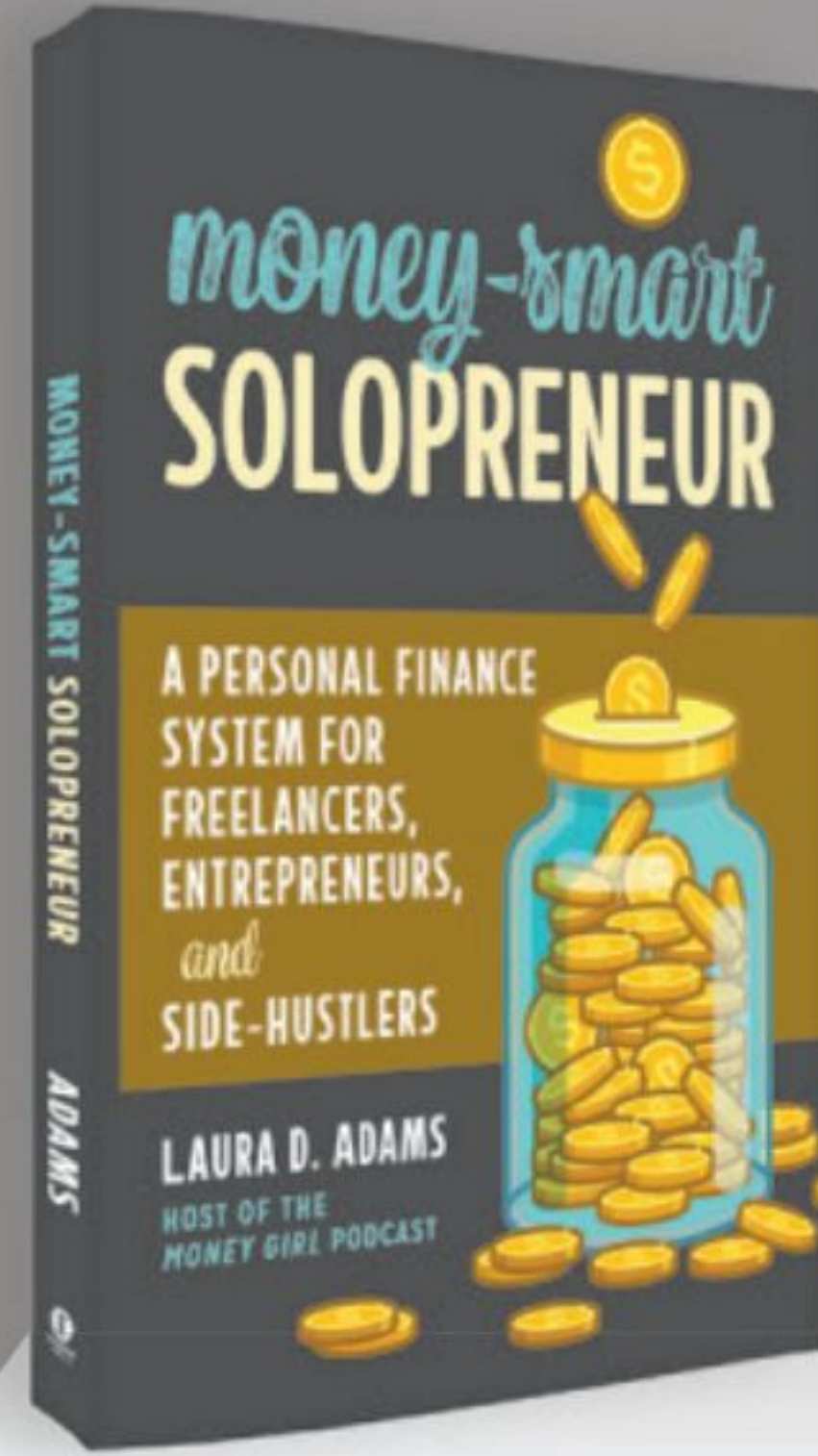
Ageless Startup



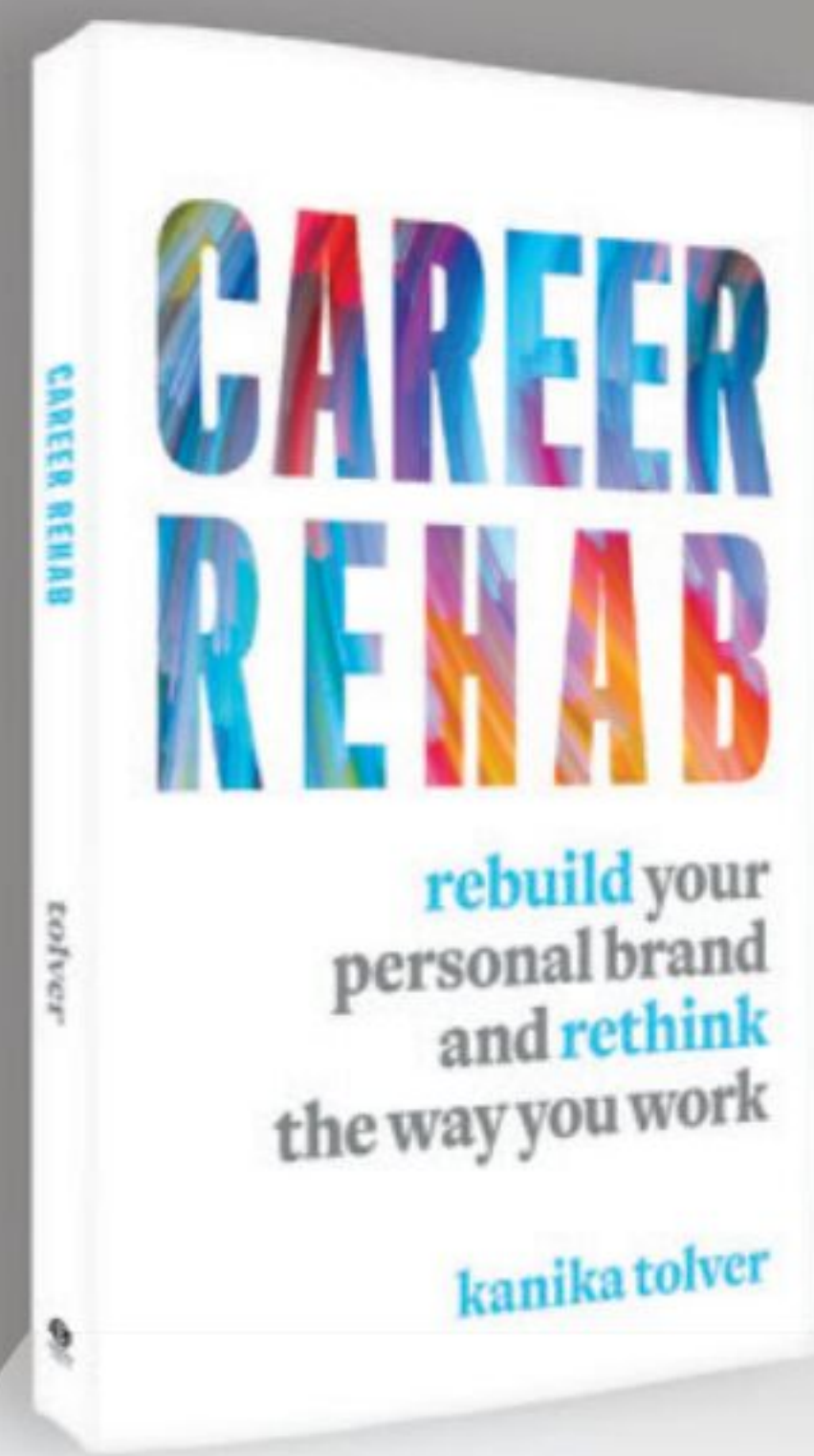
The Naming Book

Career Development

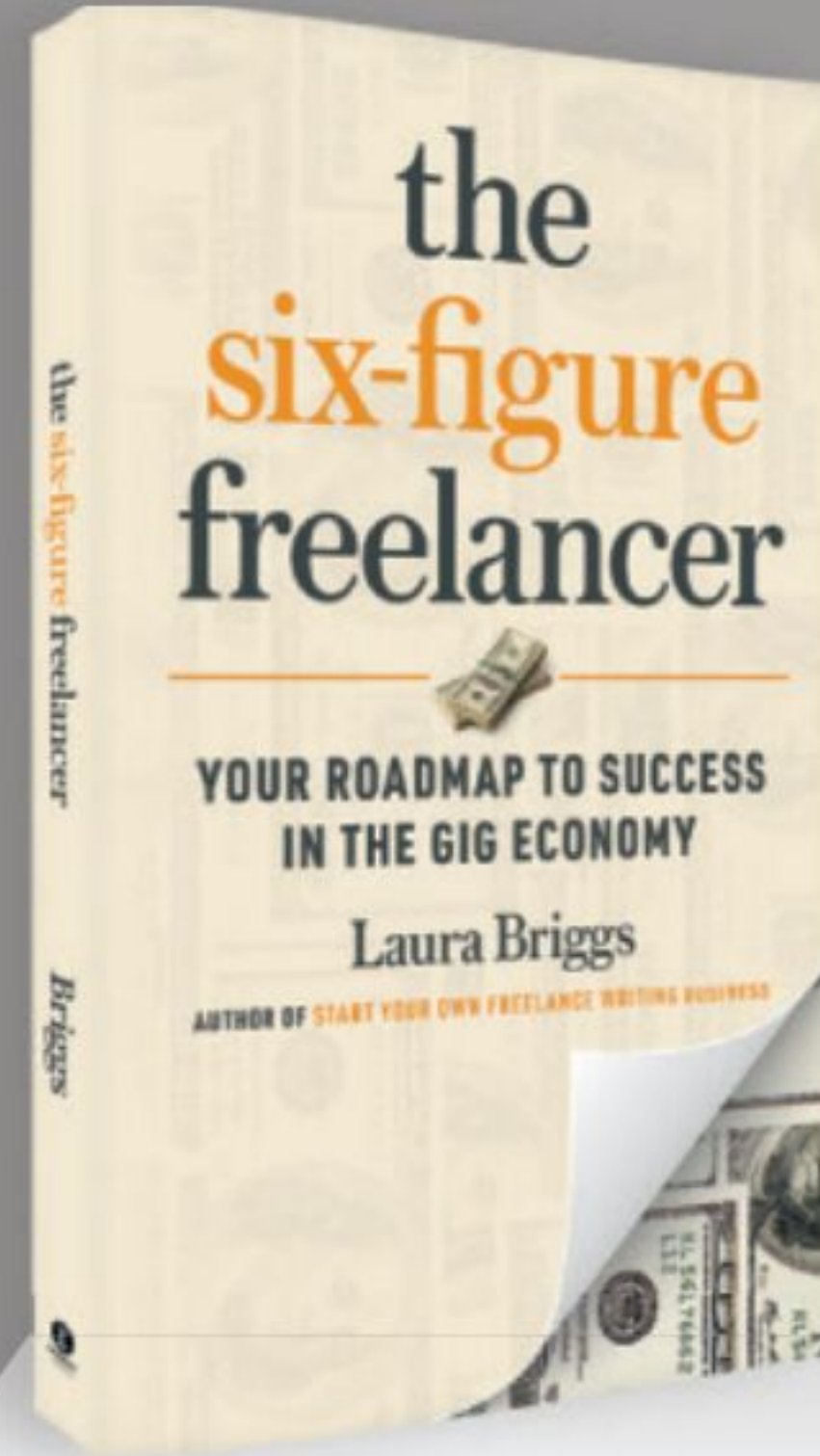
Whether you're changing careers or starting a side hustle, get the tools you need to make your move



Money-Smart Solopreneur



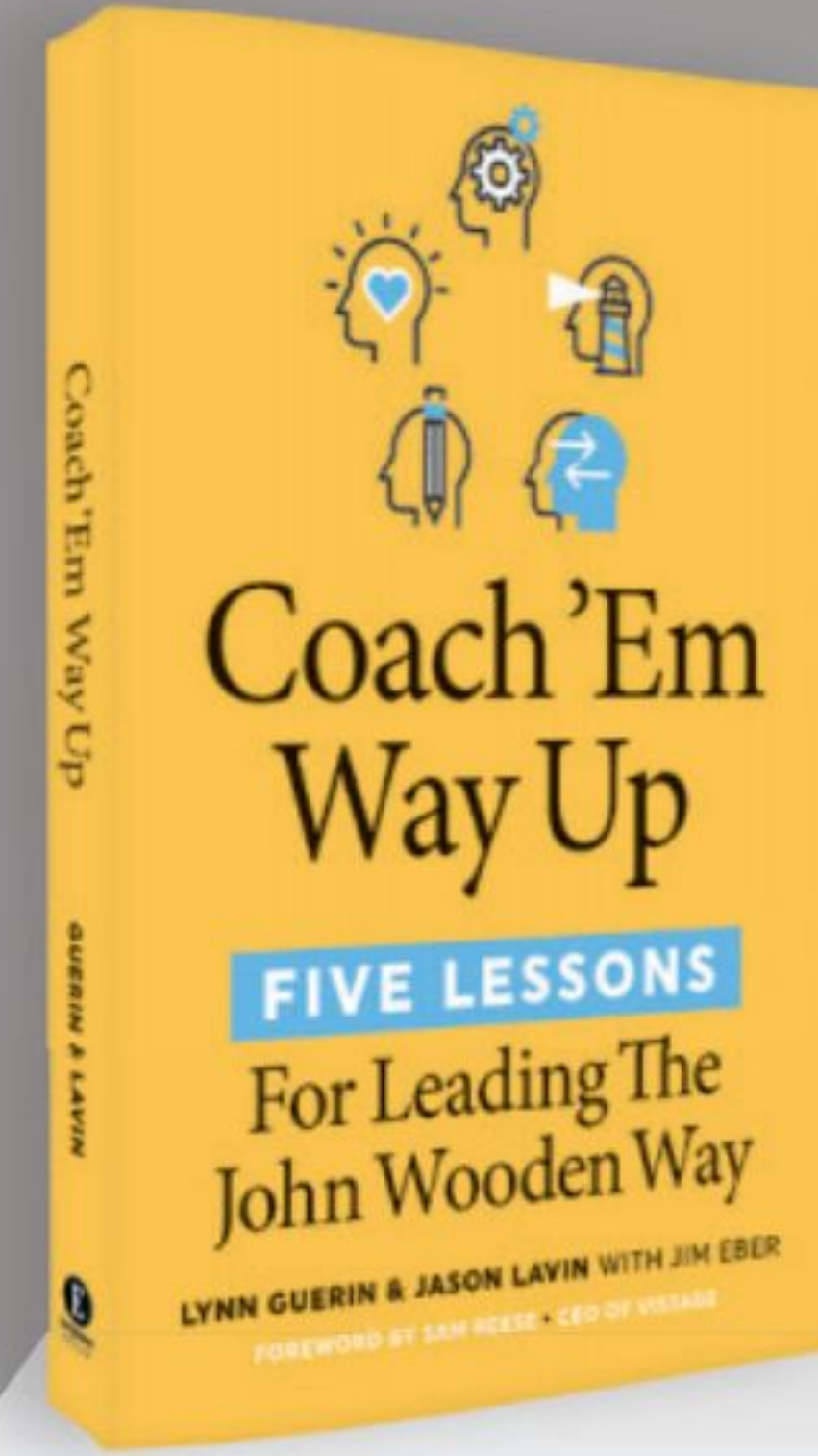
Career Rehab



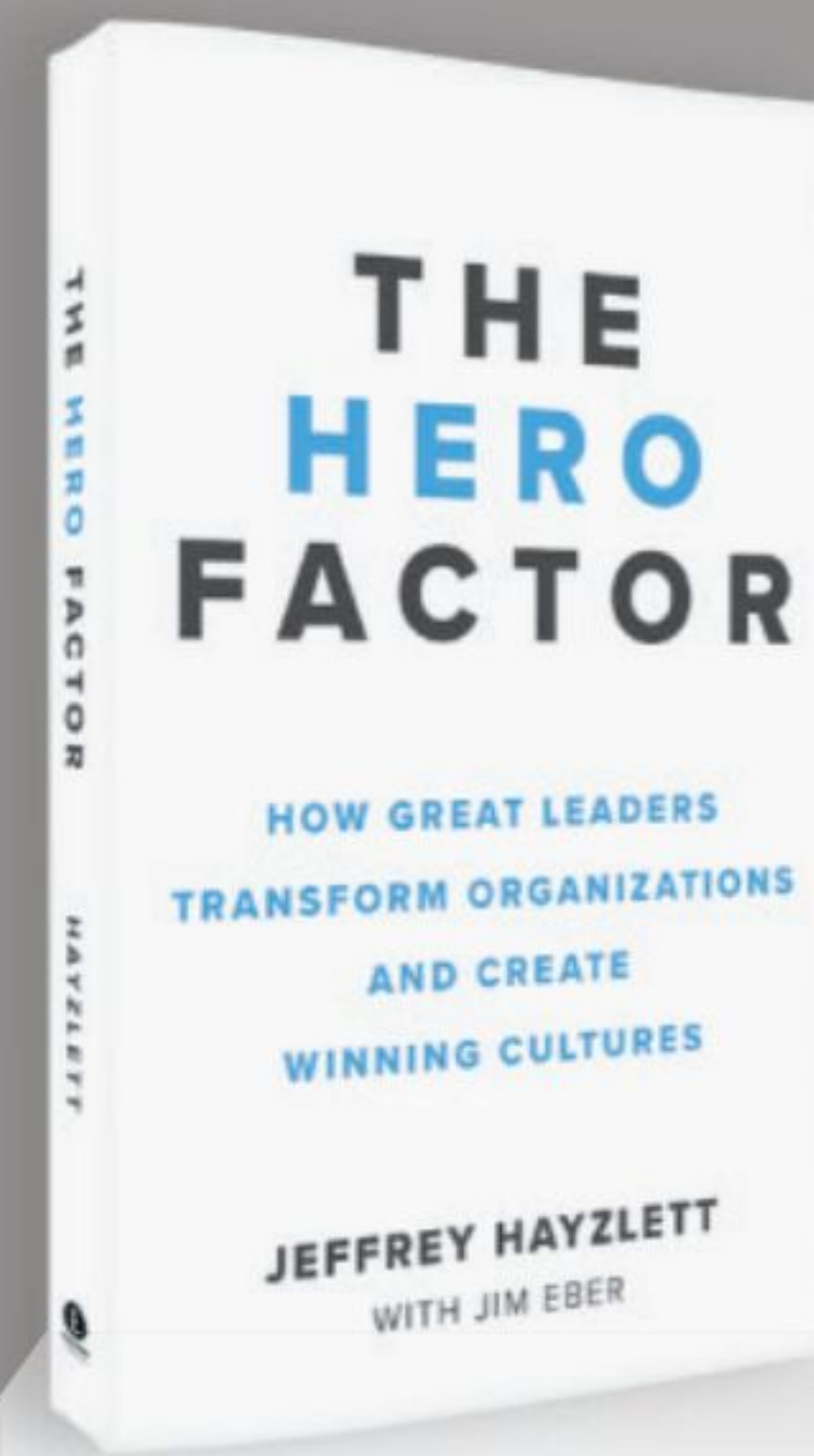
The Six-Figure Freelancer

Leadership

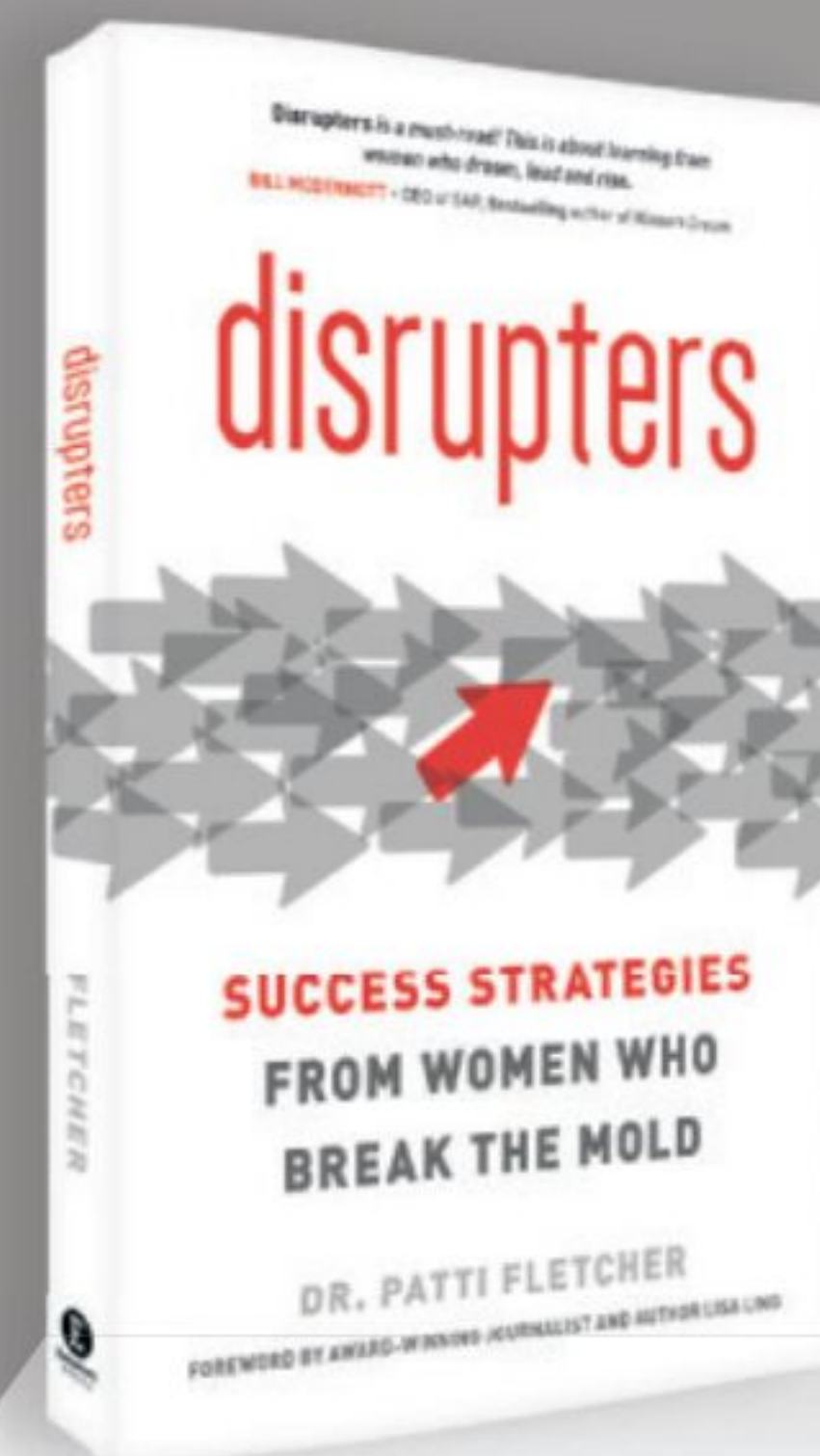
Your success is driven by your ability to lead—discover strategies and techniques to improve your leadership skills



Coach 'Em Way Up



The Hero Factor



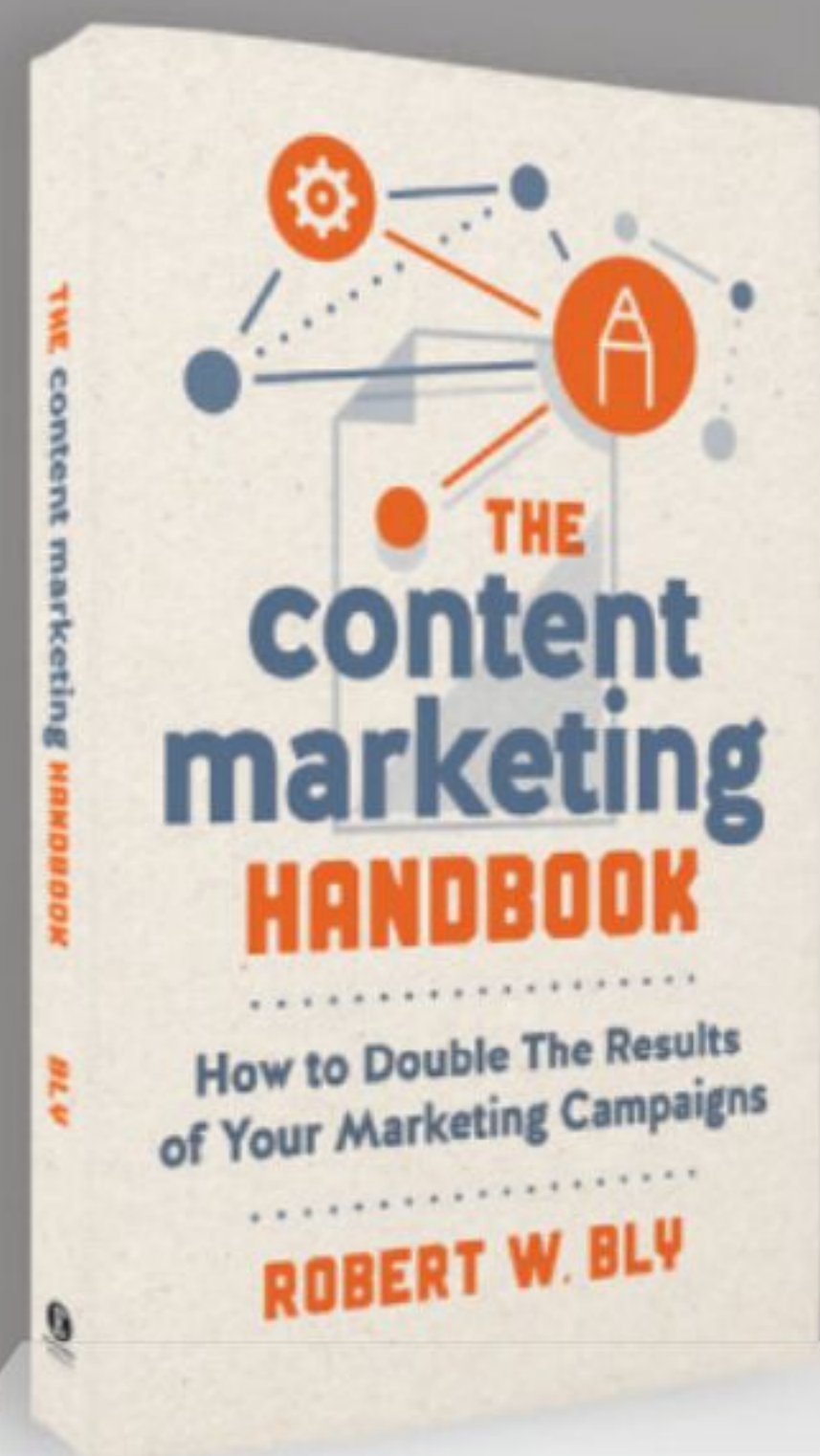
Disrupters

Shelve Under

Whether establishing your operations or spreading the word, no matter what stage

Sales & Marketing

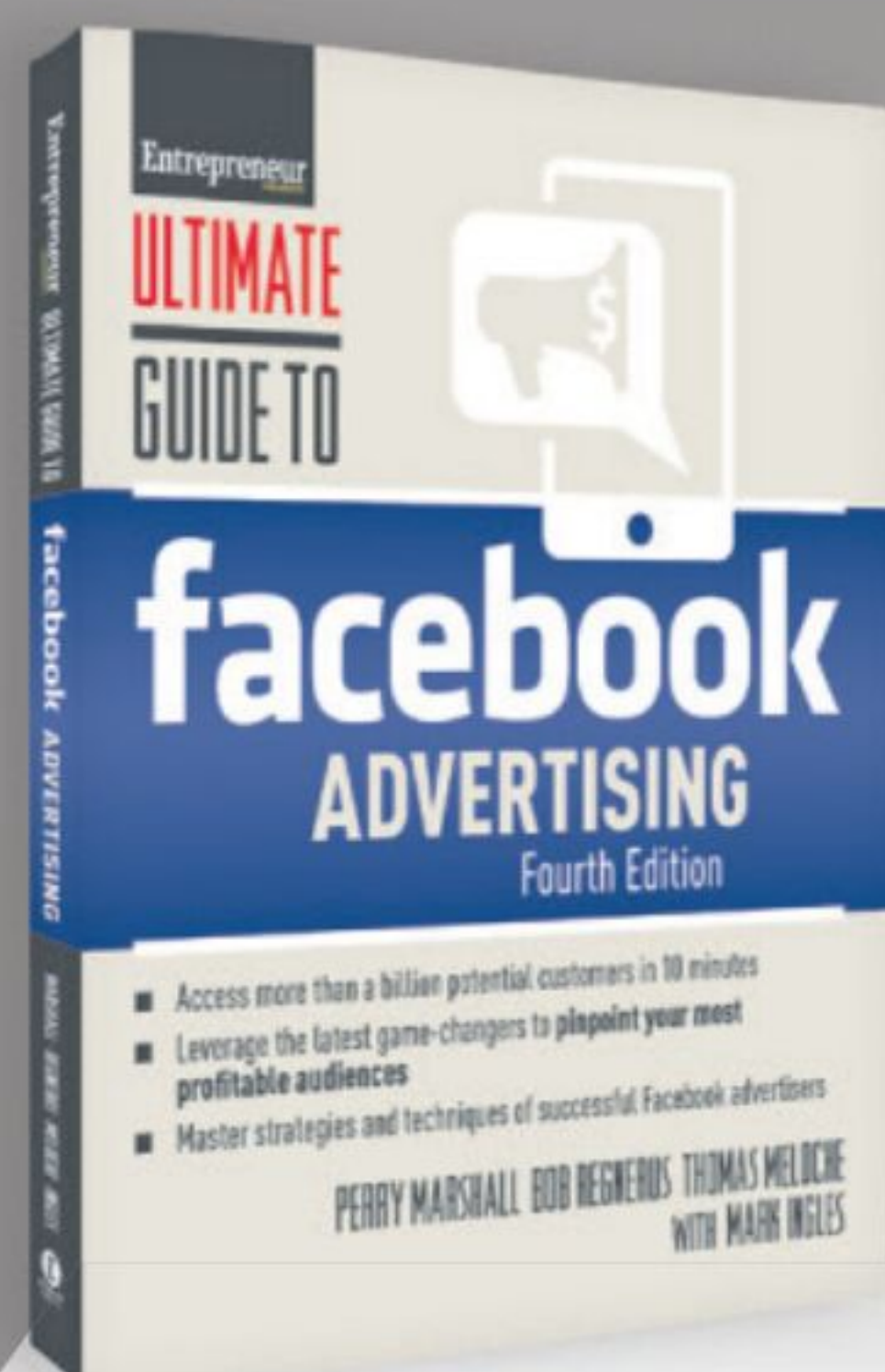
Learn how to position yourself in the marketplace, attract new customers, and keep them coming back



The Content Marketing Handbook

Online Marketing

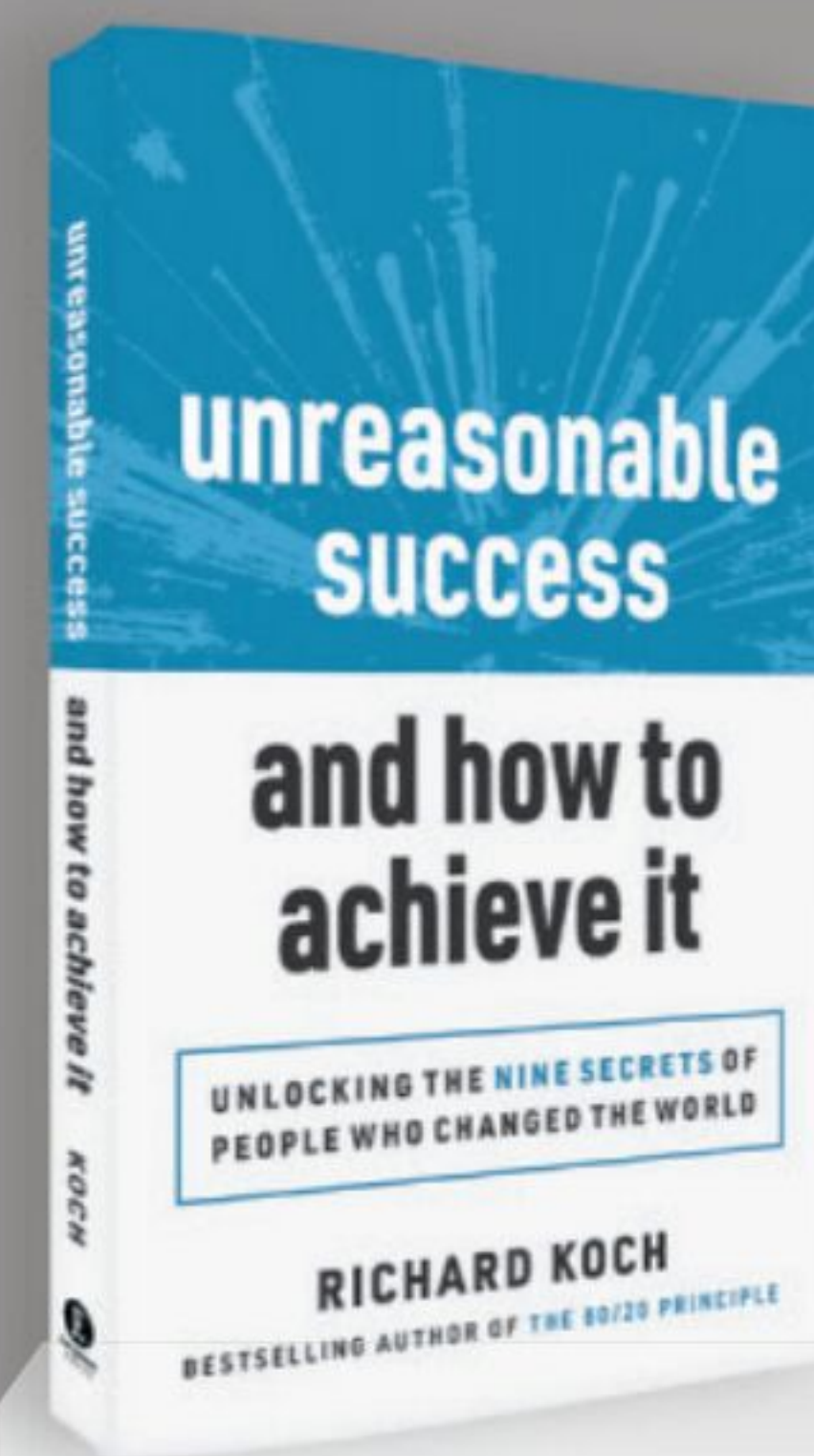
Reach millions—discover how to gain visibility and close deals in the world's largest marketplace



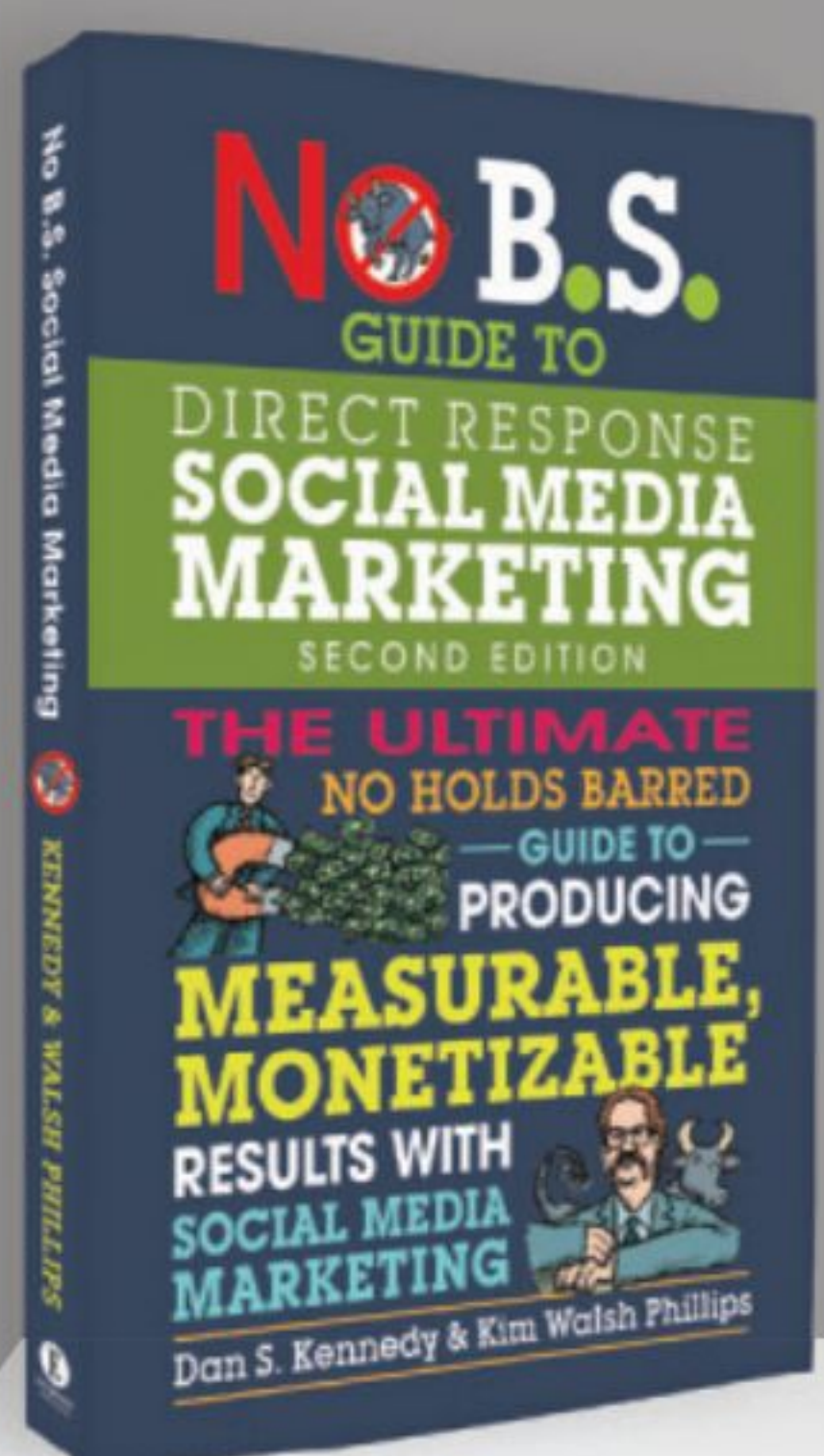
Ultimate Guide to Facebook Advertising

Motivation & Success

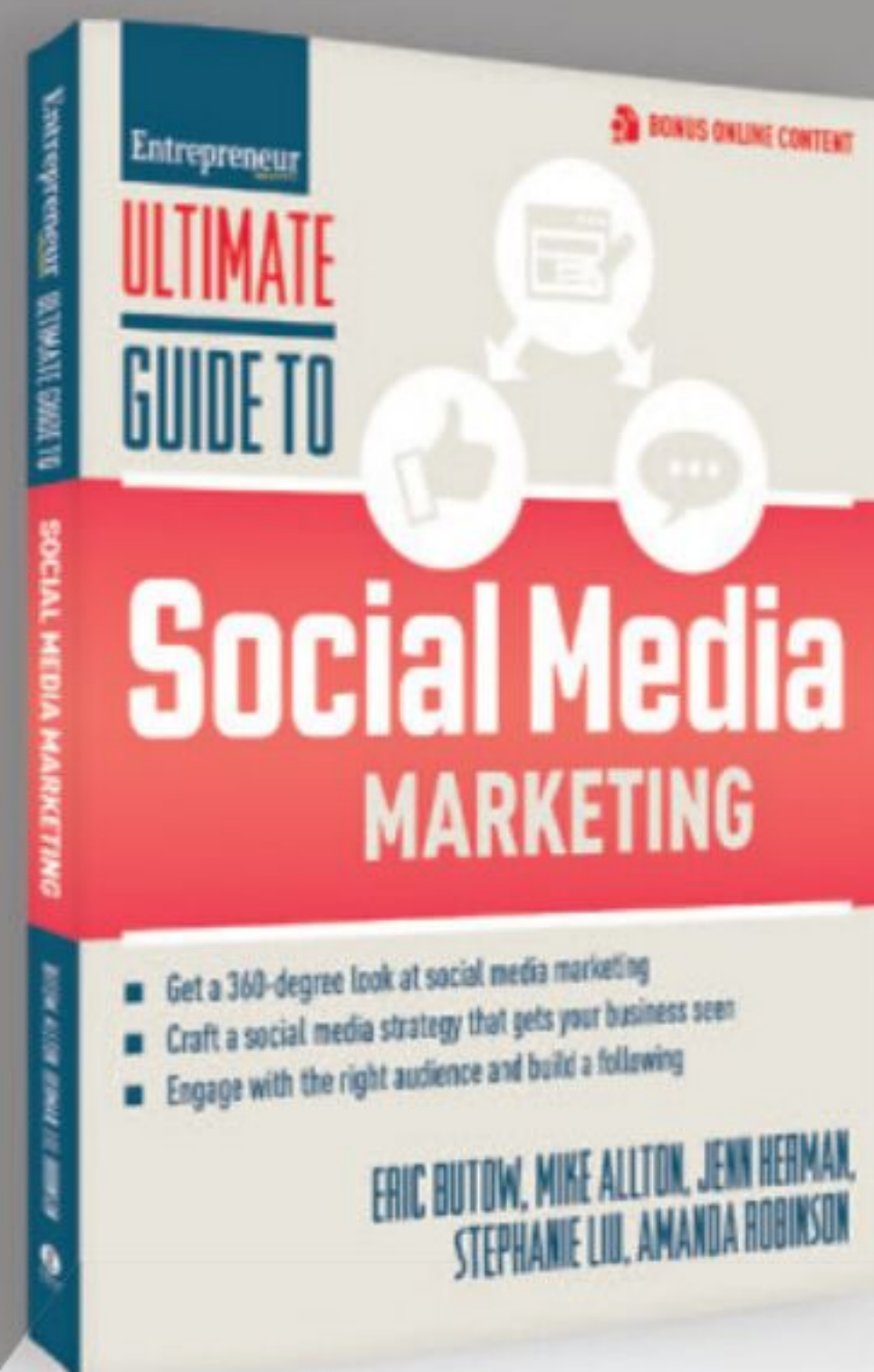
Adopt a never-give-up attitude that keeps you sane and happy on your entrepreneurial journey



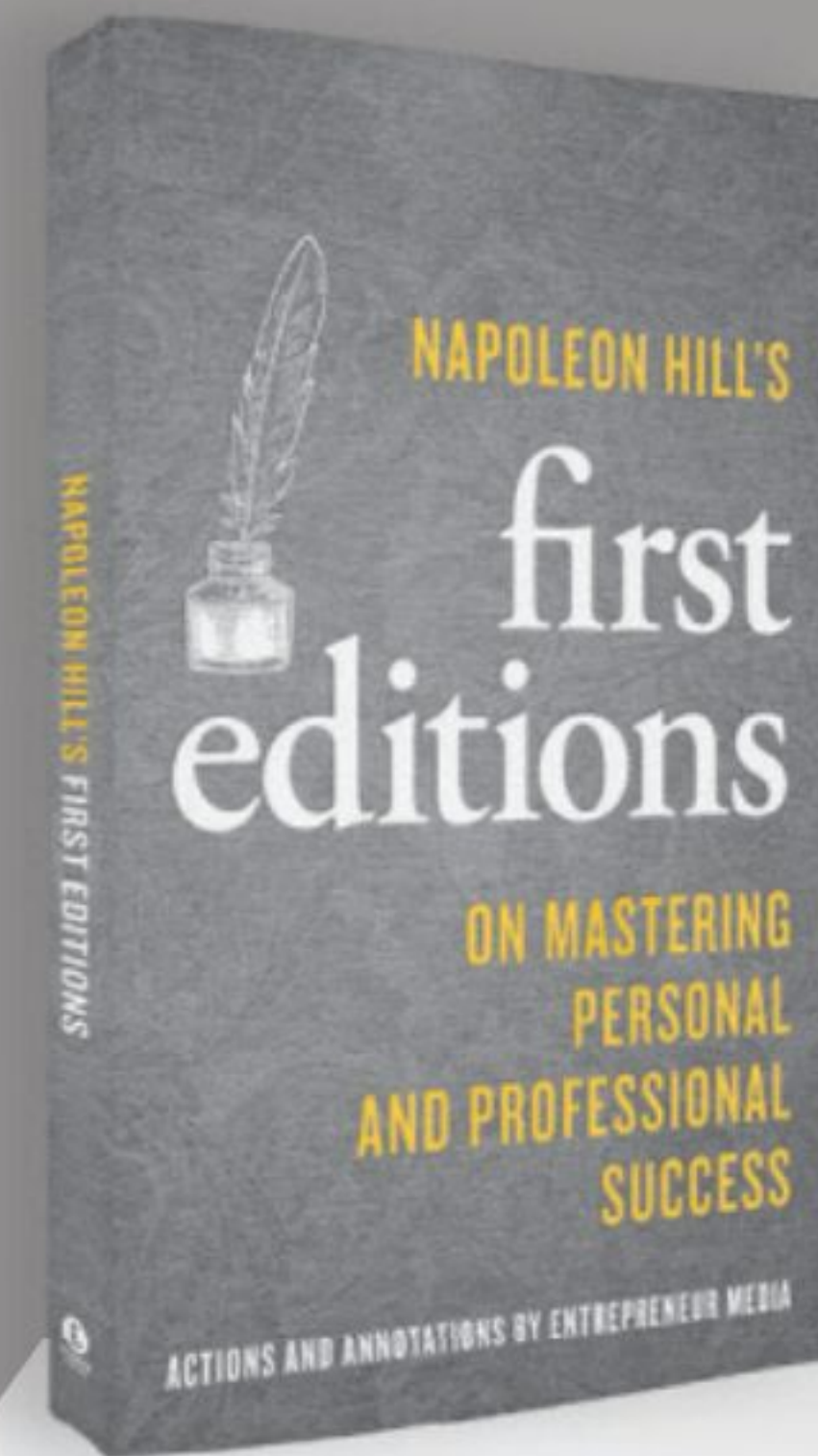
Unreasonable Success



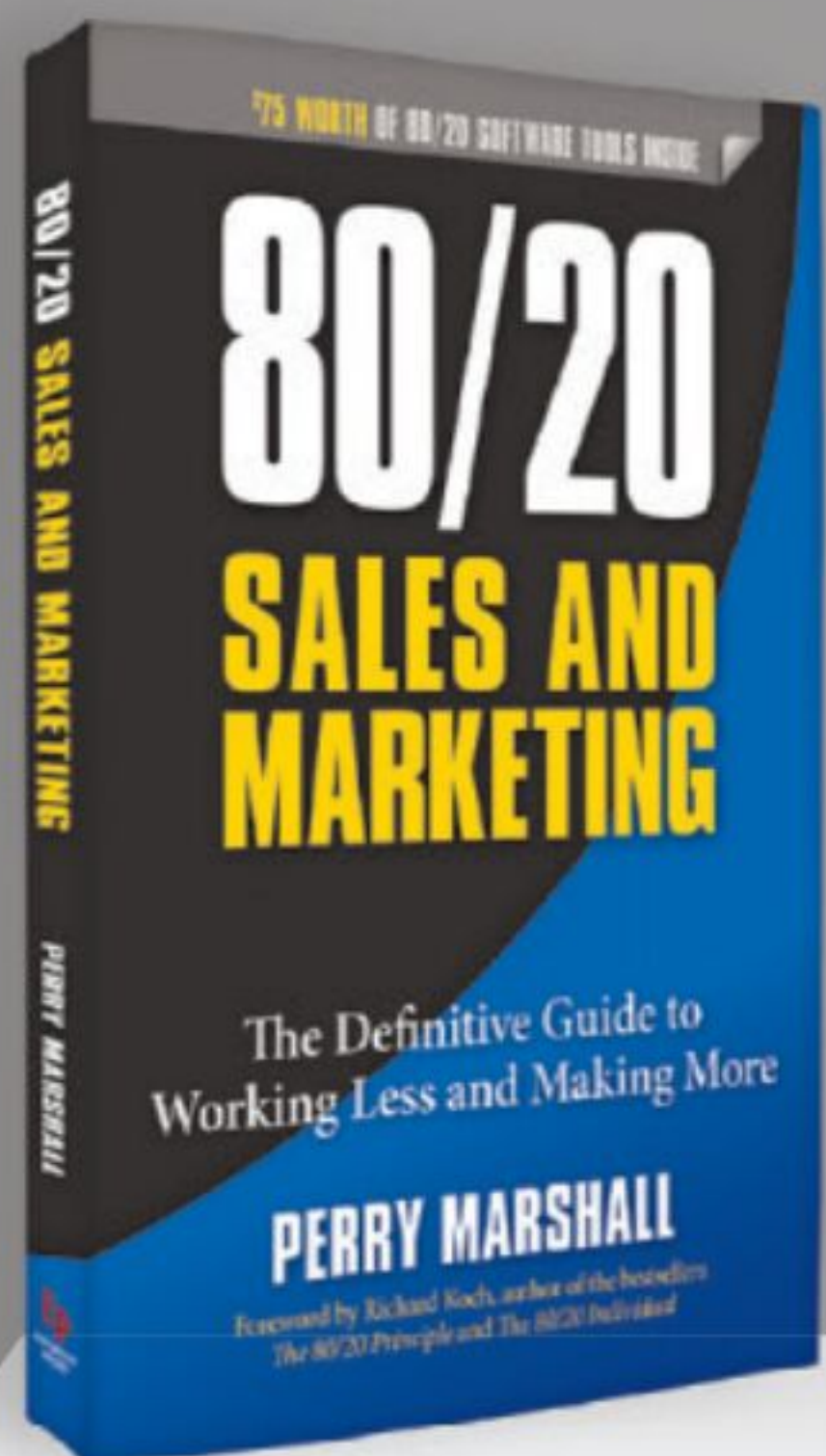
No B.S. Guide To Direct Response Social Media Marketing



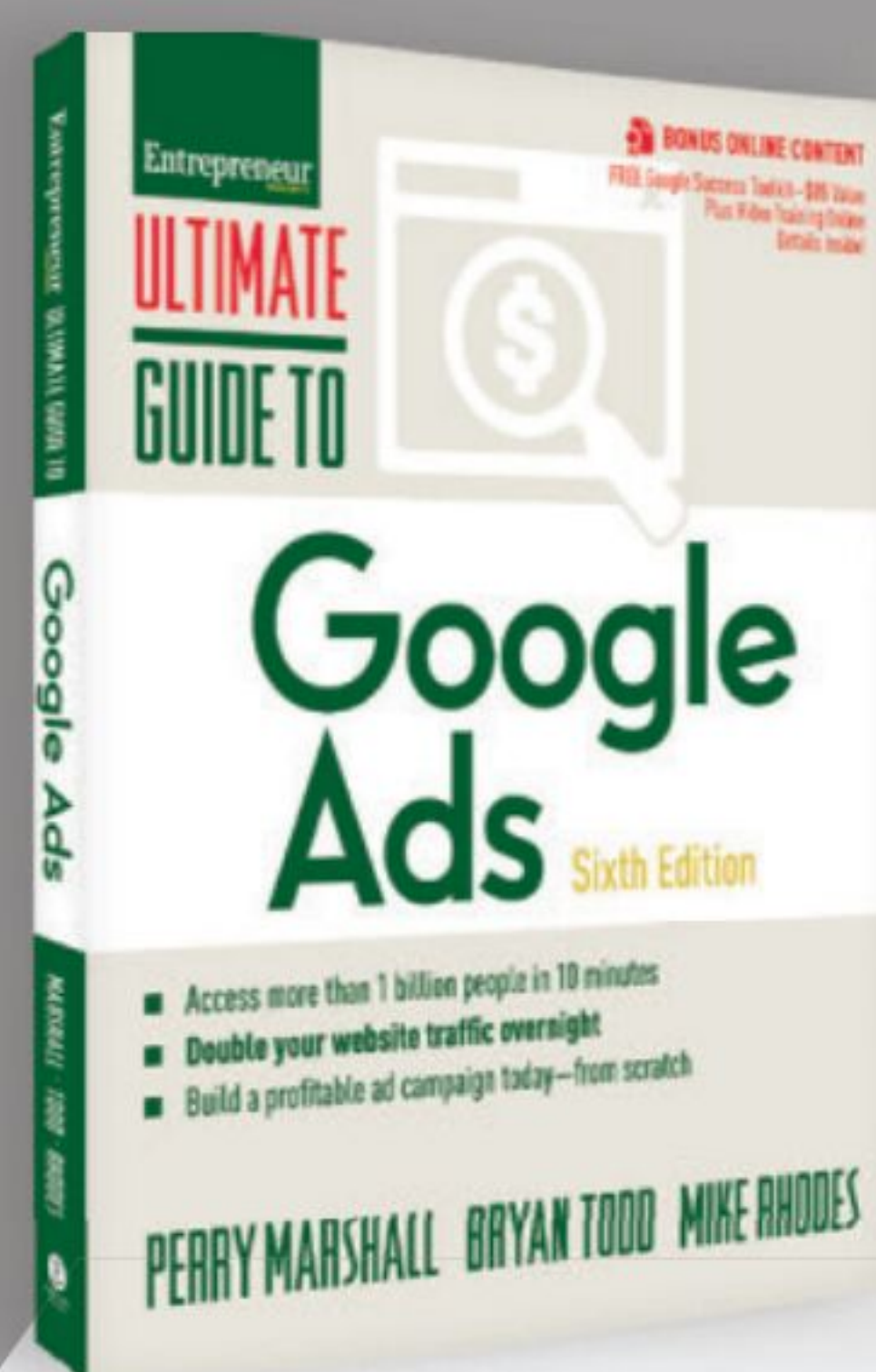
Ultimate Guide to Social Media Marketing



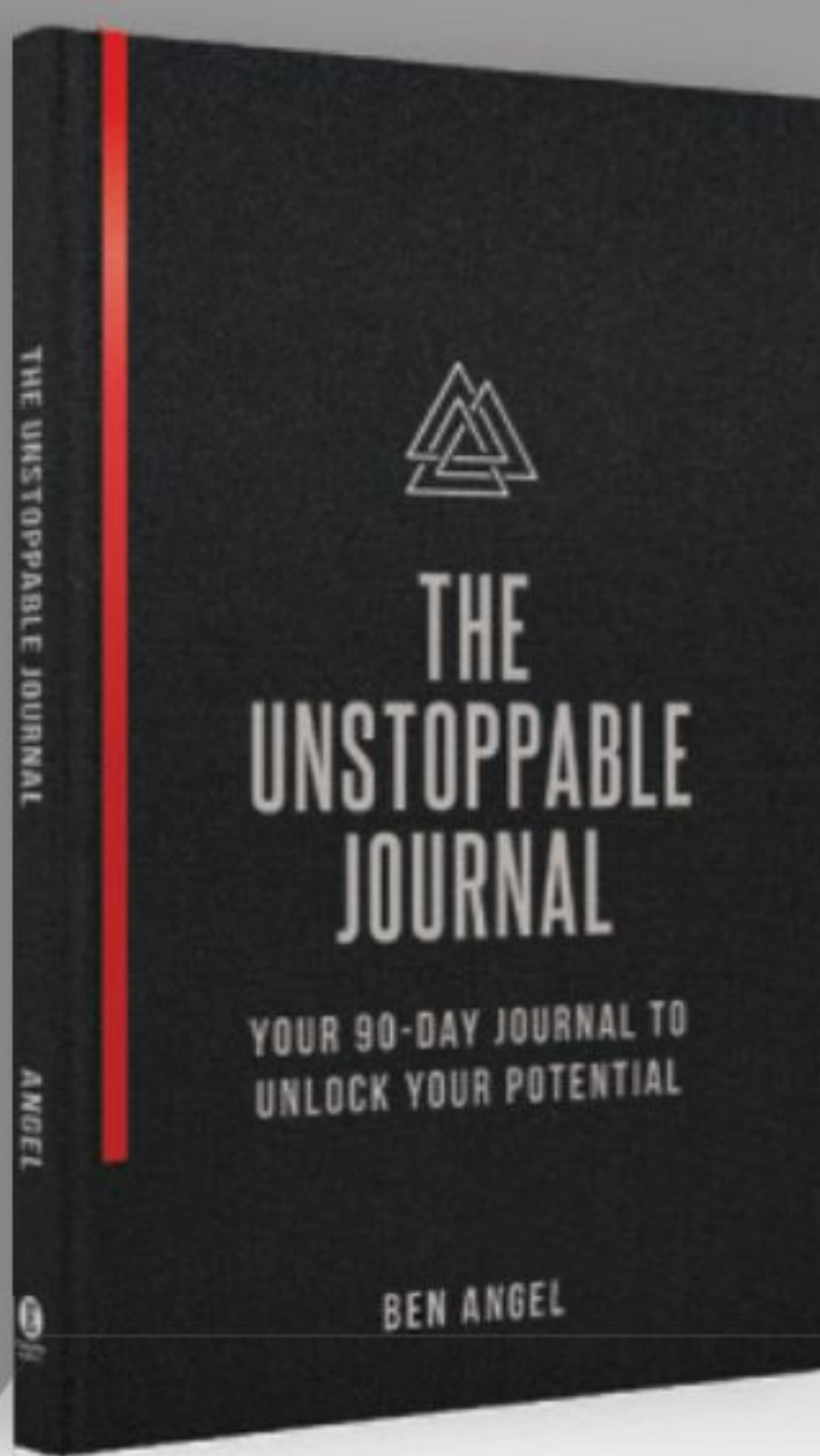
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→ **BIG BLUE**
Futrell holds the photo of Earth that she's kept for 26 years.

How I Saw the Big Picture

by **Kathleen Futrell**, founder, Spring Branch Strategies

Early in my career, I was easily overwhelmed. I over-extended myself, and soon my responsibilities and commitments and ambitions piled up into this mass that felt unfathomably large—until, one day, my manager gave me something that is still on the bulletin board over my desk 26 years later, even as I've now transformed my career: It's a postcard picture of Earth.

I worked in federal contracting at the time, and my manager gave it to me for perspective. He wanted me to look at Earth and think about the significance of what I was trying to accomplish, and the stress I was feeling, and to do so in the context of what others around the world faced. I started to do this during late nights in my office, when I hadn't seen my family in days, as I lived on caffeine and cheese nabs. I imagined the good happening to people around the globe. I also imagined the bad—people starving, enduring war, or losing their homes—and then weighed my situation. I would say a prayer for them, and I would remember that my time on Earth was limited.

With this perspective, and my manager's encouragement,

I went back to school, then took a job with a Fortune 500 firm as a contracts manager and rose to become a director and VP. I recently started my own consulting business to mentor small companies entering federal contracting. I've found that many folks feel they must make a good impression or prove themselves, and that to do so, they cannot admit when they need help. But I can see it in their eyes or hear it in their voices. I tell them what my manager told me: Step away for a few minutes, prioritize your actions, and focus on what your best can be in that moment.

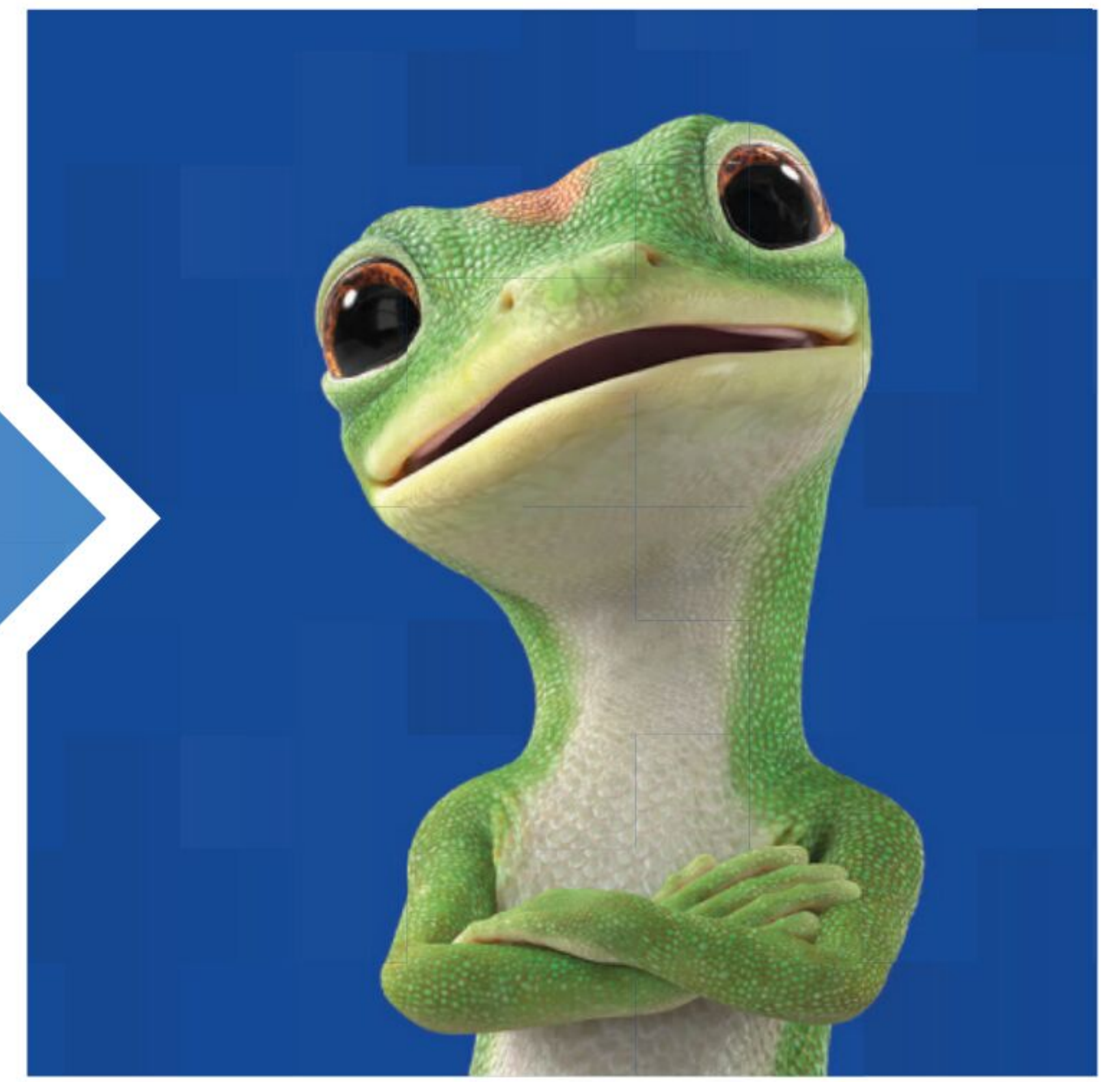
Many people say they want to change the world, and we tend to lionize those who think big. But I've always felt that changing the world starts in a small way, through those with whom you come into daily contact. Most people want to feel seen, loved, and respected by others—not because they are part of something huge, but for the unique individual they are. That is how I hope to make a difference in their lives. And who knows, maybe beyond what I see, my presence ripples out to their circles of influence, which reaches others'—creating waves akin to those that make up all that blue in my picture of Earth.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Tell us about a story, person, object, or something else that pushes you forward, and we may include it in a future issue. And we may make you photograph or illustrate it, too. Email INSPIRE@ENTREPRENEUR.COM with the subject line "WHAT INSPIRES ME."

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