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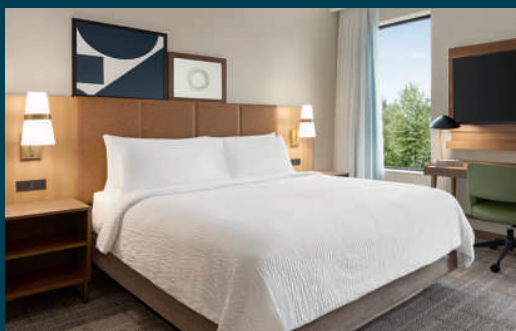
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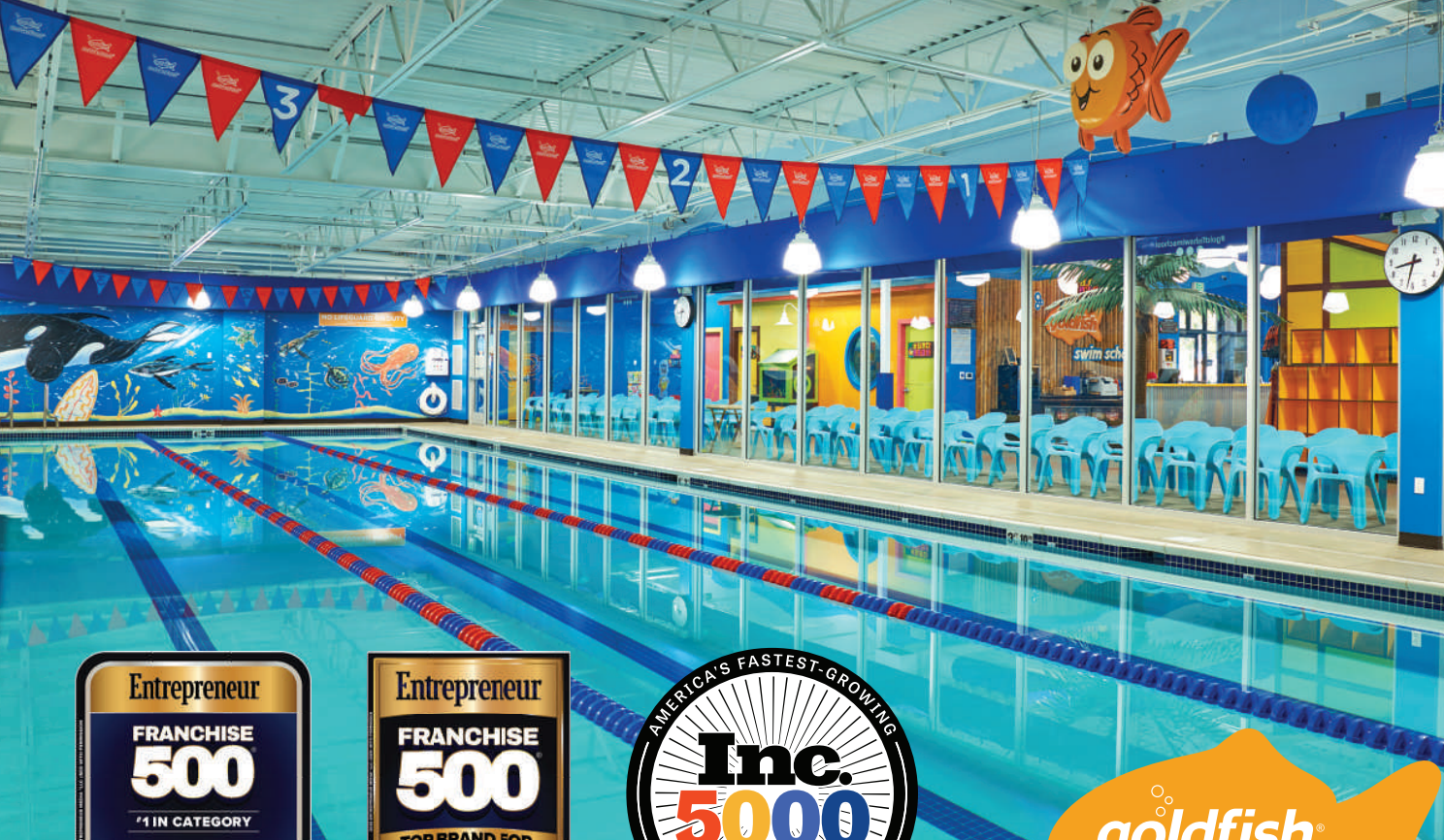
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The Bottom-Line Impact of Choosing the Right Work Van for Your Business

These are the top 10 reasons for SMBs to buy a Sprinter from Mercedes-Benz.

Sometimes even the nicest of cars or SUVs just don't cut it. When your job calls for multiple types of equipment, materials, tools, and more, you need a legitimate work van that enables you to show up prepared to do your best work.

Arguably, the best work van on the market is the Sprinter from Mercedes-Benz. The lineup includes cargo van, crew van, passenger van, and cab chassis model. There's also an e-Sprinter line that features a fully electric drivetrain.

"The versatility of the Sprinter makes it a natural fit for a broad range of industries," says Jee-Seop Kim, Head of Sales & Marketing, Mercedes-Benz Vans North America. "We see strong adoption across small- and mid-sized businesses in nearly every trade—from plumbers, electricians, and HVAC professionals to delivery services and mobile businesses like pet grooming or retail concepts. It's also widely used in passenger transport and shuttle operations, as well as by custom builders who rely on its flexibility."

Backed by more than 130 years of innovation, the Sprinter work van delivers exceptional payload and cargo space, advanced safety technologies, and unmatched configurability, supported by strong residual value and long-term durability. "Choosing a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter offers an immediate benefit to the customer as it saves time, reduces effort and protects their investment," Kim says.

Here, Kim outlines the 10 biggest reasons SMBs should consider buying a Sprinter work van for their business.

1. Sprinters offer the best residual value among commercial vans

Sprinter won the J.D. Power 2026 U.S. ALG Residual Value Award to prove it. "That means stronger resale value, lower depreciation, and a smarter long-term investment, whether you're operating a single van or a growing fleet," Kim says.

2. Engines built for reliability, durability, and performance

Mercedes-Benz engines are engineered with high-quality materials and proven through rigorous real-world testing. "This focus on durability and performance helps minimize downtime and ensures the Sprinter can meet the demands of daily business operations over the long term," he says.

3. ServiceCARE delivers peace of mind

Mercedes-Benz says ServiceCARE keeps Sprinter vans performing at their best, with certified service and Genuine

Mercedes-Benz Parts. Extended warranty options, up to six years or 120,000 miles, help provide predictable ownership costs and added confidence.

4. Best-in-class ride height and ground clearance

Offering up to eight inches of clearance with the AWD, the Sprinter is "built to go where the job demands," Kim says.

5. Strong total cost of ownership

When you combine purchase price, fuel efficiency, longer service intervals, predictable maintenance, durability, and strong resale value, Kim says the Sprinter delivers a compelling total cost of ownership that supports business profitability over time.

6. Class-leading payload and towing capability

With the highest Gross Combined Weight Rating in the segment and an available payload of up to 6,812 lbs. on the Sprinter 4500, businesses can carry more, make fewer trips, and work more efficiently.

7. Premium driver assistance and safety technology

Sprinter offers many of the advanced driver assistance features found in Mercedes-Benz passenger vehicles, tailored for commercial use. These include systems like Sideguard Assist, Blind Spot Assist, Moving Off Information System (MOIS), and available 360-degree camera technology.

8. 270-degree rear doors for everyday efficiency

They help make loading and unloading faster and easier—especially in tight job sites or loading docks.

9. Endless upfit possibilities

Businesses can tailor their Sprinter precisely for plumbing, electrical, HVAC, delivery, or specialized vocational needs. "No matter the job, there's a Sprinter to match," Kim says.

10. It's the original Sprinter—the inventor of the class

"Mercedes-Benz built the world's first work van in 1896, and the Sprinter carries that legacy forward," Kim says. "It's not just best-in-class—it created the class, backed by more than a century of innovation focused on solving real business needs."



To see special offers on Sprinter work vans, visit mbvans.com/en/special-offers

Choose the Unknown Path

Want to lead a bigger, more meaningful life?
Stop defaulting to what you already know.

You have a decision to make. One option feels clear and familiar. The other seems riskier and harder to picture.

If you're like most people, you're tempted to choose the safe one. But before you do, consider this piece of advice, given recently to a teenager facing a huge life choice—because it might lead you toward a bigger life.

A young friend of my family, Lucia, was recently deciding which college to attend this fall. She narrowed it down to two options. The first is comfortable and familiar, in a city she knows well. The second is exciting but far from home, in an unfamiliar city, and unlike anything she's known before.

Lucia told an adult she was leaning toward the first school. Here's why: "I can picture myself at the first school, but I can't really picture myself at the second one," she said.

The adult replied, "If you can so easily see yourself there, maybe it's not a big enough adventure."

That line changed her thinking. She chose the second school. I think we should all tell ourselves the same thing.

We like to reduce risk. That's natural. And it's often how we make decisions: We choose the knowable option because it limits our downside.

But consider what else you might be limiting.

If you only choose the things you can already picture, then you are mostly living inside the edges of your existing experience. You revisit what you already know, or what sits one degree away from it. Your life expands slowly, or not at all.

When I think about the most meaningful turns in my own life, I realize I could not picture them in advance.

For example, I'd never heard of *Entrepreneur* magazine when I began my career. Even when I first applied for a job here, I didn't take it especially seriously and didn't think of myself as entrepreneurial.

But I got the job, took the leap, and spent years absorbing how entrepreneurs think. It changed me. The version of myself from 10 years ago could never have pictured the version of myself today. My life is bigger, richer, and more fulfilling. This only exists because I pursued the unfamiliar.

I see this same pattern in my own kids, who are 7 and 11. My wife and I often encourage them to try a new activity, like a class or sport, and they say no.

"I don't like that," they say.

"You've never tried," we say.

"That's because I don't like it," they reply.

It's terrible circular logic, and yet adults trap themselves in a version of this all the time.



We dismiss ideas because they don't resemble the decisions we already know. We confuse unfamiliarity with wrongness.

As parents, we can force our kids out of their comfort zones. But as entrepreneurs, we must do it for ourselves.

So here's a useful question to ask the next time you're deciding between two paths:

Can I picture this?

If the answer is yes, pause and wonder why. Maybe it's because the option is genuinely right for you. But maybe it's just because it resembles what you already know.

Then ask the opposite:

If I can't picture this, is that a reason not to choose it?

Sometimes the answer is yes. The unknown is not always the right fit. I'm not suggesting that

you always choose the hardest path, or the one most designed to make you uncomfortable.

I'm simply saying: Don't confuse familiarity with correctness.

Sometimes the thing you can't yet picture is the thing that expands your life. Sometimes, "I can't see myself there" is not a warning sign, but an invitation. And sometimes the best way to live a bigger life is to stop choosing what feels safest, and start choosing what feels like an adventure.

Jason Feifer

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These Passionate Entrepreneurs are Building an Ethical Pet Brand, One Doggie Accessory at a Time

The founders of Gone to the Dogs are supporting women artists from around the world while creating a community that's passionate about sustainability.

Santos Agustin and Jennifer Wong spend most days at their bright and cheerful storefront on 7th Ave. in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood, just a couple blocks west from Prospect Park. As the founders of Gone to the Dogs, they've built a pet brand known for uniquely made dog collars, toys, leashes, and other accessories. With the door propped open and a stainless-steel water bowl set outside for passing pups, they move through the rhythm of small-business life: Greeting customers, showcasing their products, tracking P&L, and keeping tabs on suppliers.

But one morning in early May, Agustin and Wong broke from their usual routine. They packed a bag full of their best-selling products—especially their wool pet toys—and headed to an event packed with fellow Brooklyn entrepreneurs. It was *The Experience*, put on by Chase for Business, a dynamic community-focused event designed to support and celebrate small-business owners. Attendees networked, dug into practical topics like marketing, operations, and leadership, and swapped the kinds of startup stories that leave you energized.

"Attendees meet other small-business owners who may have similar challenges—someone who may become a customer, a partner, or something else entirely," says Ben Walter, CEO of Chase for Business. "Every connection is different. But time and time again, people tell us the most valuable part is the network and relationships they build while swapping ideas with others in the trenches."



Gone to the Dogs was one of six small businesses featured in the event's Marketplace, an area within *The Experience* where attendees were able to see, feel, and take home those hand-crafted pet toys. "We were super excited to do something like this with Chase," Santos says. "Being in a space where



small businesses are being supported—where we're the focus—especially here in New York City."

It was also an opportunity for Agustin and Wong to share their story about how they've built an ethical brand based on their own values and how they support women artists from around the world.

Conceptualizing a values-driven brand

Their story begins when the pair met "a long, long time ago" while working in fashion, Wong recalls. During those years, they discovered a shared commitment to ethical, sustainable practices—and a growing frustration with companies that didn't value the same. They agreed to set out on their own and create a business with purpose and meaning.

But what type of business would it be? Inspiration came from an unlikely source: Their rescue dogs Miles and Ollie. "When it came to transparent supply chains and environmental impact, it was really difficult to shop for our pets the way we shop for ourselves," Santos explains. "So, we thought, if there's this need in the market and nobody doing it, why don't we do it? So as creators, it just made sense."

After leaving fashion, Wong took a job at a nonprofit working with women artisans, training them one-on-one about how to make products that were marketable. Over time, she established a global network of women from countries like Cambodia, Ghana, and beyond. That community became the foundation for Gone to

[illegible]

Starting up and overcoming hurdles

"We had an idea of how much capital we needed, but we decided to start small and go online," Wong says. "That's low overhead. We'd do this on the side. It'd be a side gig. We'd do our full-time jobs. It'd be all good. We put all our savings into a Chase savings/checking account."

With support from Jenny Huang, their Chase for Business advisor, Agustin and Wong found solutions as new challenges emerged—everything from managing cash flow, to navigating seasonal retail, to eventually opening a brick-and-mortar store in their Brooklyn neighborhood and making *Gone to the Dogs* their full-time endeavor.

A growing brand that embraces its community

gymnastics—to create collars, leashes, harnesses, etc. A portion of those profits go to neighborhood nonprofits that work with rescue animals.

To find out how Chase for Business can help your business thrive, visit **chase.com/business**

1. Trust your instincts, but also do your research.

2. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

3. *Make it fun.*

4. Build your values into the bones of the business.

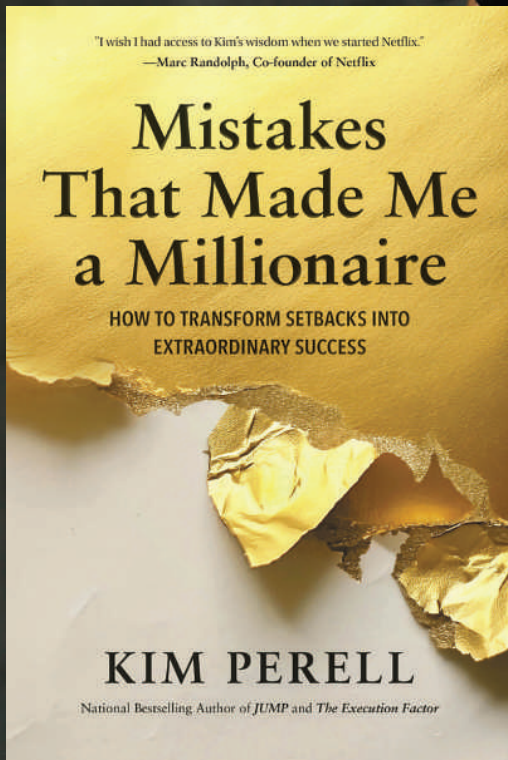
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The Pitch That Sold \$2.5 Billion in Products

For 30 years, **Forbes Riley** has been a virtuoso of selling products live on TV. Now, she's sharing her winning pitch formula. **by SHERIN SHIBU**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSHUA SELF

**→ OG INFLUENCER**

On FitTV, Riley honed the live-selling style now ubiquitous on social media.

How did you get into pitching products on TV?

I started out as a TV actress on shows like *24* and *The Practice*. One day I walked into an audition and saw a pen on the desk with a note that said, “Sell me this pen.” I thought it was stupid, because I hadn’t grown up with money and selling made me uncomfortable. So I told a story about my mother writing me long-hand letters when I went to college at 15 and how a pen could touch someone’s heart. Jake Steinfeld, who created [the first 24-hour fitness network] FitTV, came out from behind the camera, grabbed my face and basically said, “You’re going to be a star.”

People call you the “god-mother of TikTok Shop.” Why?

On [FitTV] I hosted one product after another—ab machines, tooth whiteners, bread makers, roller skates, you name it—and over five years, I pitched about 1,500 different products. A lot of what people now call influencer marketing is built on that format we created back then.

You draw a distinction between pitching and selling. What’s the difference?

When you pitch someone well, they usually say “thank you.” It feels like a gift—like your editor thanking you for a powerful story. Selling, as most people experience it, ends with a credit card transaction and often stops there, with no relationship. That’s why I think retailers like Macy’s and JCPenney [struggled]: they were late

Forbes Riley built her career in front of the camera, turning little-known products into must-haves. Over three decades, she pioneered the infomercial industry, becoming a fixture on home shopping networks like QVC and HSN and generating more than \$2.5 billion in cumulative sales. For the George Foreman Grill alone, she sold hundreds of millions in products. All the while, she was mastering the psychology of what makes people say “yes.”

In 2020, Riley stepped away from selling products to sell her greatest skill: how to pitch. She launched the Ultimate Pitch Academy and scaled it to \$1 million in revenue within nine months. She trains a wide range of clients, from entrepreneurs and executives to stay-at-home moms, on how to communicate. In total, more than 100,000 people have gone through her program, all learning a skill Riley says is at the core of every success story: the ability to sell an idea. Here, she breaks down her method, and the journey that got her there.

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to loyalty programs and focused on cash-for-product instead of nurturing ongoing relationships.

Can you describe your Ultimate Pitch Formula?

It's an eight-step formula I've developed over decades, which I now teach in a four-week training every month. It includes concepts like the hub, assumptions, relatability, the "springboard story," and especially a tool I call the "question flip."

What is the "question flip"?

It means you start by identifying someone else's pain or desire, then ask a question you already know they're likely to answer "yes" to. For a weight-loss doctor, instead of pitching the product, you might say, "If you've been hearing about fast Ozempic-style weight loss, are you willing to trade bone density and long-term health for speed?" Most people say no. Then, you offer an all-natural, side-effect-free 30-day solution and ask if that's interesting. Once they say yes, you have permission to talk about your solution.

Where does someone actually start when crafting a pitch?

You don't start by writing the pitch—that's the end. First, you go through the "hub": why you're in business, what the business actually is, what it sells, whether it's a product or a service, who the competition is, and what value the listener gets. Only after that do you decide who you're pitching—consumer, investor, media, etc.—because each of those requires a different pitch.

You talk a lot about "assumptions." Aren't we told not to assume?

We're told not to voice assumptions, but you must make them internally. When I pitch you, I notice your hair, glasses, background, clothes, and I make educated assumptions that may or may not be true. If I don't, I sound like a cardboard billboard—generic and forgettable.

Can you give an example of using assumptions and relatability in a pitch?

If I'm pitching SpinGym, a handheld fitness product I created, to a woman on Zoom, I might say, "As a woman, when winter's over and we take our sweaters off, pick your arm up and feel the back—nice and tight or a little wiggly-jiggly?"

which I call the "springboard story." That story can be powerful, but not until the listener is interested; you start with their problem and your solution, and only when they say, "Tell me more," have you earned the right to share your origin story.

What's the single biggest mistake you see in the first 60 seconds of a product pitch?

They talk too much and treat everyone the same. They don't know who they're talking to and don't seem to care.

How did you "read the audience" when you were pitching on QVC and HSN?

Before I opened my mouth, I'd ask: "Who is home on a

for *Entrepreneur*." That's true, but it doesn't drive your goals forward. I suggest something like: "As someone who loves business and entrepreneurs, I write for *Entrepreneur*. If you or someone you know has a great story, I'd love to hear from you." In one sentence, you've framed your passion, your platform, and a clear call to action.

You say you use pitching at home, even with your kids. How?

I grew up with parents who yelled, "Clean your room or you don't get dinner!" It worked, but we resented it. With my own kids, I decided to "pitch" instead. I'd ask, "Do you smell the cookies in the oven?" and "How about I play cards with you after dinner,

“

WE'RE TOLD NOT TO VOICE ASSUMPTIONS, BUT YOU MUST MAKE THEM INTERNALLY. WHEN I PITCH YOU, I NOTICE YOUR HAIR, GLASSES, BACKGROUND, CLOTHES, AND I MAKE EDUCATED ASSUMPTIONS.”

Then I paint a picture: Imagine playing with SpinGym at your desk five minutes a day, a few times a week, for three weeks—your arms get tighter. Then I ask, "Is that something you might want?" I'm aiming for an easy "yes," because once you say yes to wanting toned arms, you're far more likely to ask, "How can I get them?"

What pattern do you see among founders who have great products but can't sell them?

They rush to tell you all about their product or, worse, spend the first 60 seconds on why they started the company,

Tuesday at 9 a.m.?" It might be stay-at-home moms, remote workers, people caring for aging parents, or someone home sick with an autoimmune disease. I'd then speak directly to those possibilities—like showing how SpinGym can work your upper body, even if you're lying in bed—so a huge slice of the audience felt seen.

How can people introduce themselves more powerfully—say, at a networking event?

When I asked how you answer, "What do you do?" you said, "I'm a business news reporter

no phones?" Once I had two yeses, I'd say, "Great. Now go make the floor spotless in 15 minutes, and then it's cookies and cards." They cleaned happily because they were pursuing something they wanted. That's pitching.

Do you really believe pitching should be taught in schools?

Absolutely. We're taught math, geography, science, maybe a language—but not money, relationships, or pitching. Yet pitching is the skill that helps you get jobs, raise money, sell products, negotiate, and even parent more effectively.

WHY SOME BUSINESSES KEEP GROWING WHILE OTHERS STALL.

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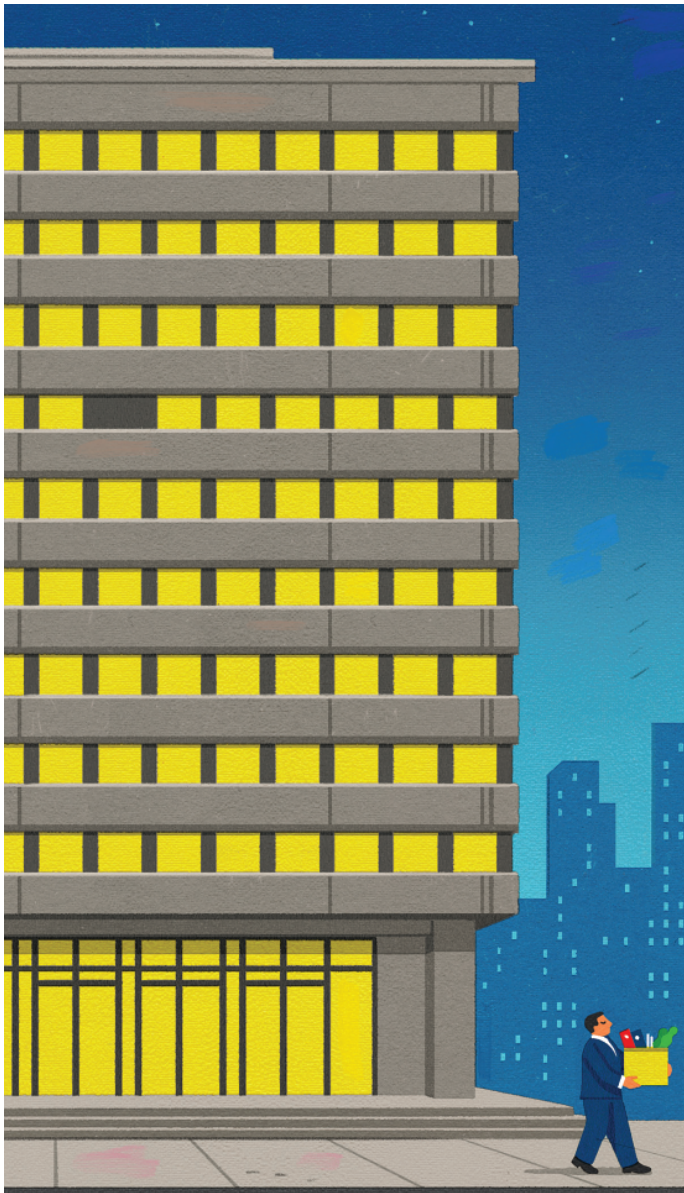
— President, Graphics Marking Systems

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People Problems

Hiring and firing can't be taken lightly. Here, we asked six business leaders about the hardest personnel decision they ever made, and what they learned from it.

1/ When you know, don't wait.

Early on, we only had budget for one engineer, but my cofounder Marcelo found two he really wanted to hire. I told him to hire both, and we'd figure it out. One is our CTO today. When you see the right person, you have to move. The same is true when something isn't working. The instinct is to wait and hope it resolves itself. It rarely does. In both cases, don't let the discomfort slow you down.

—JOB VAN DER VOORT, cofounder and CEO, Remote

2/ Toxic leaders aren't worth the short-term gains.

I once had to let go of someone who, on paper, was hitting every KPI. They were delivering on short-term results, but consistently falling short as a people leader, which I knew would ultimately erode trust with our team. When the issues didn't resolve, we went our separate ways. It was necessary to protect the other people invested in building Ritual to a higher standard.

—KAT SCHNEIDER, founder and CEO, Ritual

3/ Don't confuse loyalty with what's best for everyone.

I had a head of marketing who'd been with me since the early days. I felt loyal to her, but could feel the gap widening. I knew for almost a year before I acted. When an audit of the business uncovered significant "ghost spending"—tools and initiatives that weren't driving any return—I realized I was avoiding a hard decision. Keeping someone in a role they've outgrown doesn't serve them either.

—KERRY BENJAMIN, founder and CEO, StackedSkincare

4/ For young companies, flexibility trumps expertise.

I once hired someone with the perfect résumé. I knew they weren't a cultural fit, but convinced myself the expertise would make up for it. The mismatch showed up almost immediately. This person wasn't willing to do things differently than they had at a more established business. The friction was constant. I waited too long to act, because I'd pushed for the hire. At an early-stage company, attitude and flexibility beat expertise every time.

—LINDSEY NEWTON, CFO, A-Frame Brands

5/ Don't let fear of commitment prevent you from going all in.

I started my law practice as a sole practitioner. It was just me, my automations, and my husband in the background. When I got pregnant, I hired a contractor, and it was a disaster. I let them go three months before my due date and hired again—but this time, a full-time employee. I was afraid, but she was the right fit. Looking back, we finally grew because I was forced to fully step away.

—HILARY ANGROVE, cofounder, Angrove Law

6/ Personnel decisions are big-picture assessments.

The truth is, any decision about people is tricky. The weight of it makes you slow down. I've developed a process: I start with the [organization's] work: Could we do it better? What risks are there if it's not done properly? Next, the team: Are there enough resources? Too many? Is the hierarchy needed? Then the individual: How do they show up? Are they an energy giver or taker? Are they growing at the rate of the company or lagging?

—NICOLE OTTO, CEO, Ruggable



How'd my happy hour specials
do across locations?



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How to Start a Consulting Business in 6 Weeks

It took me two years to grow my consulting business to \$2 million, but I could have done it much faster with a stress-tested roadmap. Let this guide save you from many of the mistakes I made. **by TARA SANDHU**

→ TARA SANDHU



When my third consulting client paid me \$12,250 for a three-page document, I almost felt guilty taking the money.

It was a vendor recommendation list for a seed-stage fintech startup—something I could produce in a few hours after years of working at Stripe, Plaid, Gusto, and Mercury. But this cli-

ent wasn't paying for how long it took me to create this particular document. They were paying for the decade of expertise I'd developed as a risk and compliance leader at some of the fastest-growing fintech companies in the world. My judgment would help them skip months of research and costly mistakes in a space they didn't understand.

In two years, working an

average of three days a week, I've built a \$2 million consulting business. But my path was far from a straight shot. I sent hundreds of cold emails without getting a single lead in the first three months. It took me four months to figure out my pricing.

Early on, I desperately wished there was a roadmap to follow. Now, I feel equipped to create one for others. So here's

the six-week plan I wish someone had given me.

WEEK 1/ Stop selling everything you know.

When I started my company in October 2023, I was pitching all of it: a decade-plus of experience across compliance, risk, and fintech operations, expertise in anti-money laundering, the Bank Secrecy Act, fraud, credit risk, customer support, growth strategies, automating operations. Nobody knew what to do with me.

The shift came when I got specific. The consulting world rewards specialists, not generalists. So I forced myself to answer one question: What's the single problem I've solved more times than most people on the planet?

I challenged myself to write the answer as a single sentence. Here's what I put in my notebook: "I help early-stage fintech companies navigate risk and compliance challenges before they scale, so they can avoid the costly mistakes I've seen derail companies at this stage."

The sentence didn't need to be perfect. But it needed to be specific enough that someone could immediately know whether they needed me. And it would become the foundation for everything else. If you want to do this for your own business, follow my simple formula: "I help [type of company] solve [specific problem] over [timeframe]."

WEEK 2 / Find your first client.

When I thought about who my first client would be, my instinct was to cast a broad net. I built a spreadsheet of potential clients, researched leadership teams, and drafted outreach templates. I targeted smaller startups, because I knew they often couldn't afford full-time salaries; I reached out to ask if they needed fractional compliance help instead. After hundreds of cold outreach attempts, I hadn't landed a single lead that way.

When I finally got my first client, here's how it happened: They found me because a woman I'd never met posted a few sentences about what I did in a private Slack channel.

My husband and this woman had worked together at Stripe, though she and I had never crossed paths when I worked there. She had since moved into VC. When I was starting out, my husband mentioned my venture, and she asked for a four-line blurb about what I did. She posted it in her firm's portfolio Slack channel. One of her portfolio companies happened to be looking for exactly the kind of compliance help I offered.

Your ideal first client is not a cold lead. It's someone who already trusts you, or who trusts someone who trusts you—like former colleagues, hiring managers, and vendors you've worked with. I made a list of 10 people who fit that description. These were people I had worked late nights with, people I looked up to, people I had helped over the years—my warm network. Don't reach out yet; just decide who you'll be talking to.

WEEK 3 / Avoid the hourly pricing trap.

When I first started, I quoted an hourly rate because it felt fair. I only wanted to charge for what I actually did. What I got in return was scope creep, vague projects, and clients who wanted to negotiate every invoice.

The \$12,250 three-page document I referenced earlier changed how I thought about this. That client didn't ask how many hours it would take; they asked what it would cost to solve the problem.

This is the pricing framework that worked for me: What would it cost the client if this problem went unsolved for another six months? What could they make or save if they implemented the solution in the first year? Charge 10% of that. It made sense to both of us.

Changing the conversation

already knew me, making it easy to refer me when the right time came. And it worked.

Two of my early clients came from another former colleague at Stripe who heard I was consulting. He wasn't looking for help himself, but he knew clients who were.

I sent this message to five people that week. Then I kept sending it to five people every week.

WEEK 5 / Take calls to understand problems, not propose solutions.

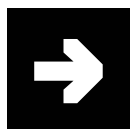
By week five, some of my initial conversations had started moving, and I was getting on Zoom calls.

The goal of these meetings wasn't to close a deal, but to understand the problem before proposing any solution. I applied something I

with a simple Excel tracker with seven columns: *Contact name*, *Company name*, *Problem they described*, *What a solution would unlock for them*, *Next steps*, *Status* (e.g., pursue, circle back later, dead end), and *Date of last contact*.

I filled it in for every conversation I'd had.

When I talk to consultants who are just starting out, I recommend that they start by finding the *one conversation* that felt most alive. Who was the person who leaned in, who described their problem with urgency, and who asked what working together might look like? Write that person a one-page proposal. You don't need a formal scope of work with legal language and payment terms. You just need one page that says: *Here's the problem I heard you describe, here's how I would*



YOUR IDEAL FIRST CLIENT IS NOT A COLD LEAD. IT'S SOMEONE WHO ALREADY TRUSTS YOU—OR WHO TRUSTS SOMEONE WHO TRUSTS YOU—LIKE FORMER COLLEAGUES, HIRING MANAGERS, AND VENDORS YOU'VE WORKED WITH.

from "How much is your time worth?" to "How much is this result worth to the business?" is a far better place to negotiate from.

WEEK 4 / Write the simple, personal message that actually gets responses.

In week four, I started reaching out to people with this simple message: "I've been doing some consulting work in risk and compliance. If you ever come across someone dealing with that, I'd love if you kept me in mind."

I didn't create any decks or elaborate pitches. I just sent a genuine note to someone who

learned time and time again at Plaid, Mercury, and Stripe: Work backward from your customers' needs.

I asked three things: What have you already tried? What is this costing you? And what would solving it make possible? Some calls led nowhere, but more people knew what I did.

WEEK 6 / Turn your best conversation into a proposal.

By this point, I'd had real conversations with real people about real problems. It was time to do something with this information. I started

solve it, here's what it would cost, and here's what this work will unlock for you. Send it before the end of the week.

When you're embarking on something new, I've found the only thing that quiets the doubt is evidence. That document is your first piece of evidence. It's proof that someone with a real problem thinks you might be the person to solve it. From that proof, you will get a "yes," and from that first "yes," everything becomes easier to believe in, including yourself.

Tara Sandhu is the founder of The Right Turn and Kinara Solutions.

Forget Generic AI Advice:

This Leadership Coach Is the Edge Growth Leaders Have Been Waiting For

As one C-level exec says: “It’s not a tool I reach for occasionally when I’m stuck. It’s a regular part of how I think through what matters most.”

Managing a team and enacting plans that truly push the needle at your business isn’t always an exact science. It requires equal parts experience, smart strategy, inspiration, and luck. But even when some or all those elements come together, the path forward can still seem ambiguous. Where do leaders at the executive level turn when they need advice?

For Brittany Podolak, Chief People Officer at Boston-based athenahealth, the answer was to seek out a leadership coach. The one-on-one time with another leader who has decades of experience and expertise always proved enlightening, helpful, and invaluable. But she says the process of finding a coach, establishing a relationship, and coordinating schedules, requires time and effort that many busy executives don’t have.

Podolak started experimenting with a new tool called ALEX, an AI-powered leadership coach created by the team at Admired Leadership. What she discovered was instant access to real, nuanced leadership advice — not generic guidance anyone can simply find online.

“Leadership at the executive level is rarely about having the right answer,” Podolak explains. “It’s about thinking clearly when the stakes are high, and the information is incomplete. We’re frequently wrestling with challenges that have real complexity to them — competing priorities, competing perspectives, and the kind of paradox that doesn’t resolve neatly.”

Leadership advice like no other AI can provide

For nearly four decades, Admired Leadership has been researching what the world’s top business leaders actually do — not theory or personality frameworks, but specific, real-world behaviors and routines that drive growth and change. They realized that the keys to achieving growth in crowded and competitive industries aren’t found in platitudes or clichéd strategies anyone can find in a book or online.

Successful leaders pull from a unique playbook with ideas your competitors have never considered before.

They used the proprietary insights they gathered to offer one-on-one, personalized business coaching to



executives from around the world. Now, using a leading AI engine as its foundation, Admired Leadership created ALEX, an AI-powered leadership tool that pulls on that same research to deliver the same exceptional advice fast, and to anyone who signs up.

“ALEX democratizes executive coaching,” Podolak says. “Traditionally, this caliber of counsel has been reserved for the most senior leaders in an organization, and even then, access is limited and expensive. ALEX makes it possible to extend that quality of advice throughout an organization at a price point that’s actually feasible. That’s not a small thing.”

Growing with confidence

Podolak says she has sampled several other AI-powered leadership tools but keeps coming back to ALEX because of its advice that’s based on decades of proprietary research. Plus, after developing and refining her preferences (providing ALEX with details such as the type of work she does, the challenges she’s facing, the developmental goals she’s seeking) and how she wants ALEX to respond (longer or shorter responses, etc.), ALEX provides targeted advice that Podolak can trust.

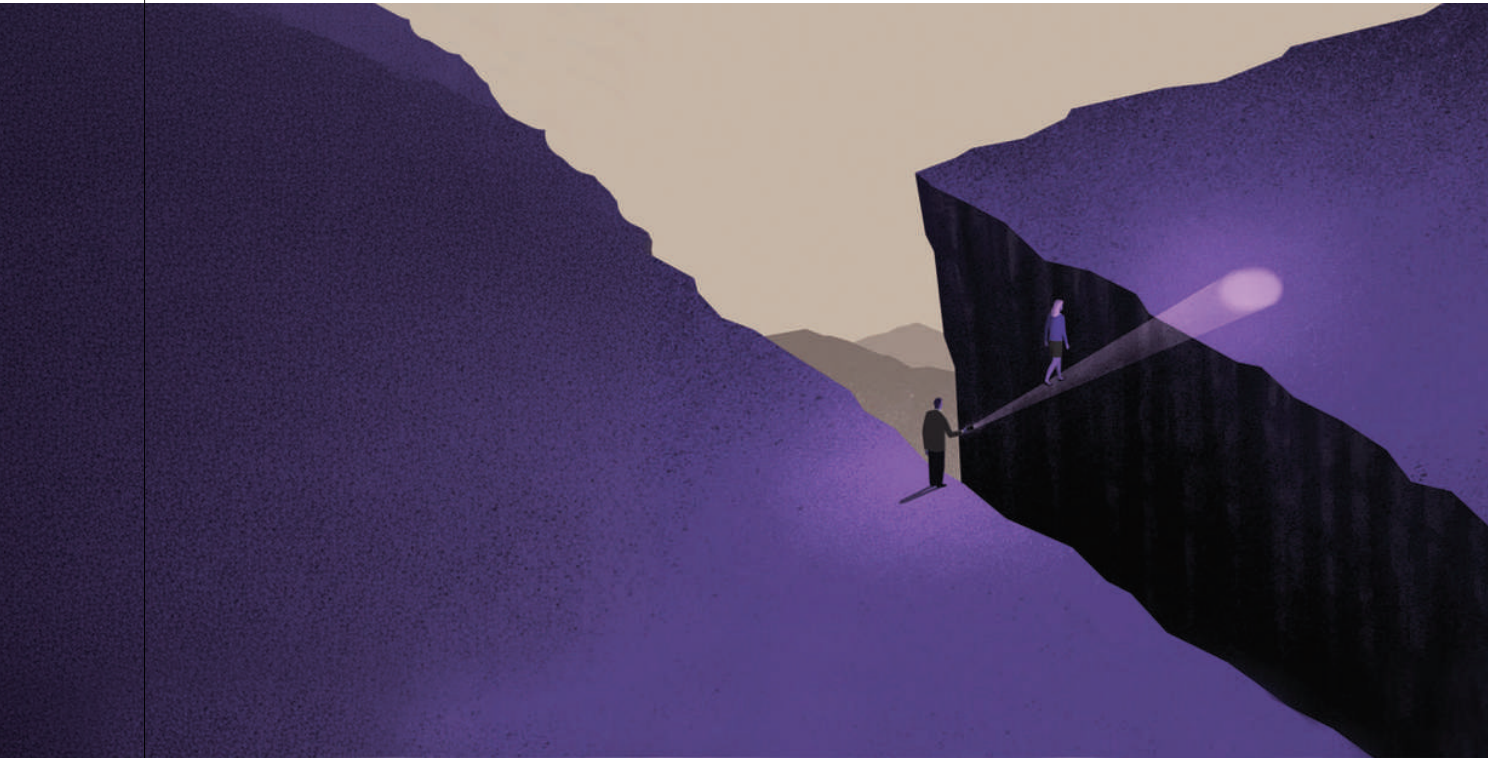
“ALEX is my thought partner for complex leadership situations — the kind where the path forward isn’t obvious and where my thinking can get in its own way,” she says. “It surfaces things I’m not considering and helps me see around corners I didn’t know were there.”

She uses ALEX for everything from creating executive memos to scenarios planning to developing performance and coaching outlines for her employees. And she’s not the only one at athenahealth using ALEX—more than 300 employees use the AI coach regularly.

“ALEX is simply part of how I work,” Podolak says. “It’s not a tool I reach for occasionally when I’m stuck. It’s a regular part of how I think through what matters most.”

To learn more about how ALEX can give you the leadership edge your business needs, visit alex.admiredleadership.com/learnmore

40 Years of Leadership Insight. One AI Coach.



For nearly four decades, Admired Leadership® has coached senior leaders across many of the world's leading organizations. Along the way, we've studied what the best leaders actually do — not theory, not personality frameworks, but the specific behaviors and routines that drive real outcomes. That proprietary content has always been the foundation of our distinctively effective coaching. And now that content, unavailable anywhere else, is the foundation of ALEX, an AI leadership coach built for the moments that matter most.

One conversation with ALEX can surface what you're not seeing — in a critical decision, a high-stakes relationship, or a situation where the path forward isn't clear. The kind of perspective that used to require a seasoned executive coach, now available the moment you need it, on any device, at any hour, grounded in a body of practical advice no other AI has.

Leaders at some of the world's most respected organizations use ALEX not as an occasional resource, but as a regular part of how they think. Because at the level where the decisions are hardest and the relationships are most consequential, **generic AI advice simply isn't enough.**

Try ALEX Now and see what 35,000 leaders already know:

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ALEX
BY ADMIREDA LEADERSHIP®

Secrets to Making a Killer Meta Ad

Why do some ads perform well while others are clunkers? We look at four pairs of creative options and break down what worked (and what didn't). **by LIZ BRODY**

Do you run ads on Meta? Have the results been unpredictable lately? There's a good reason for that.

Late last year, Meta added an update called Andromeda. It's a major shift in how ads are delivered. In the past, Meta ads were all about targeting: You refined the audience you wanted to serve, and then hit them with ads. But in Meta's new system, targeting is automated—and Meta is now watching closely for performance. If your ad doesn't immediately resonate with people, it'll get filtered out. As a result, brands need to produce a *lot* more creative. You'll win by constantly testing new ideas and comparing them. And these ads must look and feel very different from each other—because if Meta thinks they're too similar, it won't test them individually.

What does that look like, and what can you learn from these tests? We put together this case study.

Nove8 makes consumer-facing apps, and relies heavily on digital advertising. "Ninety-five percent of our success is performance marketing," says cofounder Natalia Shahmetova. It has helped grow the company to \$35 million in annual revenue. "We've run thousands of tests with different creative, and thanks to Meta algorithms, we know whether the ad is good or not within the first hour of a campaign."

Shahmetova shared with us the results of some of those tests from Nove8's dog-training app Woofz and fashion app Stylio. Then we asked the performance marketing agency Pilothouse Digital (which was not involved in making the ads, and could look at them with fresh eyes) to weigh in on why the winners succeeded. By understanding what worked for Nove8, you can improve your ads too.

CAMPAIGN 1/ Woofz

THIS AD FLOPPED

Tips to potty train a puppy
(according to a dog breed)



Puppies need to go potty more often than adult dog, follow this guideline

2 Months	→ 2-3 hrs
Every additional month	→ Add 1 hr
6 months and beyond	→ 6-8 hrs

Always take your puppy out for potty time after the following events:

- Right after a meal
- Immediately after sleeping
- After a playtime session

Don't forget to praise him for pottying outside!



Never punish your puppy for a potty accident!

If you didn't see it happen, it is too late to punish.

If you see it happening calmly but firmly say "Hah-HA" and immediately take your pup outside to finish his business.



400% CTR INCREASE

REGRETTING BRINGING A PUPPY HOME?



Feeling the puppy blues? Tired, frustrated, or second-guessing your decision?

This plan will guide you through the tough early weeks with your puppy

- ✓ Potty train - in 3 days
- ✓ Stop jilting - in 3 hours
- ✓ Stay in a crate - in 5 hours
- ✓ Walk without pulling the leash - in 1 day
- ✓ Stop barking - in 1 day

With just 10-15 minutes a day, your dog will learn everything without being punished.

The first ad shared potty training tips. The second ad spoke more personally to dog owners. "Instead of focusing on the pet's behaviors with complex guides, we focused on the owner's emotions, reassuring them that the tough moments are normal and easily overcome," says Nove8. **THE RESULT** The second ad drove a 400% increase in click-through rate (CTR).

WHY IT WORKED Pilothouse says: The weaker ad makes puppy ownership feel like a lot of work, with overwhelming details (take the puppy out every two to three hours, add a play session, etc.). The winning ad immediately reframes the chaos as containable: "Potty train in 3 days."

But the real breakthrough is the line: "Regretting bringing a puppy home?" That names the taboo emotion most pet brands refuse to touch. It recognizes that the deeper job to be done here is not really "teach my dog where to pee." It is instead "help me stop feeling overwhelmed, guilty, and incompetent." The first ad explains the product, but the second markets relief.

Consumers often search at the symptom layer but *buy* at the identity layer. In other words, while they type in potty training questions, they are really asking: *Is this normal? Did I screw up my life?*

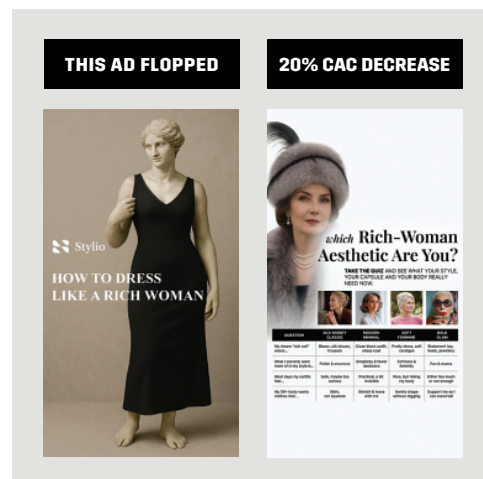
THE BIG LESSON Stop answering only the problem customers are willing to ask out loud. The strongest performing creative names the private crisis beneath it.

CAMPAIGN 2 / Stylio

The first ad promised information on “how to dress like a rich woman.” The second was a quiz, asking users what kind of rich woman they dress like. “Most potential customers don’t click through to learn what you offer, so instead of relying on a short call to action to hook them, we demonstrated the expertise Stylio offers directly in the ad,” explains Nove8. **THE RESULT** The second ad drove a 20% decrease in customer acquisition cost.

WHY IT WORKED Pilothouse says: The better ad also succeeds because as soon as a user reads “Old-Money Classic” or “Modern Minimal,” she is sorting herself. Categorization creates powerful psychological buy-in and makes the brand feel like an interpreter of identity. The smartest move is language like a “50+ body,” “skim, not squeeze,” and “nice, but hiding my body”—which proves that the brand understands not just style, but also the user’s lived experience, while helping Meta classify who should receive the ad.

THE BIG LESSON Stop asking people to click for value you could have demonstrated in-feed.



CAMPAIGN 3 / Woofz

The first ad promised to stop puppies from biting. The second explained why dogs bite in the first place. “Instead of focusing on correcting behaviors, we focused on explaining the behaviors—because there are countless videos, websites, and products promising to stop negative behaviors, but few address the underlying cause,” says Nove8. **THE RESULT** The second ad drove a 34% decrease in customer acquisition cost (CAC).

WHY IT WORKED Pilothouse says: In-feed, diagnosis beats instruction. Also, that first ad risks sounding like another hack. (Teach your dog not to bite in one day? Really?) On Meta and TikTok, it casts a broad, noisy net around urgency. The second ad’s instructional visual format feels measured, expert, and low-threat. It prequalifies the right user before the click and gives the platform cleaner data about who finds this relevant.

THE BIG LESSON In modern performance creative, the winning ad often interprets the customer more accurately, rather than explain the product more aggressively.



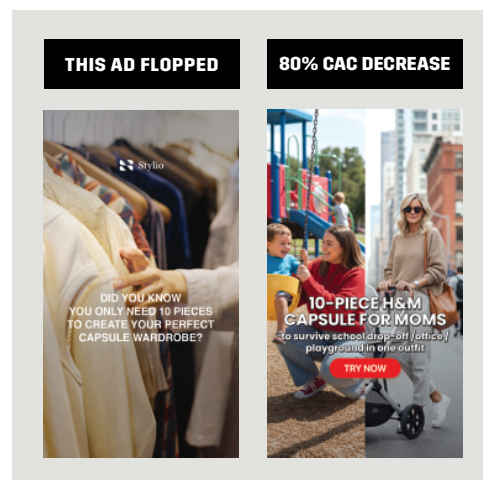
CAMPAIGN 4 / Stylio

The first ad shared a fact: You only need 10 pieces to create the perfect wardrobe. The second ad was specifically for moms. Why? “If you try to speak to all customers, most won’t feel spoken to at all. So instead, we focused on a specific person,” says Nove8. **THE RESULT** CAC was down by 80%.

WHY IT WORKED Pilothouse says: The underperforming ad sold a fashion framework, but the winning ad sold relief for a very specific kind of woman living a very specific kind of day. And when consumers feel uniquely seen, they’re much more interested.

On Meta, the first ad might have reached more people. But that’s expensive, because Stylio would be paying for all that reach. By defining a cleaner pool of high-intent customers, they’re reaching fewer people but converting more, and saving money.

THE BIG LESSON It’s not that brands should blindly niche down. The specificity only becomes powerful when it captures a real tension in a human problem and makes the customer feel understood.



How I Got My 900 Employees to Love AI

I shut down my company, Fetch, for almost a week, and asked employees to play around with the latest tools. Innovation blossomed. **by WES SCHROLL**



Like many founders and CEOs, I worried that my company was too far behind on AI. So at first, I followed what I'd seen other companies do: I planned to put an executive in charge and a team

underneath to lead our AI transformation. Then I got to thinking: It's not enough for *one team* to use AI. How do I get *all* my 900 employees to lean in—and fast?

So I shut the company down for nearly a

week. It inspired a wave of innovation.

For context, I cofounded Fetch in 2013. When shoppers use our app to scan their receipts, we give them rewards. We're a profitable, fast-growing company with

a \$700 million gross revenue run rate and 13 million monthly active users, and I was confident that AI could help us innovate and move even faster.

I started asking my people why they weren't using AI at work, and the answer was always the same: They were too busy doing their jobs. So I thought: *What if we just gave them uninterrupted time to try it out?* We'd put all other work on hold and only focus on AI.

I called the idea AI Week. My executives pushed back and said, "Let's do it for a day." But I needed to do something big. It was important for everyone to understand how serious this was. We ended up agreeing to four days. Unless there was something urgent like a deal closing, we canceled all meetings, told clients we would be unavailable, and warned users that response times would be slower.

For true innovation, you have to remove barriers so people don't hide behind the limitations. So we did a survey asking what types of projects and solutions they wanted to work on, and then assigned them to 200 teams. I also got a small task force to build a few examples in advance. In addition, we created a Slack channel for

employees to submit requests for any AI tool up to \$500 a month. (We'd later cancel those that weren't useful.)

Then, starting on June 10, 2025, we held AI Week. On the first day, we showed the task force's examples and brought in speakers from OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google to talk about their tools. Then we sent everyone off in their teams to do their hackathon, with experts on hand to provide assistance. At the end of the week, each team submitted a three-minute video of their solution, which we split up between 10 judges. The idea was to choose the best three—but the results were so good that we couldn't even narrow it down past the top 20.

Along with a massive cul-

“

I STARTED ASKING MY PEOPLE WHY THEY WEREN'T USING AI AT WORK, AND THE ANSWER WAS ALWAYS THE SAME: THEY WERE TOO BUSY DOING THEIR JOBS. SO I THOUGHT, *WHAT IF WE JUST GAVE THEM UNINTERRUPTED TIME TO TRY IT OUT?*”

ture shift, two products came out of that week, both in beta testing now. One is a shopping agent where users can ask, “What am I about to run out of?” And it knows the answer. That's great for customer retention. The other solution was more internal and foundational. Before, if I wanted to know whether our users had ever scanned a receipt at Danny's Pizza Shop in Des Moines, humans would have to go look and it would take a week to find out. Now

I have my answer in seconds. It means we can extend into the SMB market, because we can go to Danny's and say, “We know there are about 2,000 Fetch users near you who spent \$10,000 on pizza last quarter, of which you've only captured 5%. By offering points, we can help you grow to 7%.” It unlocked a scalable way to access our own data.

Since shutting down the company for AI, every measure of productivity has increased significantly. Our

revenue per employee is up around 30%, while the cost of the tools (we learned that we can almost exclusively use Claude) is negligible. But this is not a “one and done.” Because AI is evolving rapidly, we now have AI Fridays to give people the afternoon to experiment. And we're shutting down again this July. People now have big ideas for AI, so this time we're calling it Innovation Week. Because that's the real point.

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How to Crash the World Cup

It's the biggest marketing moment of the year. Here's how to use it without spending a ton of money.

by SCOTT BARADELL



As the World Cup approached in 2022, Duolingo sent out a press release. It read, in part:

"Unless you're an official sponsor, you can't talk about the [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] ... But with a bit of clever language, there's always a way to [REDACTED] the rules."

Back then, the games were being held in Qatar. Duolingo wasn't an official World Cup sponsor, so it needed to be careful about its language—but it *did* pay to become the official sponsor of Qatar FC, an amateur soccer team from Brazil. That allowed Duolingo to declare itself the official sponsor of what it called "the other Qatar." The company's mascot,

Duo the owl, became the team's official mascot too. Duolingo launched a tool for translating soccer chants and trash talk into other languages, and released that press release full of redactions. The whole thing cost far less than an official World Cup sponsorship, but earned lots of media coverage and generated goodwill worldwide.

If you're a small brand, there may be a version of this idea waiting for you now. The World Cup is in 11 U.S. cities this summer. And if your customers have a connection to the tournament, then you can benefit greatly by joining that conversation.

People often call it "news-jacking," and you have two primary options: You can create a moment or just create content.

Either way, it requires preparation and patience.

How to create a moment

This is what Duolingo did. And you can too.

First, make two lists. On the left, write down the specific things your customers will actually experience—not "they'll watch games," but the granular stuff. Googling the offside rule five minutes before kickoff? Pretending they've always been a Christian Pulisic fan?

On the right, write down what your brand is already known for. Are you the bar that actually knows soccer? The restaurant where the neighborhood goes to celebrate?

Your angle lives where something on the left intersects with something on the right in a way that produces recognition or surprise. Can your bar start handing out booklets with all the World Cup rules? Can you promote free drinks if the U.S. wins?

As you brainstorm, ask yourself: *Does this reinforce what we want to be known for?* (Duolingo, for example, teaches people new languages—so its translation tool absolutely accomplished that.)

How to create content

Moments can be expensive. Content is fast and cheap. And during the games, you'll see *lots* of brands reacting and engaging on social media. It'll look spontaneous, but they prepared.

You can too. First, build your scenario templates. You don't know who'll win or lose any

relevant games, but you know the emotional beats: the upset nobody saw coming, the heart-breaking penalty shootout. Write rough content frameworks for each. When the moment arrives, you're filling in names and details, not staring at a blank screen at midnight.

Next, get your approval chain down to one person. This way, you'll be able to get content up while it's still relevant. A classic example: During the 2014 World Cup, optical retailer Specsavers had a rapid response plan in place with its media agency Manning Gottlieb OMD. The goal was for OMD to quickly respond to big cultural moments, with Specsavers' approval not slowing it down. That paid off when a Uruguayan footballer bit Italy's Giorgio Chiellini—and Specsavers almost instantly tweeted an image of Chiellini next to a picture of a plate of cannelloni pasta. "Should've gone to Specsavers," it wrote. It got 13,000 retweets in the first hour.

Let's be clear: You don't *need* to get involved in the World Cup, or any major event. But if you want to, ask three questions: Does this make sense coming specifically from us? Have we checked every factual claim? Would we be comfortable if this got screenshots as an example of brands doing it wrong?

If the answers are yes, then the ball is yours.

Scott Baradell is the founder and CEO of Idea Grove, a digital marketing company.

A close-up portrait of Sir David Beckham, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He has short, dark hair and a well-groomed beard and mustache. He is wearing a dark, textured blazer over a dark button-down shirt. His neck is visible, showing several tattoos, including a large one on the left side of his neck.

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SAUDI ARABIA

A DECADE OF VISION 2030: FROM AMBITION TO EXECUTION

Ten years ago, Saudi Arabia undertook a transformation few sovereign economies would attempt at comparable scale, reordering what the economy produces, attracts, and projects globally. Announced in April 2016 as an economic blueprint, Vision 2030 has since evolved into something far more consequential: a sustained national exercise in institutional reinvention.

"After a decade of progress under Vision 2030, our nation has shown how ambition can be turned into real results through the determination of its people and the strength of its institutions," said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Vision 2030 Annual Report 2025.

What distinguishes the Kingdom's current phase is a shift from construction to connectivity. The early years focused on foundations: regulatory reform, infrastructure development, institutional modernization, and the liberalization of social and cultural life. What is emerging now is the interconnection of those foundations into ecosystems capable of generating their own economic gravity.

Artificial intelligence illustrates this transition most clearly. The rise of HUMAIN represents not simply an investment in compute or digital infrastructure, but the construction of an AI ecosystem designed to anchor global technology partnerships, accelerate data-center investment, and position Saudi Arabia as a strategic node within the future digital economy.

The same logic applies to industrial development. CEER, the Kingdom's first domestically produced electric vehicle brand, is moving into advanced manufacturing production, signaling the emergence of a manufacturing ecosystem capable of anchoring supply chains inside the Kingdom. As CEO James DeLuca observed: "It's an exciting time for Saudi Arabia. When the leadership of a country is aligned behind a single industrial objective, the impossible becomes executable."

Across the Kingdom, large-scale urban and hospitality developments are evolving into globally investable mixed-use destinations. Madinah is among the most strategically positioned, where Knowledge Economic City reflects a broader

shift in how the Kingdom is developing its most important hospitality and urban markets. Long-term population growth, rising visitor numbers, evolving ownership frameworks, and growing international demand are reinforcing the city's emergence as a compelling destination for global capital.

Financial services, healthcare, and insurance are evolving with equal intentionality, operating less as isolated verticals and more as connective tissue across the Kingdom's infrastructure, mobility, and corporate growth. Companies such as Tawuniya are positioning insurance not as a defensive product but as an active enabler of economic expansion, transitioning the sector into a structural pillar of long-term resilience.

Underpinning all of this is a deepening market architecture. The February 2026 reforms that opened Saudi equities to all categories of foreign investors marked a structural shift in the Kingdom's capital market accessibility. Broader market reforms, streamlined market-access pathways, and a growing private-sector IPO pipeline are collectively reshaping Saudi Arabia into a more accessible and institutionally mature investment environment.

Ten years on, Vision 2030 is best understood not as a transformation completed, but as a platform reached. The sectors taking shape across AI, advanced manufacturing, tourism, urban development, financial services, and capital markets are increasingly interdependent, institutionally mature, and globally accessible. Saudi Arabia is becoming an integrated investment platform defined not by the ambition of its founding documents, but by the compounding weight of its execution.

For investors, the signal is no longer directional. The opportunity is already in motion.



His Royal Highness Prince **Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud**, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Tawuniya

DRIVING SAUDI ARABIA'S INSURANCE SECTOR TRANSFORMATION THROUGH FOUR DECADES OF INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

Saudi Arabia's economic transformation is increasingly defined by the strength of its financial infrastructure, with insurance emerging as a critical enabler of sustainable growth. As the Kingdom advances under Saudi Vision 2030, expanding healthcare systems, giga-projects, logistics networks, and industrial ecosystems all rely on a robust risk management framework. Within this context, Tawuniya stands as a defining institution shaping the future of the Saudi insurance sector.

Celebrating four decades since its founding in 1986 as a national insurance champion, Tawuniya has evolved into one of the largest insurance companies in the MENA region, serving millions of policyholders and leading corporates across the Kingdom. Under the leadership of Dr. Othman Alkassabi, the company leads in mobility, property and casualty, ranks second in health, and is expanding into life insurance. This leadership position is supported by sustained market share strength, disciplined governance, and operational excellence, with approximately 90 percent retention across key products and significantly improved claims turnaround times.

Over the past five years, Tawuniya has evolved beyond traditional insurance into an integrated, ecosystem-driven organisation. Its four-pillar strategy, built on financial outperformance, customer obsession, technology enablement, and a people-first culture, has delivered consistent and measurable results. Return on equity has increased from approximately 11 percent to nearly 23 percent, while Net Promoter Scores have exceeded 50, reflecting strong customer satisfaction. This ecosystem approach is visible across healthcare, mobility, life, general, and bancassurance partnerships, strengthening value creation, customer stickiness, and long-term profitability.

As Alkassabi notes, "In any economy, insurance is a cornerstone. It creates a

protection layer and helps mitigate risk across sectors. By protecting businesses from disruption, supporting investment cycles, and generating employment, insurance becomes a vital contributor to the economy."

Tawuniya plays a pivotal role in advancing Saudi Vision 2030 by supporting large-scale national development projects, expanding healthcare coverage, and enabling growth across industrial, logistics, and SME sectors. This contribution aligns closely with the Financial Sector Development Program and the National Insurance Strategy, positioning insurance as a key driver of non-oil GDP growth and long-term economic stability.

For investors, Tawuniya presents a compelling and increasingly institutional proposition. Strong financial performance, rising foreign ownership from approximately 7 percent to nearly 20 percent, and a disciplined growth model combining organic expansion, selective inorganic growth, and ecosystem integration continue to reinforce confidence among institutional and retail investors.

At the same time, Tawuniya is evolving into an AI-enabled organisation, embedding artificial intelligence across underwriting, claims, and operations to enhance efficiency, precision, and customer experience.

With its scale, track record, and openness to partnerships, Tawuniya is increasingly positioned as the partner of choice for global insurers, reinsurers, insurtech innovators, and investors seeking entry into Saudi Arabia's expanding insurance market. As the Kingdom enters its next phase of growth, Tawuniya's trajectory signals a fundamental shift: insurance is no longer a supporting function but a core pillar of economic resilience and long-term value creation.



Dr. Othman Alkassabi
CEO



التعاونية
tawuniya



CEER

IGNITING SAUDI ARABIA'S AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Saudi Arabia is no longer testing economic reform—it is executing industrial transformation at scale. Under Vision 2030, the Kingdom has shifted decisively from ambition to delivery, channeling capital, policy alignment, and talent into engineering globally competitive industries from the ground up. Rather than modernizing legacy sectors, Saudi Arabia is building entirely new industrial ecosystems designed for resilience, localization, and long-term economic depth. Advanced manufacturing sits at the center of this strategy.

Sustainable mobility offers one of the clearest demonstrations of that shift. Electric vehicles, in this context, represent far more than a technological transition; they signal localized value creation, industrial capability, and customer-experience excellence. Within this framework, CEER has emerged as Saudi Arabia's first homegrown electric vehicle brand and a national industrial platform translating Vision 2030 into execution—integrating design, engineering, manufacturing, and supply chains within a single, end-to-end model.

"At CEER, we like to say we're not just starting a car company—we're igniting an entire industry," says CEO James DeLuca. Established in March 2022, CEER has moved with uncommon speed and precision, reaching a critical inflection point in less than four years. 2026 marks a defining year for CEER, with the company set to reveal its first two flagship vehicles, a sedan and an SUV, to the world. Design and engineering are complete, more than 150 prototypes have been built in Riyadh and deployed to global test centers, and CEER is now transitioning decisively from development into production.

CEER is Saudi Arabia's only end-to-end original equipment manufacturer (OEM), controlling the full automotive value chain—from design and engineering to sourcing, validation, manufacturing, and, soon, sales and after-sales service. This integrated approach embeds long-term industrial capability directly within the Kingdom rather than dispersing it across offshore supply chains.

The physical backbone of that ambition is CEER's state-of-the-art manufacturing complex in King Abdullah Economic City. Spanning over more than one million square meters, the facility integrates press, body, paint, and general assembly within a single advanced manufacturing ecosystem. "The plant is without a doubt the most technologically advanced manufacturing operation—clearly in the region, potentially in the world," DeLuca says. Delivered in record time, the facility reflects a level of automation and process integration typically seen only in the most established automotive markets.

CEER's impact extends well beyond the factory gates. "You can't have an automotive industry without a localized supply base," DeLuca explains. Building such an industry requires suppliers to co-locate at scale, particularly for large components and highly configurable systems that demand just-in-time proximity. With coordinated government support, CEER has attracted global Tier-1 suppliers to establish operations in the Kingdom, supported by Tier-2 suppliers and Saudi investors. By 2034, the company targets 45 percent local supplier participation, approximately 30,000 direct and indirect jobs, and an estimated USD 8 billion contribution to GDP—creating multiplier effects across logistics, services, and regional economies.

That industrial ambition is reinforced by a disciplined partnership model designed to embed global excellence across the value chain. CEER is a joint venture between the Public Investment Fund and Foxconn, combining



James DeLuca
CEO

national capital with industrial agility at global scale. Collaboration with BMW provides CEER with more than 100 years of technical know-how in the vehicle development and manufacturing process, while partnerships with Rimac, Hyundai Transys, and Italy's Sabell and Isoclima extend expertise across powertrain systems, interiors, and premium manufacturing. The SAR 543 million collaboration with Sabell introduces sport-car-grade seating—technology typically reserved for elite performance brands—underscoring CEER's strategy of setting world-class standards from inception.

Product development at CEER is guided by regional realities rather than global averages. Vehicles are engineered specifically for Saudi Arabia's extreme climatic conditions, incorporating advanced thermal management, dual air-conditioning systems, and halo-cooling technology that channels airflow across panoramic roofs to maintain cabin comfort in high heat. Advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS), connectivity, and infotainment are integrated from inception, with engineering

decisions prioritizing durability, usability, and long-term performance over novelty—delivering products tailored to local preferences and demanding environments.

Design and brand identity are equally intentional. CEER has introduced the world's first bilingual Arabic-English automotive logotype, reflecting global ambition and cultural authenticity. A distinctive 32-bar lighting signature—referencing the Kingdom's founding year of 1932—appears across sedans and SUVs, ensuring instant recognizability day or night. "When you see a CEER vehicle, you will recognize it immediately," DeLuca says. "We designed our cars to be unmistakable."

People sit at the center of CEER's industrial strategy. Since inception, the workforce has grown from 20 employees to more than 2,200, representing over 50 nationalities. While international expertise has been essential in the early phases, structured knowledge transfer is embedded into the operating model. CEER is a founding partner of the National Automotive & Vehicles Academy, works closely with the Ministry of Education and, through the WAAID program, sends Saudi engineers to Kettering University in the United States for immersive electric-vehicle training—investing in a workforce designed to sustain the industry for decades.

With more than four decades in the global automotive sector, DeLuca brings experience uniquely suited to CEER's mandate. Prior to joining CEER, he held senior leadership roles at General Motors before playing a central role in building VinFast into Southeast Asia's first electric vehicle manufacturer. Few executives have built an automotive company from the ground up more than once. In Saudi Arabia, that experience is now being applied at national scale. "When the leadership of a country is aligned behind a single industrial objective," he says, "the impossible becomes executable."

CEER's significance ultimately extends beyond vehicles. It is laying the foundations of a national automotive industry—creating skilled jobs, anchoring supply chains, transferring knowledge, and positioning Saudi Arabia as a credible global player in advanced manufacturing. In doing so, CEER is not only delivering on Vision 2030's industrial ambitions; it is defining how the Kingdom builds globally competitive industries from the ground up.





Knowledge Economic City (KEC)

SHAPING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF MADINAH

Saudi Arabia's transformation under Vision 2030 is redefining the Kingdom's economic geography. A decade into reform, non-oil sectors are expanding, infrastructure investment is accelerating, and cities are being repositioned as globally competitive economic hubs. Visitor numbers across the Kingdom are rising sharply, and strategic capital deployment is reshaping urban growth patterns. In Madinah, however, this transformation carries a deeper dimension. It is shaped not solely by expansion, but by stewardship within sacred geography. As visitation accelerates and connectivity strengthens, the city is entering a structural phase of urban evolution. At the center of this transition stands Knowledge Economic City (KEC), a rare and finite land platform within one of the most significant cities in the Islamic world.

Founded in 2010, KEC controls the largest remaining master-planned land bank within the Haram boundary. In a city where developable land inside the sacred perimeter is inherently limited, such scale carries exceptional weight. "KEC has the biggest land bank in Madinah within the Haram boundary. It is the only land bank left within the Haram boundary," says CEO Eng. Hazem Samir El Banna. For El Banna, leading KEC marks a full-circle moment. More than 35 years after contributing to the expansion of the Holy Haram in Makkah, he now returns to help shape Madinah's urban future. The opportunity to shape Madinah at true city scale now rests within a single integrated master plan.

That singular position defines KEC's role. Unlike fragmented developments that evolve plot by plot, KEC is conceived as a cohesive urban ecosystem. Its award-winning master plan organizes 13 integrated districts designed to function collectively rather than independently. Over the coming decade, the development is set to deliver more than 45,000 residential units alongside nearly one million square meters of commercial space, positioning it among the most significant mixed-use platforms in the region.

Hospitality forms a central pillar of the strategy. KEC is targeting a capacity of approximately 20,000 hotel keys by 2030, with potential expansion to more than 42,000 keys over the longer term, positioning it among the largest hospitality ecosystems in Madinah. By 2028, approximately 5,000 keys are expected to come online across five major hotels within Phase 1 of the Islamic World District. Operators will include Hilton, Marriott, Radisson, Aston, and Park Inn, alongside Hyatt Centric and Hyatt House, as well as the Al Alyaa housing complexes. At this scale, hospitality becomes integral to the city's long-term economic fabric rather than operating as a secondary layer. At full maturity, the platform is expected to support thousands of direct and indirect jobs while reinforcing Madinah's growing non-oil economy.



Scale is matched by integration. Residential neighborhoods, hospitality clusters, healthcare facilities, retail boulevards, schools, parks, and cultural districts are being developed in parallel to ensure coherence and long-term resilience. The



Eng. Hazem Samir El Banna
CEO

Islamic World District introduces museums and cultural spaces inspired by traditional architecture, while a fully operational medical village anchored by Mouwasat Hospital Group strengthens healthcare infrastructure. The Haramain High-Speed Rail station lies within KEC's boundary, embedding transit-oriented development directly into the master plan and reinforcing connectivity across the Kingdom.

Geography further elevates the platform. KEC faces Mount Uhud and lies within minutes of the Prophet's Mosque, Quba Mosque, and Qiblatain Mosque. In Madinah, land is inseparable from identity. The city carries profound spiritual resonance for more than two billion Muslims worldwide. "There is only one Madinah in the world. That reality shapes every decision we make," El Banna says. Development in this context requires discipline, reverence, and architectural restraint. "Our responsibility is not simply to build, but to curate a long-term urban legacy that respects Madinah's identity while supporting its growth," he adds.

Madinah itself is entering a new development cycle. The city is home to approximately 1.79 million residents, while annual visitors are currently estimated at 16 to 18 million and projected to reach 30 million by 2030. It is no longer defined solely by short pilgrimage cycles. Visitors are staying longer, investing more deeply, and increasingly considering long-term presence. Expanded rail and airport connectivity reinforce this shift. Independent studies indicate that Madinah could face a shortage of up to 190,000 residential units by 2035, 310,000 hotel keys, 925,000 square meters of retail space, and 27,000 square meters of office space, underscoring sustained demand within a structurally supply-constrained market. Even after completion of the KEC master plan, additional supply from other developers is expected to enter the market. Recent residential launches within KEC have recorded strong absorption, reflecting growing interest in integrated, master-planned communities.

For entrepreneurs and investors, Madinah is transitioning from a pilgrimage-centric economy to a diversified urban market. Hospitality, retail, healthcare, and lifestyle services are expanding alongside residential development, creating opportunities for operators and long-term capital across multiple sectors.

Regulatory discussions anticipated in 2026 may further clarify pathways for broader international participation in property ownership within the city. In a market long shaped by restriction and spatial limits, such developments would represent a structural shift rather than a cyclical adjustment. Within that evolving framework, KEC stands as one of the few platforms with the scale, governance structure, and planning discipline to engage credibly with this next phase of growth.

The company's strategic direction is guided by its Board of Directors under the leadership of Chairman Mr. Amin Shaker, reinforcing institutional governance and long-term planning discipline. As a listed company operating under the regulation and guidance of the Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority (ECZA), KEC benefits from a streamlined single-window framework that expedites permitting and enhances coordination with government entities. This alignment between board oversight, executive leadership under CEO Eng. Hazem Samir El Banna, and regulatory support strengthens KEC's ability to operate at city scale with clarity and efficiency.

KEC enables participation through land acquisition, joint ventures, and co-development across hospitality, residential, retail, healthcare, and institutional assets. Oversight is consolidated within a single master-planning authority, streamlining approvals and reinforcing coordination at city scale. This structure positions KEC as a natural partner for operators and long-term institutional capital seeking exposure within a market defined by finite land and enduring spiritual significance.

As Vision 2030 moves from blueprint to execution, Knowledge Economic City stands as a tangible expression of Madinah's next chapter. Opportunities of this scale within the Haram boundary are exceptionally rare. In a city that exists only once in the world, KEC is not merely delivering projects; it is anchoring Madinah's long-term economic evolution with clarity, scale, and enduring stewardship.



Speed Up Your Work

Your summertime to-do list just got easier, thanks to these new tech picks from Emmy Award winner **Mario Armstrong**.



1/ A more mobile mouse.

Do you use a mouse but hate to travel with it? **The Logitech Mobi Fold Mouse** [\$80; logitech.com] packs easily, turning cramped work setups into something closer to a regular desk experience. This Bluetooth mouse delivers full cursor control in a compact, travel-ready design that, at about the size of a deck of cards, slips into a bag or pocket. Pivot it open to reveal the familiar left- and right-click layout. A touch scroll replaces the traditional wheel, reducing the risk of breakage. It pairs with up to three devices, lasts up to 32 days on a charge, and noticeably speeds up multitasking on the go.

2/ Travel-ready screens.

One of the biggest productivity upgrades you can make is adding more screen space. The **Asus ZenScreen Duo MB14FCD** [\$349; asus.com] makes it easy: It packs two 14-inch IPS displays into a portable package that folds shut like a laptop and unfolds into either tent mode (to share a screen with a colleague) or dual-screen mode (to give you a 20-inch-tall workspace all to yourself). Instead of constantly toggling between windows, you can keep email on one display and documents on the other. USB-C and mini-HDMI connectivity make setup simple from anywhere.

3/ An on-brand mic.

Most content creators hold (or wear) a tiny black microphone. The **Insta360 Mic Pro** [from \$100; insta360.com] turns that mic into a branding opportunity—using its 1.25-inch color e-ink display to show logos or custom graphics. Inside, its transmitter uses 32-bit float recording, a triple-microphone array, and AI-powered noise reduction to keep audio clean even in crowds or wind. Each unit also includes internal storage and timecode support, making multi-camera workflows more reliable and providing a built-in backup of every take without extra gear.

4/ Note-taking earbuds.

Your earbud case is probably already in your pocket—so it might as well do more than just charge. The **Soundcore Liberty 5 Pro Max** [\$230; soundcore.com] pairs earbuds with a smart case that uses AI to turn meetings and brainstorming sessions into searchable, structured notes without breaking your focus. A built-in microphone captures in-person conversations and syncs them to the Soundcore app (it includes 120 minutes of transcription per month for the first two years, then subscriptions start at \$8.33/month). The case's touchscreen allows you to control media playback from your streaming service.

5/ Confidential computer.

If you work in public, your screen is more visible than you realize. A privacy filter like the **SightPro Magnetic Privacy Screen** [from \$28; sightpro.com] helps keep sensitive emails, financial information, presentations, and client work visible only to the person directly in front of the display. Unlike older filters that relied on adhesive and often looked ugly, the SightPro attaches magnetically, snapping on in seconds and removing just as easily, without blocking your webcam. That makes it ideal for travelers and remote workers who only need privacy some of the time. Models are available for most MacBooks and Surface laptops with 12- to 16-inch screens.

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The World's Identity Company



THE JUGGLER

**Do you feel
trapped doing just
one thing?**

GARY VAYNERCHUK

understands.

**And he has
the solution.**

by JASON FEIFER

If you want to see the future of work, just look at Gary Vaynerchuk's DMs. He's spent his career pushing people toward action—telling them to build something, to own something, to take control of their lives and financial destinies. Now, millions of entrepreneurs and career-builders turn to him for advice, DMing him their most pressing and personal questions. The patterns of their anxieties tell a story: *Here's what people need now. Here's what bothers them the most.*

Today, Vaynerchuk is seeing something new and interesting: "They're feeling trapped," Vaynerchuk tells me. "They're starving out there."

Why? Because they have one main job or company, but they want more. Maybe their economic anxiety is pushing them to make more money or to find more lines of revenue. Maybe they're watching the rise of AI, seeing how it can make their lives more efficient, and wondering what else they can do with their time. Whatever it is, they want to expand. But they don't think they're allowed to.

Entrepreneurs and professionals have been told a very specific story: *Success requires relentless focus. Pour everything you have into one thing. Commit yourself to it fully.* As David Packard (of Hewlett-Packard) famously wrote: "More businesses die from indigestion than starvation." In other words, the greatest risk to your business isn't doing too little. It's doing too much.

Vaynerchuk agrees, to a point. Many people thrive with focus. And a business requires dedicated operators who think nonstop about its needs and opportunities.

But many people are built differently, he says. They are the creative thinkers. The restless builders. The ideas people. They have boundless energy and ambition, and it drives them to start new businesses or seek new accomplishments outside their day jobs. And here's the most important part: For these kinds of people, doing one thing is *stifling*. It drains their energy and makes them less productive. But when they're let loose, everything they do thrives.

So if you want more, Vaynerchuk says, you should get more. "More" means more personal and professional satisfaction.

You'll create more opportunities for your team, and have more energy and enthusiasm and ideas for everything that you do. "For literally more than 50% of you reading this," he says, "you need this for your soul."

But it requires know-how to make this happen. Because "more" requires strategy and intention—or else, yes, everything you do really will fall apart.

Vaynerchuk offers himself as living proof of how it can work. He may be known for his social media output, but he's equally prolific as a builder of companies—having founded the ad agency VaynerMedia, production companies VaynerWatt and Eva Nosidam, media publisher Gallery Media Group, marketing agencies Tamara Group and ChukMedia, corporate barter and trading company Tingley Lane Trading, thought leadership platform Marketing for the Now, VeeFriends, VeeCon, as well as a speaking agency, a sports agency, a food and hospitality group, original content, and...well, more.

And if he didn't do these things? "I'd be burned out," Vaynerchuk says, "because I wouldn't be happy enough."

If you feel the same, then he wants to show you a path forward.

I am sharing Vaynerchuk's philosophy here because I think he's right. But also because I've struggled with this question too.

I job-hopped my way through my career—because I'd get bored and miserable

media. Every day is different.

A few years ago, I met a billionaire who wanted to mentor me. We began having monthly calls. But every time we talked, the billionaire would press me on the same point: *You're doing too much, the billionaire would say. Pick one thing and focus. Make a list of all the things you'll stop doing.*

This tore at me. Here was a wildly successful person, known and admired by many, and he was showing me his pathway to success. But deep in my gut, what he said felt wrong for me. I didn't *want* to pick one thing. It felt limiting and stifling. So instead, I stopped scheduling calls with the billionaire.

It's been a few years now. I still wonder if that was a mistake.

Then, a few months ago, Vaynerchuk called me and suggested this article. He said he wanted to talk about being a "juggler"—because that's what he thinks of himself as, and he wants to give others permission to do the same. And he knew I'd relate. We first met in 2009, just as he was launching VaynerMedia and I was entering national magazines, and our careers grew in parallel frenetic ways.

So I arrived at Vaynerchuk's office—the one his fans are familiar with, with the shelves full of sports and pop-culture paraphernalia, which serves as the backdrop for so much of his social content. And as we talked about this, he predicted that, five years from now, someone who read this article will approach him about it.

He narrates the future conversation:

If you only do one thing, you're only exposed to one set of experiences. If you do more, your network and experience expand.

after about two years of working anywhere. I'm too curious. I crave newness. The same would have been true at *Entrepreneur*, where I've been the editor in chief for 10 years...except that here, I learned how to transform myself into an entrepreneur. While running this magazine, I now juggle many outside projects: I start companies, join advisory boards, and make my own

"Gary," they'll say. "I read your *Entrepreneur* article five years ago, I listened, and now I actually make less money."

"Oh?" Vaynerchuk will reply.

"Yeah. I used to make \$530,000 as a lawyer. Now I'm a lawyer and I own a beer garden, and I make \$330,000."

"But are you happier?" Vaynerchuk asks the imaginary person.





He feels sure the answer will be yes.

This feels orienting to me. Because it cuts to the heart of a question that every entrepreneur must ask themselves: *What do I want from my work?* Your answer is what you should optimize for.

Vaynerchuk knows his answer: “I’m doing all of this for myself,” he says. “I want to see how good of an entrepreneur I am.” His goal isn’t to build one specific company. His goal is just to *build*. It is to take that specific action, and embrace that challenge, and live life as a builder, because that is his core. And that means one company will never do.

This made me think of the billionaire who mentored me. What is that man’s goal? Well, he’d told me: His goal is to build companies toward massive exits. He measures his success by the creation of extreme wealth. And if that’s the case, then *of course* he wants to focus on one thing! He pours everything into one company, because that’s his pathway to selling it. He’s done it many times.

But me? And maybe you? Money is not what drives me. And that’s why the billionaire and I didn’t understand each other. Yes, I like making money, but I don’t need mountains of it. I primarily want to live a life of my own choosing, free from the demands and restrictions of bosses and corporate life. I want full autonomy of my time. I want to explore unexpected paths, and to push the boundaries of my talents and usefulness.

So I ask Vaynerchuk: *How do you do it? How do you become a juggler?*

Vaynerchuk stands up. He plants both feet on the ground, next to each other. Then he takes a half-step to the right.

This is the visual he wants you to consider. Your weight was fully planted in one place. Now you’re shifting that weight—potentially destabilizing where you started, while also needing to build a solid foundation for your other foot to land on. Before you step, you must do an audit on yourself. Ask: What are you excellent at, and what excellence do you need from others?

Start with yourself. Vaynerchuk remembers when everyone doubted his ability to start VaynerMedia. He was just a guy making YouTube videos out of his parents’ wine store, and then he launched an advertising agency. It seemed unserious at the time. Today it operates as the flagship of a diverse

portfolio of brands under parent holding company VaynerX, a nearly \$400 million business. So how did he do that? And how, today, can he start a production company that’s creating content for Amazon Prime and the History Channel? And how can he sell eight figures’ worth of assets through VeeFriends? And how can he open a members-only club, Flyfish Club, in Manhattan?

The answer to these questions is the same: “Because we’re good at marketing,” he says. “If I start a doughnut shop or a nuclear power plant or a SaaS business, my competitive advantage is the ability to outmarket anyone and everyone in every sector.”

That’s it. One skill, transferable across industries. He can drive viewers to the TV show, drive excitement to VeeFriends, and drive members to a club. The guy just knows how to market. And in this way, a seemingly incoherent collection of

has always leaned on people he trusts deeply. He’s built VaynerMedia and VaynerSports with his brother, AJ. He built VaynerSpeakers with Zach Nadler, who was his speaking agent at CAA for six years. He built Wine Library with Brandon Warnke, his best friend since age 14. These are relationships he never has to question.

Then you must get comfortable with *not* being the person who does everything. That’s a hard adjustment for entrepreneurs, especially if you’ve been laser-focused on one thing for a long time. We come to believe that we are integral to our companies’ success—as if everything must be done by us or else it won’t get done right.

But Vaynerchuk has some tough news for you: “Most things don’t matter,” he says. Not only do entrepreneurs inflate their own sense of value, but they also inflate the importance of the things they’re devoting their time to—which means you’re often putting valuable time into things that just don’t

“It requires humility to let people shine outside of you, even if you are the reason they are shining.”

businesses has an internal logic. It is tied together by a core discipline.

“And other people have disciplines too,” he says. Maybe you’re great at finances, or team building, or partnerships, or sales. “Someone could be a great operator—and they could go into a private equity firm, or a flyer shop, and either way they could look at the P&L and say, ‘God, they’re wasting \$2 million a year.’”

Whatever it is, you must know this about yourself. Recognize what your transferable value is. Because in this way, every new thing you do is just a new expression of your core skill set.

Next, let’s look at what other people in your orbit are excellent at—because if you’re going to divide your time and energy, other people will need to rise in your place. “It requires humility to let people shine outside of you, even if you are the reason they are shining,” Vaynerchuk says.

At the highest levels, Vaynerchuk

require it. “There’s 15 people in your company that can do it,” Vaynerchuk says, “and most people’s B’s and C’s are actually better than your A’s, because the overall impact on this thing isn’t big enough.”

Whenever there’s a new initiative, Vaynerchuk likes to operate with what he calls the 15-80-5 rule: “I need to be involved in the 15% up front, to really synthesize the idea,” he says. “I’m the offensive coordinator. Then my direct report and their team go away and do 80% of it. And then I get involved in the last 5% to put a cherry on the sundae, and we move on.”

He pulls up his calendar to show me what this looks like. We’re staring at Google Calendar on his monitor, and it is a dense, color-coded wall of appointments. Most of them are just 15 minutes long, which he says is plenty of time to make important decisions. “Hourlong meetings are just 15 minutes of meat anyway,” he says.

Once you start structuring your days

like this and empowering your team to operate without you, something tremendous happens: You create more optionality for your top performers, because you now have more opportunities for them to pursue. He offers an example: One of his employees has been at VaynerMedia for nine years. She's a superstar, but was somewhat frozen in place because the person above her wasn't leaving. This is often why companies lose great talent; there's just no more room for advancement. But in this case, the VaynerMedia employee was just able to shift to a more senior executive role at another one of his companies.

"So not only does this create optionality for me," he says, "but it creates optionality for everyone." Because Vaynerchuk knows: He isn't the only guy at his company who wants to do more. By thinking so ambitiously, he's attracting and retaining exactly that kind of person.

If I ran all this by the billionaire who mentored me, he would probably offer the following counterpoint: If you only commit a fraction of your energy to one project, you'll only see a fraction of the rewards. Companies grow slower when you spread yourself thin.

I share that with Vaynerchuk, and he concedes the point. Yes, if he focused exclusively on VaynerMedia, it would be pulling in significantly more. If he focused solely on VaynerWatt, it might have 50 shows on TV now instead of the 10 in

we're burned out or exhausted, not because we're doing too much, but we're doing too little of the things that make us come alive," he says.

Vaynerchuk loves that. And he wants you to consider an important final question: What happens when you do the things that make you come alive?

The answer is: Everything you do benefits. And you could prove that billionaire wrong.

He lays out a scenario: Imagine you run a PR firm, and you also dream of owning a coffee shop. "You haven't opened the coffee shop in your town because everyone told you to focus," Vaynerchuk says. But without that coffee shop, your days are feeling sluggish.

So you open it. And at first, your PR firm shrinks a little. You've diverted your energy elsewhere. But then...wait. The coffee shop energizes you. It also puts you in touch with more people, who become PR clients. It gives you new ideas about how to reach people and to communicate brand stories, and you become *better* at PR as a result, and your PR company grows. "It gave you the escape you needed," he says.

I am living proof of this. People are often surprised at how supportive *Entrepreneur* is of my own personal entrepreneurship. But *Entrepreneur* is not foolish; the company directly benefits from my external pursuits. First of all, I'm happier—which is why I've stayed

Vaynerchuk sees it himself—how he learns something through one of his companies, and then benefits from that learning at another. "I have an unbelievable depth of knowledge," he says. "I'm fucking unstoppable in every meeting. I have too much context."

Vaynerchuk doesn't unplug for vacation often. But when he does, he goes all out. "I have no interest in seeing a sight. Do not get me a tour guide," he says. "I don't want to do *anything*."

Most recently, he went to Turks and Caicos. He pulled up a chair on the pristine beach, plugged in some headphones, and listened to Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and Biggie for nine hours straight. And as he stared out into the great blue nothingness, he also started to watch a little kid nearby, who was building the most immaculate sandcastle Vaynerchuk had ever seen.

From maybe 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., this kid worked and sculpted. His attention to detail could rival the architects of medieval cathedrals. It was a masterpiece.

Then, as evening approached, the kid's mom called him in for dinner.

"I watched this kid look at his castle," Vaynerchuk says. "Then he smashed it. And he left. And I sat there and thought, 'Oh, my God, I'm this kid.'"

Why do entrepreneurs build?

For some, it's about belonging. We build something to identify with, and to occupy us, and to immerse ourselves inside.

For some, it's about outcome. We build toward an exit to make a ton of cash, and to enjoy those spoils.

For others, like Vaynerchuk, and the sandcastle kid, and me—and maybe you—we build for some of those reasons. We love our work, and we want to be rewarded. But mostly, we're building for ourselves. Because it's how we explore the world around us. Because one thing will never satisfy us. Because it makes us happy. Because we want to see the boundaries of our potential.

So if you want to build, build. Don't let someone else's definition of success hold you back. Build until it's time to smash it to the ground and walk away. The act of building was always the part that mattered most. **E**

Jason Feifer is the editor in chief of *Entrepreneur* magazine.

"I'm doing all of this for myself. I want to see how good of an entrepreneur I am."

development. But he'd feel trapped inside that success. It wouldn't feel satisfying.

And that would be even worse for his company. Again, he says, it's a question of what you're optimizing for. Is it growth? Or happiness? Which do you need more? To him, expansion is happiness. And a happy half-time Vaynerchuk is vastly more productive than an unhappy full-time one.

I'm reminded of the way brain coach Jim Kwik talks about burnout: "Sometimes

in this role so long. But also, I'm constantly meeting people, learning things, and encountering ideas that I then bring back to *Entrepreneur*. My personal connections often become my employer's partners and sources.

This shouldn't be shocking. If you only do one thing, you're only exposed to one set of contacts and experiences. If you do more, your network and experience expand. You become a source of collective wisdom and experience.







What Happens When You Return a Product?

THE ANSWER:

**You become part of a \$1 trillion problem,
with brands and retailers eating the loss.
But help is on the way.**

by LIZ BRODY

Somewhere out there in Walmart land, on May 27 at 3:18 p.m., a customer returned a Nintendo Switch 2. Maybe the Joy-Con controllers weren't their vibe. Maybe they spilled juice on it. There could be a million reasons.

But here's the more urgent question: What happened to that Nintendo Switch *next*?

The answer is dauntingly complicated. Not to mention, expensive.

For many years, returned merchandise has been a quiet cost of doing business at retailers large and small. What can't go back on the shelf is often offloaded to liquidators for pennies on the dollar, some of it ending up incinerated or in the landfill. In the past, brands and retailers just tucked that loss into their initial pricing. But as online shopping exploded in the aftermath of the pandemic, and Amazon eased customer hesitation by offering free returns, people started buying things differently. There's a whole new vocabulary for it, like "bracketing" (when someone orders several sizes at a time to see which one fits and sends back the rest) and "wardrobing" (you buy something, wear it once, then return it).

It's gotten so bad that people are sending things back as if they're at an all-you-can-eat buffet in reverse. Nearly one in five online purchases got returned last year. If you look at the value of all that merchandise flowing back to retailers, what we've got now is a \$1-trillion-a-year problem.

"It hit like a tidal wave," says Scot Case, who recently served as vice president of corporate social responsibility and sustainability at the National Retail Federation (NRF), the world's largest retail trade association. "The challenge scaled so rapidly. All of a sudden, everybody's like, 'Oh my gosh, we need to fix this.'"

In response, a wave of companies has risen to address the problem. Their names may not be familiar to the average consumer—Optoro, Loop, Redo, ReverseLogix, and Rebel, among others—but they've likely managed stuff you returned. They operate in a field called "reverse logistics," which is exactly what it sounds like: They're trying to move products back *inside* retail stores, even though the retail business is designed to move product *out* to the customer.

One of the most established entrepreneurs in the space, Sender Shamiss,

"IT HIT LIKE A TIDAL WAVE. THE CHALLENGE SCALED SO RAPIDLY. ALL OF A SUDDEN, EVERYBODY'S LIKE, 'OH MY GOSH, WE NEED TO FIX THIS.'"

wasn't surprised by the returns explosion. He has been trying to solve the puzzle of reverse logistics for more than 18 years. His company, ReturnPro, processes and sells about \$2.5 billion in retail return value annually and is on track for more than half a billion dollars in revenue this year. And when you understand how he built it, you'll see just how challenging it is to get a returned Nintendo Switch back into a Walmart—and how much opportunity there is in making it work.

One might assume that a barely touched returned Nintendo Switch could simply be put back on the shelf as brand new.

Same with a sweater that someone quickly tried on and didn't fit. But here's the thing: Unless you're in a physical store, the route from A to B is not the same as the route from B to A.

First of all, there's the identification problem. A thousand Nintendo Switch 2s can share the same UPC code, because they all are exactly the same when being sold. But when those thousand video game consoles are returned, each becomes unique—one has a scratch, another has a torn box, a third is like new, a fourth has been used, a fifth is fake, etc.—so now every single one of those Nintendo Switch 2s needs to be treated differently and tracked accordingly.

Second, if a product is sent back in the mail, it doesn't go to the store where it originated; it likely goes to a massive ware-

house. There can be "almost literal mountains of returns to be processed," says Will O'Brien, a longtime supply chain specialist who's now managing partner at True North Growth Partners. And who's supposed to handle all that? It often hasn't been a key part of anybody's job. "If I'm the distribution center operator, *that's* not outbound shipping—and my metrics are on outbound shipping. How can I afford to spend 100 hours this week processing those returns?"

Even if a warehouse does process them, the question for the brand or retailer becomes: *If I have to ship the product somewhere to be refurbished, sanitized, or repackaged, and then ship it somewhere else to be resold, probably at a discount, does the financial math make sense?* Sometimes it's cheaper just to throw the stuff in the garbage or sell it to the liquidator for pennies on the dollar.

Business owners like Emily Hikade, founder and CEO of the luxury sleepwear brand Petite Plume, are sorely in need of solutions. "We have a very low return rate—only 4%. But that is still a huge number when you're looking at \$100 million for sales," she says. "We try to restock what we can, and we donate as well. Then we get rid of some of the stuff if we have to. We are trying to get more efficient, but this is a constant pain point."

The problem, says Shamiss, is that handling returns is a whole other business that's expensive to build. "And it's mission drift for these brands and retailers when



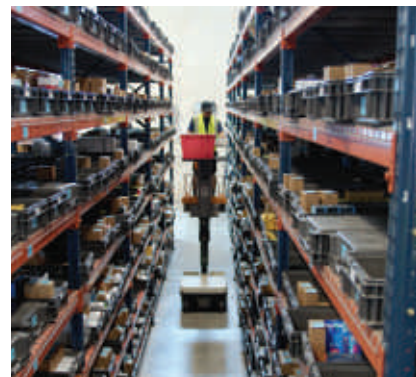
→ **REVERSE ENGINEER**

Sender Shamiss
(in illustration form)
at work in one
of his warehouses.



→ RETURNS MAGIC

(Left) A ReturnPro technician tests Nintendo Switches at a processing center in Bentonville, Arkansas; (Below) A teammate picks orders to ship to new customers.



they're trying to inbound and outbound new items." That's why he decided to make it *his* business.

Born in Kaliningrad to Russian Jewish parents, Shamiss moved around—first to Israel at age 4, after his father defected in 1981, then to New York just long enough to get a Brooklyn accent, and finally to Toronto. "I'm a highly dyslexic individual. I dropped out of high school. I dropped out of college. And ultimately, I dropped out of university," he says. In 2001, on a tip from a friend, he found a small business in the outskirts of Toronto selling electronics at crazy discounts and discovered they were all returns from a big chain store. Shamiss decided to try it himself. He borrowed money for a 53-foot truck loaded with 26 pallets of returns, tested every item, and listed them all on eBay and Craigslist. "I bought the truck for \$10,000," he says. "I sold it all for \$26,000 in less than 48 hours. I'm like, *There's money in this business.*"

In 2008, Shamiss decided to start what is now ReturnPro. Back then, he admits, he was just trying to make a buck. The returns problem was not top of mind. "And then slowly over time, as I saw how complex it was, I just fell in love with it," he says.

In those early days, there was a big reverse logistics company called Genco that would handle returns. (It had \$1.6 billion in revenue when it was acquired by FedEx in 2015.) But in many ways, Genco was a blunt object, mostly sending returns to liquidation or back to vendors,

who probably did the same. The liquidators would pack the items on pallets and auction them off to resellers like young Shamiss. When apparel got returned, the clothes were bundled like bales of hay and thrown onto 18-wheelers, and "shoes would be put into huge cardboard cartons—no boxes, nothing, just loaded up," says Hitendra Chaturvedi, a reseller back then. Now a professor in the supply chain management department at Arizona State University, he had a business that sold all kinds of returns, and remembers the chaos of it all. He'd buy clothes in bulk for 10 cents on the dollar, most of which he couldn't resell, and try to make his money on the 15% to 20% that he could. Some 70% to 80% of fast fashion went to landfills, according to his numbers.

As Shamiss got to understand the returns problem better, he started searching for new ways to solve it. Instead of just reselling the items in perfect condition, he wondered if maybe he could also refurbish the rejects. So he began going to small brick-and-mortar electronics stores, and offered to buy their returns, refurbish them, then sell them on consignment. He moved the business to Miami, and around 2013, he started to think bigger. He was making good money on sent-back electronics, but he wasn't helping retailers with their larger problem of how inefficient and costly the returns issue is. Then it came to him: Instead of just reselling their returns and pocketing the cash, what

if he worked *with* the retailer? Was there a larger opportunity there?

He decided to show retailers exactly how much money he was making off them—40% margins in some cases—and to offer to let them in on the take. He figured his loss would pay off in gaining long-term clients to do something more significant with. Instead of getting the 43 cents on the dollar for returned items he bought from a retailer, he'd tell them they could make 50 cents or more by paying him a small service fee to rehab the product and get it on the next best shelf. Ideally, that would be *their* shelf, so they could avoid paying commission on another re-commerce platform. They'd still lose money on the returns, of course, but not as much. Looking ahead, with a higher recovery, they'd not only have more working capital, but they could lower their prices to gain a competitive advantage.

Today, factoring in its fees, Shamiss says, ReturnPro typically increases a client's net recovery from the 5% to 10% they'd get from liquidation to 45% to 60%. And gross recovery can be as high as 85%. At the beginning, however, he was hazy on how to pull it all off. "He was actually more of a coding geek," says Tony Sciarrotta, who met Shamiss in those days. "But the passion was there to take care of the people buying this stuff and take care of the products." That was something they shared, as Sciarrotta went on to run the Reverse Logistics Association in 2016. Started in



Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho

CONNECTING JAPANESE EXPERTISE WITH GLOBAL INDUSTRY

Japan's economy is maintaining steady growth in 2026, supported by improving wage trends, resilient domestic demand and sustained corporate investment even as global supply chains continue to adjust. According to the International Monetary Fund, the Japanese economy continues to expand above its potential level, supported by strong domestic demand, rising wages and steady private investment, even as global geopolitical tensions reshape supply chains and trade patterns. The IMF notes that consumption and corporate investment remain key drivers of growth, with inflation gradually stabilizing toward the Bank of Japan's target and employment conditions remaining tight—signals that one of the world's most established manufacturing economies continues to offer a stable and attractive environment for industrial activity and international collaboration.

Within this broader macroeconomic momentum, Japan's advanced manufacturing and industrial solutions sector remains one of the country's most strategic strengths. Long recognized for its precision engineering, materials innovation and process efficiency, the sector continues to support industries ranging from food processing to specialty chemicals and environmental solutions. Many industrial solution providers are increasingly moving beyond equipment supply toward integrated technical partnerships with clients. This shift toward value-added collaboration is opening opportunities for companies that combine technical depth with adaptability—especially those ready to engage with international partners across emerging markets.

Among these companies, Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho stands out as a long-established, family-owned industrial partner with a reputation for reliability and technical responsiveness. The company's core business is providing "chemical assistant" services that solve customers' challenges through chemical products, and in recent years, it has further expanded its business performance



Yuichiro Kato
President

Haruo Kato
Chairman

and innovation within customer operations. As Kato explains, "While many companies today focus primarily on responding to client demands, we aim to integrate research, development, and production in a comprehensive way." This capability positions the company as a long-term collaborator rather than simply a chemical supplier.

The company's long history also reflects a strong ability to adapt to regulatory and technological change. Over decades, Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho has transitioned through multiple generations of raw-material usage—from whale-oil inputs in earlier industrial applications to petroleum-based solutions and eventually to more sustainable materials as environmental standards tightened. This capacity for evolution has helped position the company as a dependable partner capable of navigating structural changes in industrial production while maintaining continuity of service.

At the same time, sustainability and reputation remain central pillars of its strategy. As a family-owned company with a long track record, Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho emphasizes trust-based relationships and long-term cooperation with clients across Japan's manufacturing ecosystem. Sustainability is not only a regulatory requirement but a strategic direction shaping materials selection, product development and operational priorities. The company is also increasingly strengthening its international B2B identity, signaling readiness to expand beyond its traditional domestic base and collaborate with partners in new regions.

This international orientation is already visible in the company's approach to collaboration, where partnerships are viewed not simply as market-entry tools but as opportunities to combine complementary strengths across regions and industries. Rather than expanding through scale alone, Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho is pursuing exchanges that strengthen technical capability on both sides. "For example, some partners are strong in specific regional markets, while we have deep expertise in the Japanese market. By combining our strengths, we can create mutual value," Kato says. The company is therefore positioning itself as a cooperative industrial bridge between Japan and overseas partners seeking reliable technical counterparts.

Despite ongoing challenges such as raw-material supply disruptions and demographic pressures affecting Japan's domestic market, the company continues to diversify its client base and explore opportunities in new industries. Its ability to operate across multiple sectors provides resilience against cyclical fluctuations and allows it to identify emerging applications for its technologies. This flexibility is especially valuable at a time when manufacturers worldwide are reassessing supply-chain strategies and seeking partners capable of delivering both technical precision and operational continuity.

Looking ahead, Kato emphasizes that Japan itself remains a compelling destination for industrial collaboration and investment. "Japanese products are known for their high quality, and we are able to manufacture efficiently while maintaining those standards. This combination is a key strength of Japanese companies," he says. In an era defined by reliability, sustainability and technological partnership, companies like Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho illustrate how Japan's industrial heritage continues to evolve—offering international partners both stability and innovation in equal measure.



by strengthening its trading functions. Chairman Haruo Kato notes that recent results reflect strong momentum: "In 2025, we achieved record-high sales and profits, supported by strong sales in our core pulp and paper sector, expansion into other fields including textiles, and the growth of our trading activities." This progress reflects not only favorable demand conditions but also the company's steady evolution as a partner capable of supporting multiple industries through tailored technical solutions.

One of Nissin Kagaku Kenkyusho's distinctive strengths lies in its role not as a conventional chemical supplier, but as a comprehensive partner in the fields of chemistry and process engineering. Instead of responding only to predefined technical requests, the company works alongside clients to anticipate production challenges and refine solutions across multiple stages of implementation. This consultative approach allows it to contribute meaningfully to both efficiency



2002, the group (later acquired by the NRF) was becoming more and more important as the returns problem grew, and Shamiss would go on to get involved in it.

But at the time, he wasn't entirely clear what he needed to build. Was this an e-commerce company that would sell returned merch? A physical supply chain with warehouses and trucks? A sophisticated tech startup? It seemed like he'd need all of it to truly handle a company's returns. But that sounded insane.

Then he started talking to Walmart.

As America's largest physical retailer, Walmart was obviously not ignorant to the problem of returns. From early on, they tried to solve it themselves. "I mean, a lot of our reverse logistics operations were set up by Mr. Sam himself [i.e. Sam Walton, Walmart's cofounder]," says Sylvester John, the retail giant's vice president and head of reverse supply chain in the U.S.

When Shamiss made inroads at the retailer in 2011, it had already built its own system to manage returns and was set on keeping it in-house. After all, it had huge delivery fleets and warehouse management operations. But there were also gaps in its process. "If you're talking about putting screws on a laptop in order to bring it back to life, well, that's not a core retail competency, and that deep expertise could be beneficial to me," says John. That's why Walmart was initially interested in working with Shamiss' team. ReturnPro could refurbish returned items from the retailer and then help resell them at a discount at Walmart or on other re-commerce platforms.

For example, here's what happened with the Nintendo Switch 2, purchased for \$449, that was returned to a Walmart store in May. First, it was sent directly to a ReturnPro facility where an evaluation of options determined that refurbishment and resale would generate more value than sending it back to the vendor or liquidation. Then it was tested and found to be fully functional. ReturnPro cleaned it, replaced some accessories, and put it in a new box. Once that was done, ReturnPro handled the process of reselling it. To do this, their tech analyzed demand, pricing fees, and inventory velocity across more than 25 resale channels, then listed it on several, including Walmart Marketplace; VIP Outlet, a discount website that ReturnPro created; and eBay. Three days

"I BOUGHT THE TRUCK FOR \$10,000. I SOLD IT ALL FOR \$26,000 IN LESS THAN 48 HOURS. I'M LIKE, 'THERE'S MONEY IN THIS BUSINESS.'"

later, the video game console sold on eBay for \$359, or about 80% of the original price. The whole process took 16 days.

Did Walmart still lose money on this return? Absolutely. But it lost way less than if the Nintendo Switch had been junked—which is better for Walmart and for the environment. John, the Walmart vice president, says the company has achieved a landfill diversion rate of more than 90% across its entire network and is pushing for 100%. But he has also led a major shift on how Walmart sees returns: He wants to actually make a *profit* on them, which once would have been unthinkable. How's it possible? He says it's a matter of becoming extremely cost-efficient, and moving inventory back into sellable channels fast. "You have enough of that revenue, and you've got your costs low enough, then you flip," he says. "Our reverse supply chain business is making strong progress toward becoming a profit-driving part of the company, and we've already seen profitable months this year."

Once he had a front-row seat to the inner workings of Walmart—along with other retailers that ReturnPro began to work with—Shamiss saw his larger path forward.

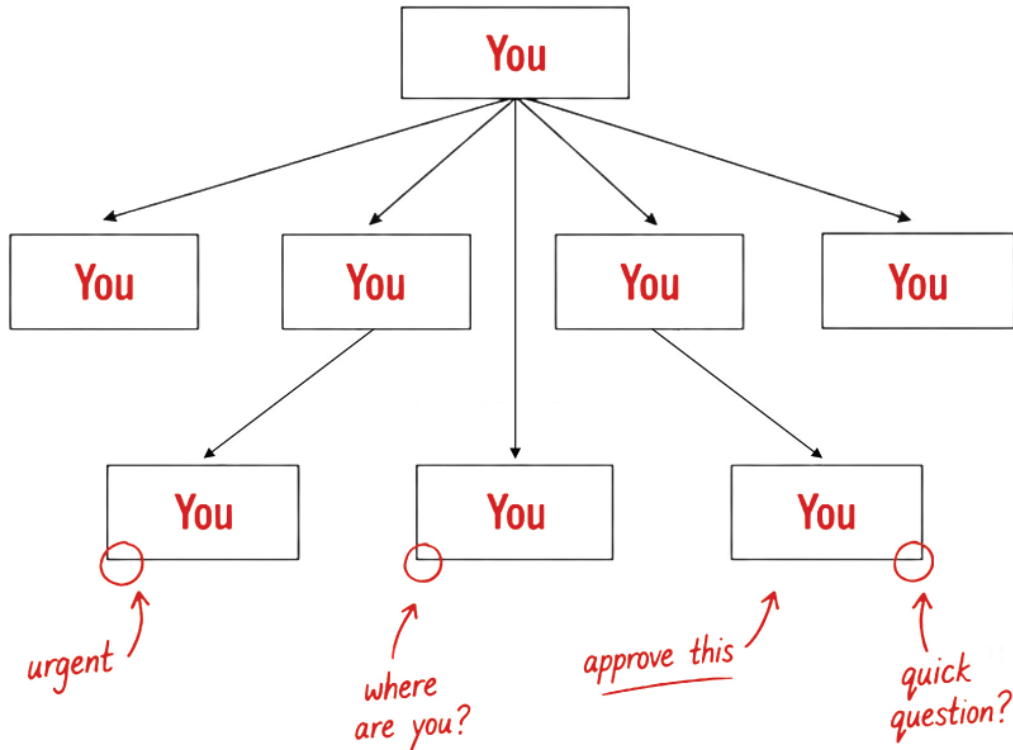
He learned, for example, that retailers' corporate structures often exacerbate the returns problem, because their teams are so siloed. Departments like store operations, online sales, transportation, mer-

chandising, and marketing typically stay in their own lanes to perform at top capacity. While that works for moving products at scale, it's much less efficient when managing returns. For example, the marketing team must think differently about promoting returns, and must coordinate differently with online sales and operations. Walmart itself realized this, and began fundamentally changing how its teams collaborated. Shamiss saw that and realized he could help other retailers do the same—by providing a unifying platform where their disparate teams could share data, policies, workflows, and performance metrics to make coordinated decisions about their returns.

Then he built out his own reverse logistics octopus—e-commerce, supply chain, and AI-driven technology all in one.

Today, ReturnPro is an end-to-end service. It begins by trying to dissuade a customer from returning something at all. For example, when a shopper initiates the process, the platform might present another product of similar value and encourage an exchange instead. It can also flag customers with an abusive return history (like repeated "wardrobing"), and then require a fee. When someone does send something back, depending on which retailer it is, the item can go straight to one of ReturnPro's 11 facilities where AI technology instantly decides the optimal route—to go back to the vendor or to be refurbished, repackaged, sanitized,

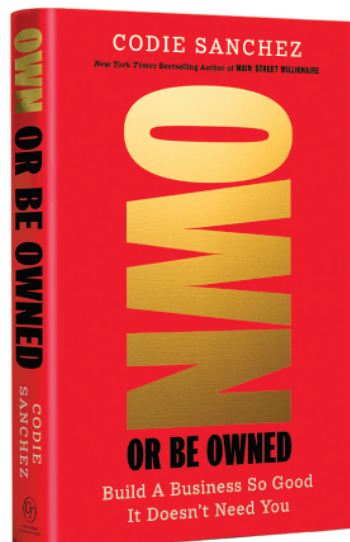
DO YOU OWN YOUR BUSINESS OR DOES IT OWN YOU?



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liquidated, resold, recycled, or donated (they aim for zero to the landfill). Factored in are the costs of each option and speed of delivery, because a dress can go out of fashion in three months, and an Easter bunny is only good during Easter. The algorithm always maximizes the financial outcome for each client.

Transportation is handled via the company's brokerage, which connects its customers directly with shipping and freight companies. ("Owning trucks is a waste of money," says Shamiss.) Because some retailers and brands don't have a secondary marketplace to resell their returns, ReturnPro has created three of its own, including VIP Outlet, and integrates with about a dozen others. After a sale, it then ships the product to the new buyer via their own services or a third party.

ReturnPro makes money via multiple revenue streams, a main one being its supply chain services, including refurbishment. ReturnPro also charges monthly fees for its platform based on returns volume, gets a percentage of the resale, and makes a small margin on the shipping arrangements when its services are used.

Over time the company has expanded the kinds of retailers it serves. On top of the Walmarts of the world, ReturnPro offers reverse logistics for small and mid-sized businesses. It's an approved provider on Amazon and the Walmart Seller Center, where growing brands can access it to outsource their returns. And it's available as an integration on Shopify. The economic fit depends on a business's volume of returns and how much time and money it's spending on managing them. A smaller business might just sign on for the returns automation software, for example, while a midsize brand would go for the supply chain and resale services as well. Many of ReturnPro's clients start with one piece of the solution and expand as they see the benefits.

At this point, there's no going back for retailers. Free returns have become too essential to their economy: 82% of consumers now say that they're an important consideration when shopping online, according to a 2025 report from the NRF.

That leaves Shamiss with a big question: With more than 1,200 employees today, profitable, and handling some \$2.5 billion in returns value a year—all bootstrapped—where else can his business go from here?

“THE COMPLEXITY IS IMMENSE. BUT YOU CAN’T JUST START A COMPANY TOMORROW AND SAY, ‘OH, WE WILL DO EVERYTHING.’ THIS GIVES US A MOAT.”

One idea was inspired by his work with Walmart. He saw how many vendors the company has, and how complicated it is to track all those relationships. Retailers have separate legal contracts with every brand they work with that specify what percentage of returned merchandise the vendor will take back for credit. To make it easier for his retail clients, Shamiss built a portal where they can put all their contracts in one place and bring their vendors in, so they're all on the same page. These contracts also inform automated decisions at the warehouse, to determine what should happen to an individual item. But now that new brands were brought into their system, ReturnPro could approach them as possible customers, since they have returns to deal with too. "It's a big mouse-trap," Shamiss says.

Next he's looking at counterfeits. Nine percent of all returns are fraudulent, according to the NRF report—meaning that people buy a product and send back a knockoff. That's a huge problem to solve, with major rewards for anyone who does. So this year, ReturnPro is attempting a solution by partnering with a tech startup called Clarity. Working with its founders, Shamiss developed a machine that can scan a package TSA-style using X-ray intelligence, computer vision, and AI. Instead of a human inspecting the goods, Clarity can see inside the box and tell if a product is real, fake or altered in about three seconds. Then the return can be rejected. "I like talking to

entrepreneurs on a regular basis," Shamiss says. "It gives me ideas that I could never come up with on my own."

As the returns problem evolves, so will ReturnPro. Shamiss muses, "If I told you 15 years ago, 'Give me \$30 million as an investment and I'm going to build you a national supply chain network, a software company, a logistics company, and an e-commerce company, and they're all gonna function as one,' you'd say, 'You're crazy. Focus on one thing.' But then you would've said the same thing to Jeff Bezos too, right? Because how did he get from books to selling cloud services to streaming services for movies?"

It would certainly be simpler if they had just focused on one of those companies, says Som Mukherjee, ReturnPro's CFO. "The complexity is immense. But it is also a competitive advantage for us, because you can't just start a company tomorrow and say, 'Oh, we will do everything.' This gives us a moat."

Right now, Shamiss guesses that ReturnPro owns just 1% of the returns market. But he's confident that will grow. "For an entrepreneur, the key is: What is the problem to solve?" he says. "And when I found this problem, I got really addicted to it. I couldn't stop building for it. And when you build a business that way, the money will come." **E**

Liz Brody is a contributing editor at Entrepreneur.

Modern Postcard teams up with sponsors, USPS® and Entrepreneur Media on Direct to Success, a national business growth seminar series.

Beginning June 4, the Direct to Success seminars kicked off at the Washington Marriott at Metro Center in Washington, DC. This comprehensive event has set itself apart from virtually any other business growth event in that it combines some of the latest information on how to effectively integrate digital and traditional marketing channels, but also on how to successfully raise capital to help businesses fund their growth.

“If you look at virtually any owner or senior manager of a growth business, their main concerns are acquiring and keeping customers and making sure they have the capital to do that at scale”, said Keith Goodman, the VP of Sales and Marketing for Modern Postcard, and he continues “and covering both the marketing growth and raising capital in the same day, makes this a must attend event for them.”

A primary focus of the marketing portion of the event is how digital, email and social media marketing integrate with direct mail, which often overlooked, can be a critical factor in boosting the success of these programs.

In addition, attendees will learn how to create highly targeted prospect lists with laser precision using demographic, psychographic, and online behavioral data and, equally important, how to develop creative that combines powerful visual impact with compelling messaging to engage and resonate with today’s increasingly younger and digitally influenced audiences.

“It’s important to understand that the key buyers today are Gen Xers, followed closely by Millennials” said Keith Goodman. “This is a generation that has grown up with technology, is used to having information at their finger tips,



and really responds well to graphical impact. Traditional media, such as direct mail, can be highly effective if it can capture their attention and integrate with digital media to create a 360-degree messaging environment.”

To close out the day, Jonathan Hung, Venture capital investor and author, will be presenting on how to raise capital for your business, and more importantly the pros and cons of the different avenues that are available, as well as what information each of them are looking for.

“Every company, regardless of size or type, is trying to grow their revenue and increase their profitability. One of the most critical needs in scaling a company is adequate capital,” said Jonathan Hung, Managing Partner

of Entrepreneur Ventures. “It is really important for owners and business leaders to understand the options and pros and cons that come with each option. This is really a great opportunity to share this information at these events.”

The Direct to Success seminar series will be coming to cities across the country throughout the remainder of the year.

Upcoming events include:

- Denver — August 5
- San Francisco — August 26
- Long Beach/Los Angeles — October 14
- Phoenix/Scottsdale — November 11

Check in begins at 9:00 a.m., with the seminar running from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. All attendees will receive course materials, a continental breakfast, catered lunch, one-year subscription to Entrepreneur Magazine, and \$250 in complimentary printing services from Modern Postcard.

These events have been drawing large crowds and tickets are limited. You can register now for all events at: modernpostcard.com/growth.



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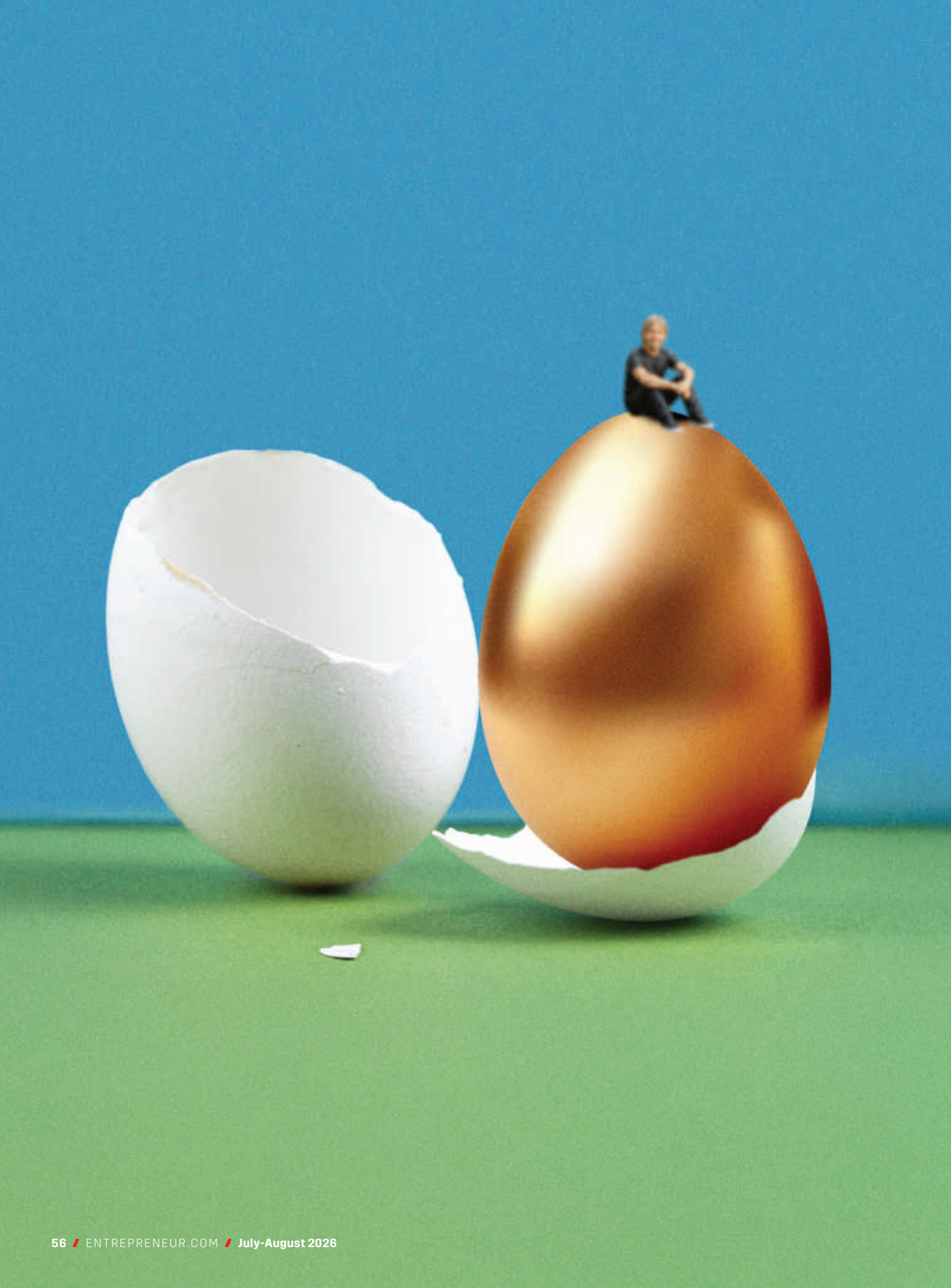
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I built a \$12 billion company by learning how to come up with winning consumer products. Here's my formula.

by **MARK PINCUS**

HOW TO MAKE A HIT PRODUCT





T

The process of defining, testing, and launching new products can feel chaotic. So how do we increase the odds of a hit, and decrease the time it takes to get to “right”?

This is something I have spent my whole career thinking about. I’m a serial entrepreneur, best known for founding Zynga, which pioneered social gaming with hits like FarmVille and Words With Friends, in 2007. We achieved \$1 billion in revenue within four years, and went public in 2011. (In 2022, Zynga was valued at \$12.7 billion when it merged with Take-Two Interactive, best known for Grand Theft Auto.) I also cofounded a venture capital firm with Reid Hoffman, and we backed companies including SpaceX.

Reid is a friend and lifelong collaborator, and he calls me an idea generator. But my challenge has always been bringing my ideas to life. That is true for everyone, in a sense: We all have ideas that we never pursue. Real life can feel like a beatdown. Once we start imagining the many steps necessary to implement our idea, it can feel overwhelming, expensive, and a lot less fun. Often, that’s when we decide that maybe the idea wasn’t that great. Even when we do pursue an idea, we’re usually forced to make painful trade-offs, with time as our primary currency. The way to change this equation is to massively accelerate the speed at which we build.

With Zynga, in order to survive, I had to be right about which products had the best shot at success—so I developed a simple framework. I call it Proven Better New. It became a religion inside Zynga, and has spread to many of my fellow product makers.

Proven Better New is a systematic approach to generating winning products faster. Its core value is in isolating truly new ideas and then testing them rapidly to get accurate customer feedback. It protects us from our urge to make everything better, avoiding wasted cycles and false signals. And it stops us from reinventing features that someone else already perfected. That way, we can spend our time and energy on innovation that actually excites us and our users.

PROVEN BETTER NEW FRAMEWORK

=

PROVEN.

A product that is already loved by your target audience—the exact features/mechanics that make up the experience.

>

BETTER.

What you can improve so that 10 out of 10 users would respond with: “Yeah!” Be careful: What you think is Better may actually just be New.

+

NEW.

Your novel idea that’s never been tried with this product and audience. This is the riskiest part, so you want to isolate that idea and test it.

Start with what’s proven.

In order to implement the “Proven” part of this formula, there’s one idea that every product maker must get comfortable with: Copying what already works (legally).

I get it. There’s an inherent tension in really going after the “Proven.” We all want to be respected by our peers, so our egos hold us back. Copying also goes against every instinct that we have as product makers: We want to innovate! Copying other people’s work can feel distasteful, wrong, unfair, and not something we’d take pride in. In my experience, the more junior the product teams, the harder they try not to copy or even look as if they were copying.

But the greatest artists and product makers have often been the best at copying what’s already out there; they’ve stood on the shoulders of giants. Steve Jobs, the grandmaster of product making, famously said, “Good artists copy; great artists steal.” (Ironically, he stole this quote from Picasso, who was a master at tracing and copying other artists’ works before he created his own.) Only a master craftsman can spot excellence and be comfortable copying it.

If you’re truly ambitious, you need to stop worrying about getting respect from your peers. What looks innovative to your customers may not be impressive to the rest of your industry.

Steve Jobs spoke about this in 1997, when he addressed one of his first developer conference audiences about the new

Mac. “This whole notion of being so proprietary in every facet of what we do has really hurt us. It might be 10% better, but usually, it ends up being about 50% worse.”

Of course, if all we did as product makers was copy, people would have no reason to use our product instead of whatever we were copying. So that’s where our innovation zones of “Better” and “New” come in.

“Better” refers to something in the Proven product that you can do better in the eyes of the current audience, so that 10 out of 10 of those users will say, “Yeah, that’s better!”

“New” refers to the novel idea that is our real innovation zone. It’s something so new that it will get people to try, talk about, and even love our product. Here, we have to acknowledge just how hard it is to get an actual new idea that the world is ready for and wants. One of my maxims inside Zynga, repeated to this day, was “all New fails.” It’s not to discourage innovation, but rather to encourage experimentation and curiosity without presuming success. “New” is the shiny penny everyone wants to spend all their time on. We put all our hopes and dreams in imagining how our new idea can change the world. The disciplined product maker knows to isolate the new zone to derisk their product.

Here’s the process: Start with enough “Proven” that your product doesn’t fail for the wrong reasons. Find “Better” if you can, because it will increase your odds of success. Then, try lots and lots of isolated “New” ideas on top of your product until you get to something that does work. This process of isolated innovation will help you massively change your odds of success to come up with a winning product.

CASE STUDY / ZYNGA POKER

The fastest way to understand Proven Better New is to see the breakdown for the original Zynga Poker game from 2007.

Essentially, we took the *proven* table layout and game mechanics from online poker, made it *better* by removing the download, and added a *new* feature: real people, often your friends, with their pictures at the table.

Zynga came from my deep instinct that games could become a daily habit for busy adults. They just needed permission to play, which came in the form of being social and therefore somewhat produc-

tive. Games had always been “empty calories”—never considered a good use of time. I knew social gaming could be massive.

But Zynga Poker was so unambitious and noninnovative that it was embarrassing. It was just a poker game that looked exactly like every other—except for two simple changes.

One change—our *better* feature—was instant play with no download, because we built it in Flash for the web (which was novel at the time). This was a big deal, because I’ve always found you lose 80% to 90% of your audience when you require a download. No other games could afford to offer instant play over the web because they all offered real-money gambling, where security was crucial. We had an advantage because we were pursuing a free model.

Our other change was our *new* feature: showing players’ real identities with their Facebook profile pictures instead of random, creepy avatars. By isolating our new aspect to purely social elements, we could test our core hypothesis without reinventing everything else. When we saw that 25% of people were joining their friends at tables, we knew we were onto something big.

We called this social game mechanics,

**THERE’S AN
INHERENT TENSION
IN GOING AFTER
THE “PROVEN.” WE
ALL WANT TO BE
RESPECTED BY OUR
PEERS, SO OUR EGOS
HOLD US BACK.**

and it became Zynga’s entire innovation and growth engine. With social game mechanics, we built something no one had offered before: the integration of a player’s social network into their game board. This was how we disrupted the game industry.

CASE STUDY / SLACK

Now let’s look at how Proven Better New works in a totally different industry.

In 2012, Stewart Butterfield realized he had to make a hard pivot. His company, which had been building a massive multiplayer game called Glitch, was low on money with no prospects of more funding. People at the company asked themselves, “What can we do?” and realized they had this one internal engineering tool they all used. That was Slack.

Slack perfectly implemented the Proven Better New model against HipChat, an existing team collaboration tool. HipChat was a popular chat product used inside most large enterprises to manage internal communications, primarily between engineers. Here

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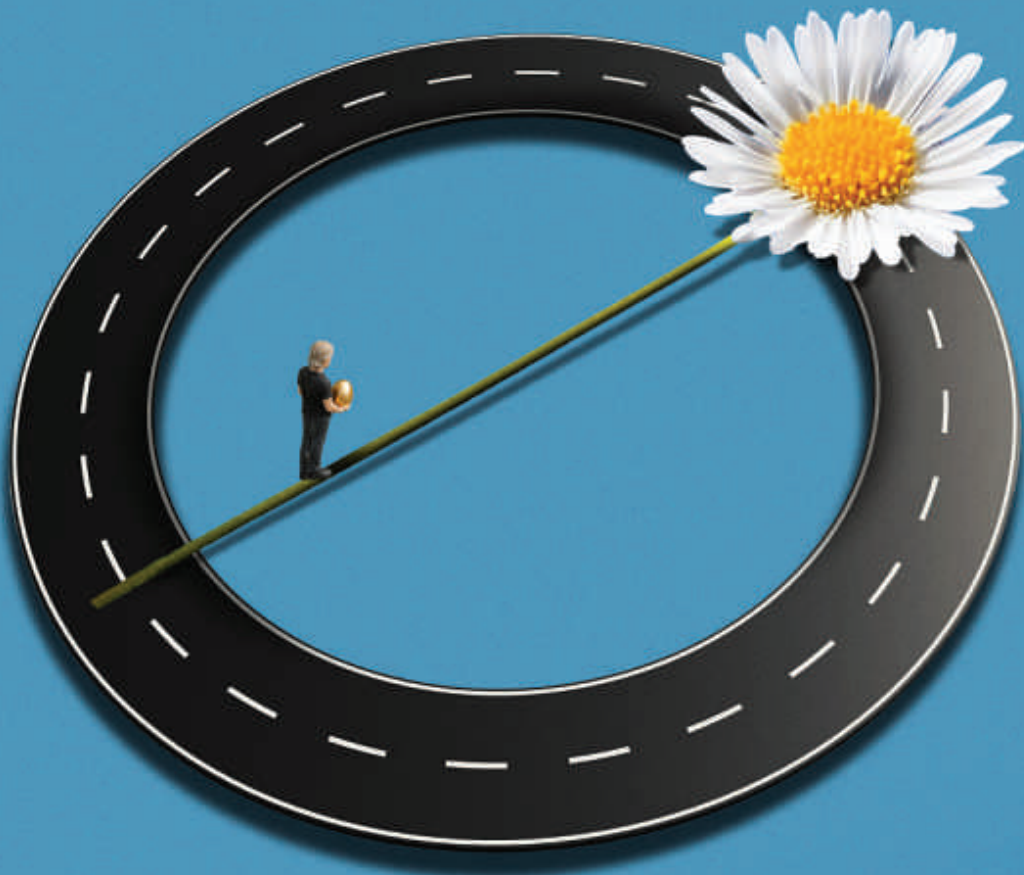
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was an enterprise product everyone had relied on that wasn't fun. Because Slack was the product of a game company, they built a more "cuddly" user interface on top of what was functionally still HipChat. Slack's Proven Better New strategy was to offer the exact same product, but make it better with an interface that felt more friendly. I don't even remember whether they had anything *new* initially. I do remember that the product greeted you with 25 different words for hello.

When the company launched the product as Slack, it spread virally: Eight thousand companies signed up within 24 hours. Everyone loved it—but they couldn't explain why. Inside Zynga, our IT group was rolling their eyes: "There's nothing different. Why are you forcing us to get this?" But the big idea of Slack was making very small innovations that were very meaningful to the end users (not to the IT department). The product spread through work groups and surpassed HipChat in a year. Eventually, Salesforce bought Slack for \$27.7 billion, making it one of the largest acquisitions in the software industry at the time.

Using AI for Proven Better New

AI is an amazing tool to get us leverage in implementing Proven Better New, and has already become a crucial and magical tool for product making. But so far, it can't replace what we humans add: creativity, empathy, and taste.

I had a lot of fun asking ChatGPT to deliver a Proven Better New analysis of several hit products to explain their success—and then to help us generate ideas for Better and New products. What I found was that AI is great at looking backward to analyze and explain the world around us. But as of today, it doesn't have the ability to distinguish between false and true signals. It can't ask 10 users what they'd say "Yeah!" to, and it has yet to match the human ability to predict and imagine new products, new markets, and new worlds.

AI and LLMs offer the potential to massively accelerate Proven Better New, but are also likely to homogenize, reducing both quirkiness and the potential to surprise and

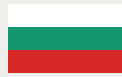
delight people. GPT can get you to a B-plus in seconds, but it might actually be pulling you away from getting to an A.

In a way, that's not too different from the risks of the Proven Better New formula itself. Years of deploying Proven Better New have shown me that the formula can become a crutch. It can deliver false signals in the form of B-plus products that never get to A-plus. Because you are copying successful products, you may get positive signals even when your unique new idea isn't that good.

A core philosophical question about product development is whether it is an art or a science. My answer is that it's both: The art is taste, and the science is process.

The best product makers don't chase novelty for its own sake; they start with what's been proven, build with discipline, innovate where it counts, and know when to break the rules to deliver something magical. **E**

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EMCO Ltd.

BULGARIA'S DEFENSE EDGE

Bulgaria entered 2026 with the profile of a country no longer defined only by cost competitiveness, but by resilience, industrial depth and a stronger place in Europe's strategic economy. The World Bank describes Bulgarian real GDP growth as "robust" at 3.1% in 2025, supported by domestic demand, private consumption and investment, while the IMF projects growth of about 2.8% in 2026. In a region where uncertainty has become the default operating environment, Bulgaria's EU access, NATO membership and export-oriented manufacturing give it a sharper investment story.

Few sectors show Bulgaria's changing role more clearly than defense. Across Europe, security spending has moved from a budget debate to an industrial priority: EU member states' defense expenditure reached €343 billion in 2024 and an estimated €381 billion in 2025, equal to about 2.1% of GDP, according to the Council of the European Union. SIPRI's latest data, released in April 2026, shows that military spending in Europe rose by 14% in 2025, the fastest increase of any region. For Bulgaria, this has turned a long-established industrial base into a more visible strategic asset, as the country combines NATO and EU membership with decades of manufacturing experience, skilled technical labor and export-oriented defense companies able to serve both European and international demand.

Part of that story is EMCO Ltd., a Bulgarian defense company built around manufacturing, trade and export of defense-related products. Established in the early 1990s, the company has grown into a major industrial employer, with around 3,500 people engaged in a wide range of operations activities from manufacturing to the commercial realization of the final product. Its production is overwhelmingly export oriented, with 99% of its capacity going abroad, especially to EU markets and former Warsaw Pact countries, while also reaching Africa, the Middle East, Asia and beyond.

EMCO's, as well as the Bulgarian's defense sector's position, is advantageous because it sits at the meeting point of two defense traditions. Bulgaria's industrial history gave it deep familiarity with Eastern standard equipment, while the country's Euro-Atlantic path opened Western markets and standards. For owner Emilian Gebrev, that dual knowledge is one of EMCO's defining advantages. "There are two main standards in the world: Eastern and Western. Until the 1990s, we were strongly linked to the East and manufactured products related to Eastern standards. Since then, we have also developed for the West. Today, we are in a unique position because we have know-how in both systems. There are only a handful of companies in the world able to develop and manufacture both



Emilian Gebrev
Founder & CEO

Eastern and Western calibers."

That capability matters in a market where demand is urgent, supply chains are tight and buyers focus on availability. EMCO presents itself not simply as a producer, but as a responsive partner. Gebrev says every request must be answered within 24 hours, and that in an industry where delivery can often take years, EMCO aims to deliver within the shortest possible time frames. "The defense industry is very specific because it is not always the cheapest offer that wins, but often the fastest one. Having the manufacturing capability to respond quickly, produce in the shortest possible

time, and still maintain quality and price competitiveness is what matters to our clients and leads to a solid presence in an otherwise currently chaotic market.

The discipline behind that speed is financial as much as operational. EMCO says its priority is not extracting profit, but reinvesting funds back into production, keeping resources in raw materials and production readiness so it can respond when orders arrive, while funds are directed towards enhancing the manufacturing's capacity and machine park. That model gives the company a stronger sales argument for governments, licensed partners and defense-sector customers: it can combine compliance, capacity and speed at a time when all three are scarce.

For Gebrev, EMCO's commercial case is also tied to confidence in Bulgaria's industrial identity. He sees the link between the state and the defense industry as inseparable, and believes the country has the foundations to be seen as a serious manufacturing and technology partner. "We are proud that EMCO is a Bulgarian company. Our factories, our main operations and our people are here, and we believe Bulgaria has the industrial talent and discipline to be recognized internationally for quality and reliability." In addition, Bulgaria's location at the South-Eastern border of the European Union, in the centre of the Balkan peninsula, not only symbolically represents its central role in this region, but enhances its importance as a defense partner.

Emco Ltd.'s present-day philosophy is quite simple: focus on the client without compromise with quality and delivery timelines. Its strengths are not abstract: experience, technical expertise, skilled staff, knowledge of both Eastern and Western systems, independence from debt and a reinvestment-led operating culture. In a European defense market defined by bottlenecks, those are not secondary details; they are the difference between discussing capacity and delivering it.



Entrepreneur | Authorities

SUMMER 2026

As any founder knows, the lessons that shape you most come from experience, often learned the hard way.

FROM MISJUDGED PARTNERSHIPS to scaling challenges and moments of doubt, these insights take shape in real time under real pressure. We asked a group of seasoned entrepreneurs and operators to reflect on the toughest lessons they've learned along the way and how those moments ultimately changed how they build, lead and grow. Their responses reveal a common thread: success in entrepreneurship depends not just on what you get right, but on how quickly you learn when things go wrong.





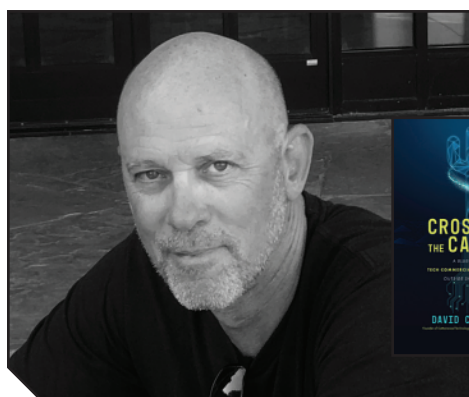
Colin C. Campbell

Co-founder of Startup Club, Tucows, Hostopia, Club Domains, GeeksforLess and Paw.com | Author of *Start. Scale. Exit. Repeat.*

THE BEST TIME TO EXIT is when markets are frothy, not when they start to fall. In 1999, we merged our 10-year-old company with a cable business. The stock surged from a \$180 million valuation to over \$1 billion. I was 29, and with 13% ownership, I was suddenly very wealthy, at least on paper. One year later, the company filed for bankruptcy protection. The dot-com crash hit. The Nasdaq fell from 5,000 to just over 1,100. The music stopped, and there weren't enough chairs.

That experience taught me two lessons. First, when you sell a company, you need liquidity or control. We had neither. We gave up control and agreed to an 18-month lockup. Second, bad things happen. In 2021, there were over 1,000 public listings. In 2022, that number dropped below 200.

Eight years after the dot-com crash, we sold our next company, and this time for all cash. The deal closed one month before the Lehman collapse.



David Blivin

Founder and Managing Director of Cottonwood Technology Funds | Author of *Crossing the Cactus*

BELIEF IN YOURSELF and perseverance around the roadblocks will make the difference. It's tempting to seek the approval of others and be guided by their feedback. But you know yourself best and need to trust your instincts. Peter Diamandis said, "The day before something is truly a breakthrough, it's a crazy idea." To make an impact, it's unlikely you can follow the conventional wisdom.



Ksenia Yudina

CEO and Co-Founder of Mostt | Author of *One Venture, Ten MBAs*

ONE OF THE BIGGEST lessons I learned while building a startup is that startups are a living system - constantly evolving, constantly presenting new variables, and constantly creating opportunities to adapt. The MBA degree can't fully replicate that environment. In school,

you learn frameworks, models, and structured decision-making. In a startup, the market moves in real time, customer behavior shifts quickly, and new challenges can become new advantages overnight.

What changed for me was realizing that success doesn't come from building one perfect strategy - it comes from building a company that can learn, adjust, and move faster than change itself. In startups, adaptability becomes the ultimate competitive edge.



Lisa Piercey

Physician | Investor | Author of *Natural-Born Entrepreneurs*

I BOUGHT A COMPANY with a long, successful track record and what looked like a solid leadership team already in place. Every seat was filled with someone who'd been there for years, so I assumed they were doing the work their titles described. What I couldn't see was that the founder had never actually built a team around her. She'd built a machine around herself, delegating tasks but never real ownership, and when she left, nobody knew what to do next.

I spent the better part of a year trying to develop people who had never actually been asked to lead, convincing myself I was missing something because how could this experienced team at this successful company actually be the problem? But that was exactly it. My gut had been right from the beginning, and I'd let a long track record talk me out of trusting it. I won't do that again.

Demos Parneros

Fortune 500 CEO, Advisor, and Board Member

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAN BECOME ALL-ENCOMPASSING if you let it. In the past, I've said yes to too many opportunities, sometimes without a clear filter for where I can truly add value.

Over time, I've learned to be more intentional about what to pursue. Now I pressure test everything against a simple framework: Can I meaningfully contribute? Can I learn something new? Does this have a real path forward? If it doesn't check those boxes, I'll pass on it.

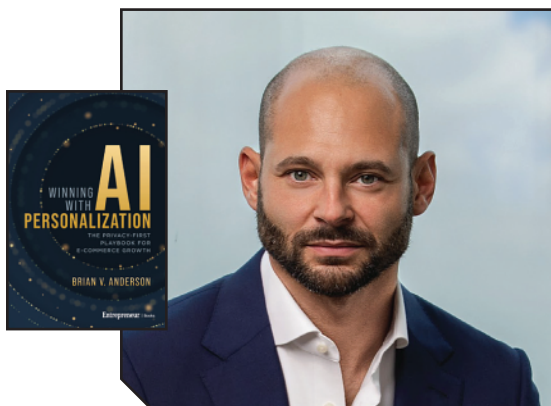
It's not just about improving time management; it's about effectiveness. It's easy to fall into the trap of equating activity with progress. What I've learned is that the more disciplined you are about where you engage, the more impact you can actually have.



Jonathan Hung

Managing Partner of Entrepreneur Ventures | Author of *Your Emergency Contact*

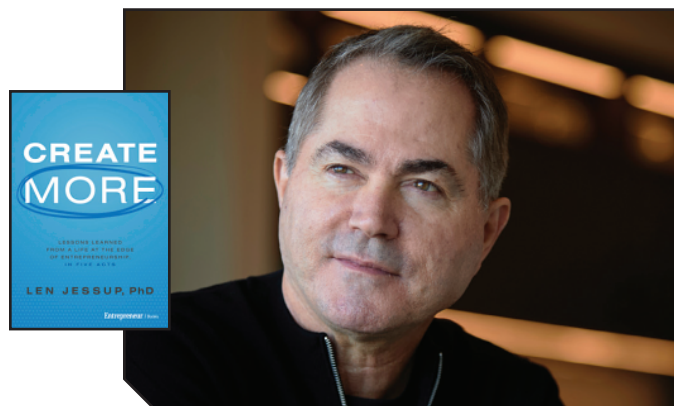
ONE CRUCIAL LESSON I learned the hard way in entrepreneurship is the danger of jumping into business partnerships too quickly without fully aligning on values and vetting the person's character. Early in my career, I would enthusiastically commit to partnerships after just a few conversations or a promising pitch deck—almost like marrying someone after only two dates. This eagerness led to painful missteps, most notably when I launched a startup called Legacy Pioneers. I provided the majority of the funding and connections, only to be pushed out by a co-founder who was all talk and wanted control. That experience taught me that people who look perfect on paper might lack the integrity required for a lasting, successful partnership. I also learned that funding a startup without clear, operational execution plans often means you are simply funding a founder's lifestyle.



Brian V. Anderson

CEO of Nacelle | Author of *Winning with AI Personalization*

TEST YOUR IDEAS before you build anything. Early in my career, I fell in love with solutions before validating that customers actually wanted them. You can spend months engineering something elegant only to discover the market doesn't care. The most expensive lesson I learned was that product-market fit isn't something you achieve after launch. It's something you have to hunt for before you write a single line of code. Now I treat every assumption as a hypothesis that needs evidence before it gets resources.



Len Jessup

Managing Partner, Desert Forge Ventures
Author of *Create More*

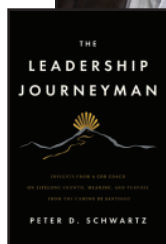
I GOT TO WATCH MY FATHER and family, who had small businesses, either as their full-time gig or on the side, and I got to see how hard it is to make them successful. I learned really early on what it feels like to earn money and be proud of the work that you do. As a junior faculty member, I tried to co-launch a software company and learned firsthand how difficult it is to have a full-time gig while remaining passionate about a side hustle. These were all really valuable lessons for me very early on. There are a couple of companies in particular that I'm very involved with today and, once again, I'm experiencing how difficult it is to get these startups across the finish line. It's impossible not to profoundly respect the founders with whom we work day-to-day.



Bradley Akubuiro

Partner at Bully Pulpit International | Author of *Faster. Messier. Tougher.*

I'M NOT AN ENTREPRENEUR MYSELF, but I have counseled many. What stands out to me most is the level of genuine belief you need in yourself and your vision. It's from that belief that you draw perseverance. Even the most qualified person in the world for what they're trying to do may still have the door slammed in their face 99 times before they get to that one yes, but one is often all you need. That's true of almost everything hard and meaningful: starting a business, building a brand, raising capital, writing a book. Vision, passion, hunger, humility, and work ethic all matter. But perseverance is what actually gets you through. A close second is to be prepared for the unexpected. That may seem hard when you're already spread thin, but the investment required to prevent a crisis is always smaller than what's required to manage one.



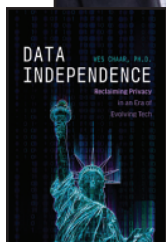
Peter Schwartz

CEO Coach | Author of *The Leadership Journeyman*

HOW TO BE VULNERABLE.

Trying to constantly be recognized for competence or as the smartest person in the room was getting in the way, so I developed a new strategy or internal operating system for performance that focused on what mattered most to

me and what I needed to do as a leader to get it. I shifted my internal operating system from “my” results to “our” results and began relating to my team in ways that brought out the best in them. I paid attention to what success in the role looked like and spent time developing and mentoring my teams. Finally, being vulnerable meant letting people see more of me, not just my cognitive strength, but my heart and passion for what mattered most to me. When my people saw that part of me, they gave me more buy-in and honesty in the conversations needed to overcome difficult situations.

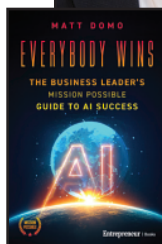


Wes Chaar

Data & Analytics Executive | Author of *Data Independence*

MOST BUSINESSES THINK they are selling a product. But in fact, they are really extracting trust. Early on, I focused on building better technology. What I learned is that if people don't trust the system, the system doesn't matter. In today's world, especially with

AI and data, trust is not a byproduct—it is the business model. And many companies still do not realize they are burning it.



Matt Domo

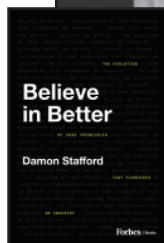
CEO of FifthVantage and Chairman of the Space Force Association | Author of *Everybody Wins*

BUILDING THE DATABASE DIVISION

at AWS from scratch. No playbook. No precedent. We were inventing a market that didn't exist yet, and everything downstream depended on getting

it right. What that experience burned into me permanently was the difference between building something that works

and building something that scales. A lot of teams build things that work. Very few build things that hold up when hundreds of millions of people are depending on them. I lead with that distinction in mind every single day.



Damon Stafford

CEO of Alpine Intel | Author of *Believe in Better*

HUSTLE DOESN'T SCALE.

In the early days of my company, I outworked every problem because I couldn't afford a team. And for a while, that works - grit and adrenaline can carry a

startup further than most people think. But there's a wall, and I hit it hard. The business was growing, but it was growing on my back, not on a foundation. All

institutional knowledge lived in my head and was done by hand. My hands. Nothing was repeatable. I was sprinting on a treadmill. The painful realization was that the process is what actually prints scalability. I stopped glorifying the grind and started building the machine. Entrepreneurship rewards the hustle that gets you started, then punishes you for not evolving past it.



Chris Festog

Chief Financial Officer at CrossPurpose | Author of *The CFO Advantage*

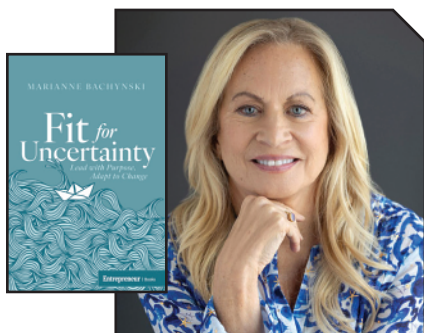
MY DAD HAD A GOOD CAREER as a Controller in several organizations and would always speak about different business opportunities he wanted to start but never did. I was determined not to have that happen. But it did! If you are good at what you do, there is a meaningful opportunity cost that quickly develops, making starting a business more costly. By the time I was in my late 20s, the time and salary costs to start a business had become too great.

My entrepreneurial spirit was lived out not by creating my own business but by either fixing struggling organizations or creating new businesses within larger organizations. This allowed me to fully express my entrepreneurial desire to build, innovate, create, and take risks while reducing my personal financial risk and leveraging the resources of a larger organization. It has been a great journey, but different from what I first imagined.

Jissan Cherian

Chief Marketing Officer | Founder, DVERSFY | Author of *Hack the Corporate Learning Curve*

WHEN I BECAME AN ENTREPRENEUR for the first time, there was a “honeymoon phase” in which colleagues from my former corporate world congratulated me for taking the bold step, and my family was ecstatic about this new chapter. However, after that initial excitement wears off, there is a realization that this can also be a lonely experience, with the weight of entrepreneurial success falling on the founder's shoulders. Every morning, my personal drive had to get me out of bed and willing to put in the long hours. I had to keep reminding myself of my purpose and why building a company was worth fighting for. I had to feel comfortable with the idea that there would be more losses than wins in the first 6 months as I pushed through the initial barriers of LLC setup, building a digital presence, and articulating the value I would bring to my customer base. Doing all of this while managing the personal finances to support my family, as the company was pre-revenue, required conviction and a drive I had never experienced before.



Marianne Bachynski

CIO Leadership | Board/C-Suite IT Strategic Advisor | Author of *Fit for Uncertainty*

YOUR PERSONAL BRAND must stand on its own. In corporate roles, your reputation is tied to the organization. I had to start from scratch: telling my own story, building my own network, and learning to stand on the strength of my own voice. It was uncomfortable at first, but it was a pivotal, empowering entrepreneurial lesson.



VISIT [BOOKS.ENTREPRENEUR.COM](https://books.entrepreneur.com) AND REQUEST A CONSULTATION TO DISCOVER HOW YOU CAN AMPLIFY YOUR AUTHORITY AS AN ENTREPRENEUR BOOKS AUTHOR.

Best of the Best Franchises

Want to buy a franchise and feel like you're making a safe bet? Here are the top performers in every franchise category. **by TRACY STAPP HEROLD**



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Franchising is competitive. No matter what kind of business you buy, there will be others like it. So how do you know which is the *best*?

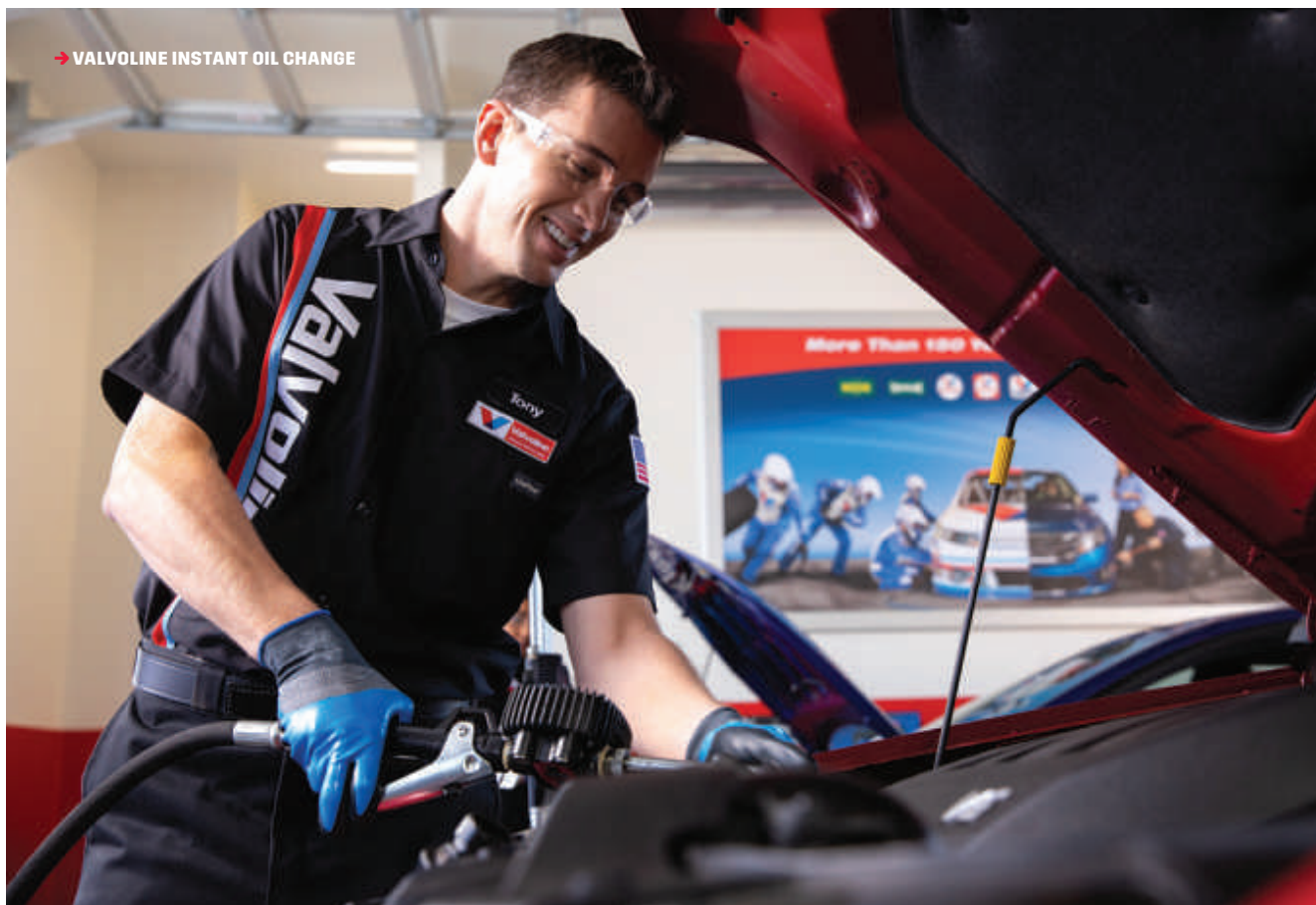
This list makes it easy: We're telling you the top-performing franchises across all industry types.

To understand how we do it, let's back up to where the data begins. Every year, we publish our Franchise 500 list—our definitive ranking of franchises, created after an exhaustive evaluation of more than 150 data points for each brand. We divide the brands into categories like Property Management, Advertising Services, Oil-Change Services, and every other slice of industry you could think of.

On the following pages, you'll see *only* the franchises that earned the top spot for each of those categories. These are the winners among winners. And this list is the quickest way to browse the types of businesses you're interested in, and identify the brands worth a closer look.

Keep in mind as you look through this list that it is not intended as a recommendation of any particular franchise brand. These are the “best” companies within each industry based on our metrics, but the best franchise for you is based on your individual circumstances, needs, and skills. Always do your research before investing in any opportunity: Read the company's legal documents, consult with an attorney and an accountant, and talk to franchisees.

→ VALVOLINE INSTANT OIL CHANGE



AUTOMOTIVE

Appearance Services

Ziebart

Vehicle appearance and protection services

STARTUP COST
\$450.1K-\$924K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
340/15

Car-Wash Services

Tommy's Express Car Wash

Car washes

STARTUP COST
\$4.98M-\$8.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
250/21

Oil-Change Services

Valvoline Instant Oil Change

Oil changes and preventive maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$192.4K-\$3.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,042/942

Repair & Maintenance Services

Midas

Auto repair and tires

STARTUP COST
\$341.7K-\$924.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,038/0

Tires & Wheels

Big O Tires

Tires, tire services, auto products

STARTUP COST
\$511.5K-\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
464/0

Window Tinting

Tint World

Auto, home, and business window tinting; vehicle wraps, mobile electronics, auto accessories, detailing services

STARTUP COST
\$249.95K-\$479.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
158/0

BUSINESS SERVICES

Advertising Services

Stroll

Monthly publications for upscale neighborhoods

STARTUP COST
\$2K-\$12.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
497/86

Business Brokerages

Transworld Business Advisors

Business brokerages; franchise consulting

STARTUP COST
\$104.1K-\$131.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
500/1

Business Coaching & Consulting

The Entrepreneur's Source

Franchise/business coaching and development

STARTUP COST
\$114.4K-\$133.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
255/0

Coworking Spaces

Office Evolution

Virtual office services, coworking spaces, executive-suite and conference-room rentals

STARTUP COST
\$193K-\$2.2M

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

Networking Groups

BNI

Referral-based business networking

STARTUP COST
\$53.4K-\$273.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,015/293

Printing/Marketing Services

Minuteman Press

Printing, graphics, and marketing services

STARTUP COST
\$81.99K-\$221.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,028/0

Property Management

Real Property Management

Property management

STARTUP COST
\$91.8K-\$234.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
448/0



Signs **FastSigns**

Signs, graphics, and visual communications

STARTUP COST
\$231.2K-\$386.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
793/0

Sign Maintenance/Installation

YESCO Sign & Lighting Service

Sign and lighting service and maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$65K-\$432.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
56/40

Staffing/Recruiting

Express Employment Professionals

Staffing, HR solutions

STARTUP COST
\$131K-\$598.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
838/5

Training Programs

Leadership Management International

Leadership and organizational training and development

STARTUP COST
\$20K-\$27.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
495/0

Miscellaneous Business Services

Sculpture Hospitality

Bar and restaurant management solutions

STARTUP COST
\$45.5K-\$64.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
254/12

CHILDREN'S BUSINESSES

Childcare

The Learning Experience Academy of Early Education

Preschool/educational childcare

STARTUP COST
\$780.8K-\$5.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
418/32

Children's Enrichment Programs: Art

Children's Art Classes

Art education for ages 3 to 18

STARTUP COST
\$134.3K-\$264.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
34/2

Children's Enrichment Programs: Music

School of Rock

Music education

STARTUP COST
\$425.3K-\$704.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
366/50

Children's Enrichment Programs: STEM

Snapology

STEAM education programs

STARTUP COST
\$74.95K-\$105.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
140/1

Children's Enrichment Programs: Miscellaneous

Drama Kids

After-school drama classes and summer camps

STARTUP COST
\$48K-\$57K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
181/0

Children's Fitness Programs: Sports

D-BAT Academies

Indoor baseball and softball training, batting cages, merchandise

STARTUP COST
\$536.5K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
189/0

Children's Fitness Programs: Miscellaneous

KidStrong

Physical fitness, leadership, and confidence-building training for children

STARTUP COST
\$448.1K-\$600K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
143/10

Children's Retail

Once Upon A Child

New and used children's clothing, equipment, and accessories

STARTUP COST
\$327.2K-\$462K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
439/0

Fundraising

Fundraising University

Fundraising

STARTUP COST
\$79.6K-\$84K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
67/5

Swimming Lessons

Goldfish Swim School

Infant and child swimming lessons

STARTUP COST
\$17M-\$7.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
186/6

Tutoring

Kumon

Supplemental education

STARTUP COST
\$73.1K-\$165.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
23,573/20

MASTER FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITY

90%

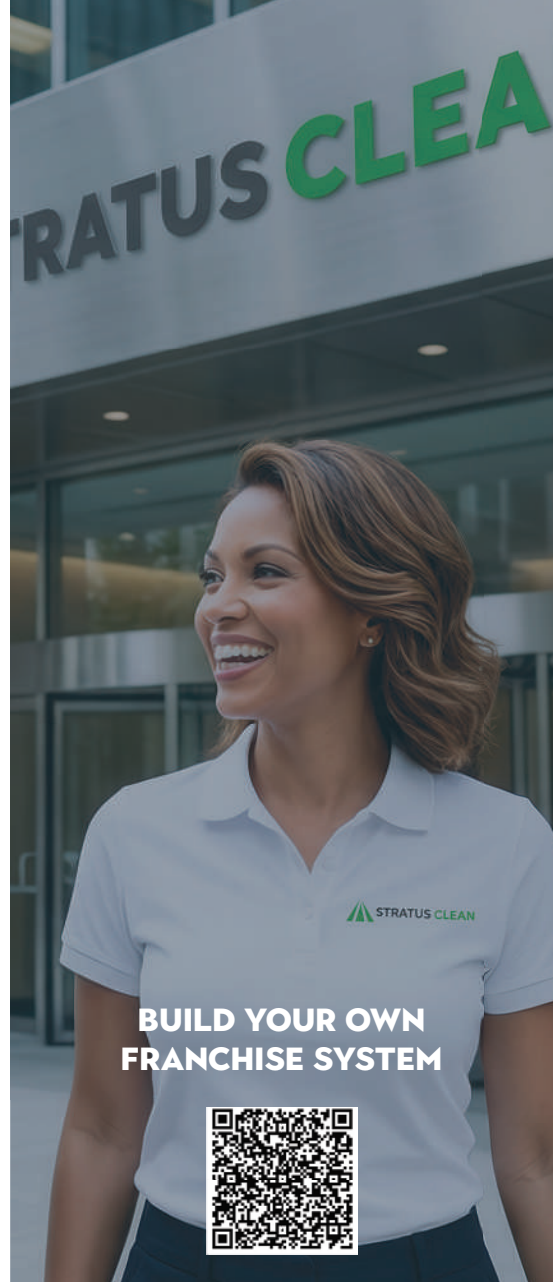
RECURRING REVENUE

\$3M+

AVERAGE GROSS ANNUAL REVENUE*

9

REVENUE STREAMS



BUILD YOUR OWN
FRANCHISE SYSTEM



*AS DISCLOSED IN THE 2026 STRATUS MASTER FRANCHISING FRANCHISE DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

STRATUSFRANCHISING.COM

→ AUNTIE ANNE'S



FINANCIAL SERVICES

Business Financial Services **Padgett Business Services**

Tax, accounting, compliance, payroll, and advisory services

STARTUP COST
\$8.7K-\$117K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
250/0

Insurance **Estrella Insurance**

Auto, home, and business insurance

STARTUP COST
\$12.3K-\$84K
TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
240/0

Tax Services **H&R Block**

Tax preparation, electronic filing, bookkeeping, and payroll services

STARTUP COST
\$34.1K-\$158.8K
TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,300/6,701

FOOD: FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

Breakfast/Brunch Restaurants **IHOP**

Family restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$1.8M-\$5.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,804/10

Pizza Restaurants **Boston's Pizza Restaurant & Sports Bar**

Casual-dining restaurants/sports bars

STARTUP COST
\$1M-\$3.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
416/1

Self-Pour Bars **Tapville Social**

Self-service beer and wine restaurants/kiosks/mobile units

STARTUP COST
\$100.5K-\$2.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
40/3

Sports Bars/Pubs **Buffalo Wild Wings**

Wings, bar food, alcohol

STARTUP COST
\$2.5M-\$4.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
602/645

Miscellaneous Full-Service Restaurants

Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar
Family restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$1.8M-\$5.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,568/47

FOOD: QUICK-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

Acai Bowls **Playa Bowls**

Acai, pitaya, coconut, kale, banana, mango, and oatmeal bowls; smoothies, juices, cold brew

STARTUP COST
\$281.96K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
342/30

Asian Food **Jinya Ramen Bar**

Ramen, tapas, craft beer

STARTUP COST
\$16M-\$3.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
73/5

Baked Goods: Cookies **Great American Cookies**

Cookies, cookie cakes, brownies

STARTUP COST
\$340.5K-\$462.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
414/0

Baked Goods: Doughnuts **ShIPLEY Do-Nuts**

Doughnuts, kolaches, pastries, coffee

STARTUP COST
\$516.5K-\$855.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
381/12

Baked Goods: Pretzels **Auntie Anne's**

Soft pretzels

STARTUP COST
\$156.2K-\$638.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,076/11

Baked Goods: Miscellaneous **Cinnabon**

Cinnamon rolls, baked goods, coffee

STARTUP COST
\$215.6K-\$675K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,127/29

Bakery Cafes **Paris Baguette**

Bakery cafes

STARTUP COST
\$727.4K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
3,884/139

Chicken **Wingstop**

Chicken wings, tenders, and sandwiches, fries, sides

STARTUP COST
\$298.2K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,764/54

Coffee **Dunkin'**

Coffee, doughnuts, baked goods

STARTUP COST
\$437.5K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
14,094/34

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Invest in a **recession-resilient, \$157B+ industry** with two top-dog brands.



Strong Industry



Bottom-Line Boost



Recession Resilient



Nationwide Availability



Wag N' Wash is a fast-growing, natural food, service-focused franchise you can grow with.

2%

**Starting
Royalty Fee**

\$1.2M*

**Average
Unit Volume**

1,000+

**Available
Locations**



Pet Supplies Plus is the #1 pet franchise with 30+ years of experience.

2%

**Starting
Royalty Fee**

\$2.6M**

**Average
Unit Volume**

700+

**Open
Locations**

Visit wagwashfranchising.com and petsuppliesplusfranchising.com

* This information can be found in Item 19 of the 2026 Franchise Disclosure Document issued by WNW Franchising, LLC. The data reflects the calendar year beginning January 1, 2025 and ending December 31, 2025, and shows the data for 11 reporting stores which were open and operating 12 months as of December 31, 2025. The discounted initial franchise fee applies only to franchise agreements executed on or before December 31, 2026; no other discounts apply. A new franchisee's results may differ from the represented performance.

** This information can be found in Item 19 of the 2026 Franchise Disclosure Document issued by PSP Franchising, LLC. The data reflects the calendar year beginning January 1, 2025, and ending December 31, 2025, and represents 385 reporting financial stores that were open and operating for 12 months as of December 31, 2025. There is no assurance you will do as well. If you rely on our figures, you must accept the risk of not doing as well. This is not an offer to sell a franchise. Franchises are offered by prospectus only.

There is no assurance you will do as well. If you rely on our figures, you must accept the risk of not doing as well. This is not an offer to sell a franchise. Franchises are offered by prospectus only. A new franchisee's results may differ from the represented performance. There is no assurance you will do as well. If you rely upon our figures, you must accept the risk of not doing as well. This is not an offer to sell you a franchise. Franchises are offered by prospectus only through the delivery of a franchise disclosure document. Certain states require that we register the franchise disclosure document in those states. The communication is not specifically directed to the residents of any of those states. Moreover, we will not offer or sell franchises in those states until we have registered the franchise (or obtained an applicable exemption from registration) and delivered the franchise disclosure document to the prospective franchisee in compliance with the applicable law.

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→ NOTHING BUNDT CAKES



Frozen Desserts: Ice Cream
Baskin-Robbins
 Ice cream, frozen beverages
STARTUP COST
 \$307.4K-\$622.6K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 7,910/0

Frozen Desserts: Ices
Kona Ice
 Shaved-ice trucks
STARTUP COST
 \$102.4K-\$226.8K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 1,930/4

Frozen Desserts: Miscellaneous
Yogen Fruz
 Frozen yogurt, soft-serve ice cream
STARTUP COST
 \$285.1K-\$754.7K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 468/0

Hamburgers
Culver's
 Specialty burgers, frozen custard
STARTUP COST
 \$2.6M-\$8.6M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 1,013/7

Hawaiian Food
L&L Hawaiian Barbecue
 Hawaiian-style food
STARTUP COST
 \$253.95K-\$838.5K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 224/7

Hot Dogs
Wienerschnitzel
 Hot dogs, ice cream
STARTUP COST
 \$519.1K-\$2.5M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 320/0

Mediterranean Food
Shah's Halal
 Halal food
STARTUP COST
 \$192K-\$410K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 106/19

Mexican Food
Taco Bell
 Mexican-inspired food
STARTUP COST
 \$934.8K-\$4.3M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 8,225/521

Pizza
Papa John's
 Pizza
STARTUP COST
 \$261.2K-\$853.4K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 5,623/554

Sandwiches: Philly Cheesesteak
Charleys Cheesesteaks & Wings
 Philly cheesesteaks, fries, wings, lemonade
STARTUP COST
 \$203.7K-\$984.7K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 823/69

Sandwiches: Submarine
Jersey Mike's Subs
 Subs and Philly cheesesteaks
STARTUP COST
 \$181.9K-\$1.4M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 3,107/24

Sandwiches: Miscellaneous
Arby's
 Sandwiches, fries, shakes
STARTUP COST
 \$644.95K-\$2.5M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 2,507/1,063

Seafood
Captain D's
 Seafood
STARTUP COST
 \$898.6K-\$1.4M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 232/291

Smoothies/Juices
Tropical Smoothie Cafe
 Smoothies, salads, wraps, sandwiches, flatbreads
STARTUP COST
 \$340.8K-\$814.5K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 1,595/1

Teas
Gong cha
 Bubble tea
STARTUP COST
 \$207.5K-\$648.5K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 2,069/93

FOOD: RETAIL SALES

Candy
Kilwins
 Chocolates, fudge, ice cream
STARTUP COST
 \$295.4K-\$880.3K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 174/4

Retail Baked Goods
Nothing Bundt Cakes
 Bundt cakes and gifts
STARTUP COST
 \$667.1K-\$1M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 714/8

Miscellaneous Food/Beverage Businesses
The Honey Baked Ham Co.
 Retail specialty foods, catering, cafes
STARTUP COST
 \$581.4K-\$876.95K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 212/233

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Assisted Stretching
StretchLab
 Assisted stretching
STARTUP COST
 \$269K-\$610.2K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 528/0

Autism Services
Success on the Spectrum
 Autism treatment services for children and young adults
STARTUP COST
 \$320.5K-\$848.2K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 72/1

Chiropractic Services
The Joint Chiropractic
 Chiropractic services
STARTUP COST
 \$245.3K-\$543K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 880/83

Fitness (General)
Planet Fitness
 Fitness clubs
STARTUP COST
 \$15M-\$5.2M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 2,487/275



Children's Art Classes

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Fitness: Barre

Barre3
Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$408.7K-\$650.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
170/6

Fitness: Boxing/Kickboxing

Rumble Boxing
Boxing and strength training group fitness studios

STARTUP COST
\$509.6K-\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
99/1

Fitness: Pilates

Club Pilates
Group Reformer Pilates classes

STARTUP COST
\$385K-\$839.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,319/0

Hormone Replacement

Gameday Men's Health
Men's hormone replacement therapy and wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$224.6K-\$410.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
368/6

IV Therapy

Prime IV Hydration & Wellness
IV therapy, micronutrient injections, NAD+ therapy, weight-loss solutions, hormone replacement therapy, wellness plans

STARTUP COST
\$187.7K-\$631.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
186/2

Mental Health Services

Ellie Mental Health
Outpatient mental health services

STARTUP COST
\$392.3K-\$679.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
255/0

Mobility Products & Services

Next Day Access
Wheelchair ramps, grab bars, stairlifts, and other accessibility and mobility products

STARTUP COST
\$176.2K-\$352.1K

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

Physical Therapy

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

STARTUP COST
\$167.9K-\$518.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
561/54

Urgent/Primary Care Clinics

American Family Care
Urgent care/primary care centers

STARTUP COST
\$955.5K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
321/82

Miscellaneous Health Products

The Good Feet Store
Arch supports, related products

STARTUP COST
\$256.3K-\$617.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
297/0

Miscellaneous Health Services

Pearle Vision
Eye care and eyewear

STARTUP COST
\$71K-\$1.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
460/106

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Fencing

Superior Fence & Rail
Fence sales and installation

STARTUP COST
\$133.5K-\$275.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
322/2

Flooring

Floor Coverings International
Flooring

STARTUP COST
\$182K-\$247K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
309/0

Glass Installation/Repairs

Glass Doctor
Auto/residential/commercial glass installation, repair, and replacement

STARTUP COST
\$152.9K-\$323.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
187/0

Insulation

Koala Insulation
Insulation services

STARTUP COST
\$189.1K-\$234.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
395/0

Kitchen & Bath Remodeling

Five Star Bath Solutions
Bathroom remodeling

STARTUP COST
\$162K-\$293.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
322/3

Lighting Services

Outdoor Lighting Perspectives
Residential landscape, architectural, holiday, and hospitality lighting

STARTUP COST
\$179K-\$222.2K

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

Organization/Storage Systems

Closets By Design
Custom closet and home/office organization systems

STARTUP COST
\$154K-\$511K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
86/6

Outdoor Space Construction/Remodeling

Archadeck Outdoor Living
Outdoor living space design and construction

STARTUP COST
\$120.4K-\$139.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
87/0

Painting

That 1 Painter
Residential and commercial painting and cosmetic repairs

STARTUP COST
\$113K-\$142K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
274/16

Roofing

Mighty Dog Roofing
Residential and commercial roofing, siding, window, gutter, and solar panel services

STARTUP COST
\$171.5K-\$223.97K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
362/0

Window Coverings

Budget Blinds
Window coverings, window film, rugs, accessories

STARTUP COST
\$100.5K-\$211.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,476/0

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Miscellaneous Home-Improvement Businesses
Window World
 Sales and installation of windows, doors, siding, roofing, and other exterior remodeling products

STARTUP COST
 \$123.2K-\$362.5K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 211/0

LODGING

Hampton by Hilton
 Upper midscale hotels
STARTUP COST
 \$15.2M-\$25.96M
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 3,148/0

MAINTENANCE

Biohazard Cleaning
Steri-Clean
 Biohazard cleaning
STARTUP COST
 \$85.8K-\$262.7K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 61/0

Carpet & Upholstery Services
Chem-Dry Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning
 Carpet, upholstery, wood floor, and area rug cleaning, tile and stone care, granite countertop renewal
STARTUP COST
 \$99.6K-\$240.99K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 1,545/0

Commercial Cleaning
Stratus Building Solutions
 Commercial cleaning
STARTUP COST
 \$4.7K-\$79.8K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 4,909/0

Commercial Kitchen Maintenance
Filta Environmental Kitchen Solutions
 Commercial kitchen maintenance services
STARTUP COST
 \$131.1K-\$153.8K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 379/0

Dryer Vent Cleaning
Dryer Vent Wizard
 Dryer vent cleaning, replacement, installation, and maintenance
STARTUP COST
 \$82.9K-\$159.4K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 192/0

Drywall Repair
PatchMaster
 Drywall repair and painting
STARTUP COST
 \$122.95K-\$157.95K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 161/4

Electrical Services
Mr. Electric
 Electrical services
STARTUP COST
 \$152K-\$314.9K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 238/0

Garage-Door Repair/Installation
Precision Garage Door Service
 Residential garage door repair, installation, and service
STARTUP COST
 \$164.3K-\$360.3K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 143/0

Home Repairs/Handyman Services
Ace Handyman Services
 Residential and commercial repairs, restoration, and maintenance
STARTUP COST
 \$131.99K-\$223.8K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 382/18

HVAC Services
Aire Serv
 HVAC services
STARTUP COST
 \$113.8K-\$271.7K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 224/0

Indoor Air Quality Services
Green Home Solutions
 Indoor air quality and remediation services
STARTUP COST
 \$115.96K-\$199.3K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 216/0

Lawn & Tree Care
Lawn Doctor
 Lawn, tree, and shrub care; mosquito and tick control
STARTUP COST
 \$150.1K-\$177.1K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 660/1

Leather & Vinyl Repair
Fibrenew
 Leather, plastic, and vinyl restoration and repair
STARTUP COST
 \$102.1K-\$122.3K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 317/0

Pavement Maintenance
EverLine Coatings and Services
 Parking lot striping and pavement maintenance
STARTUP COST
 \$183.5K-\$319.3K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 120/1

Pest Control
Pest Authority
 Pest control
STARTUP COST
 \$40.5K-\$105.7K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 346/1

Pet Waste Removal
DoodyCalls
 Pet waste management
STARTUP COST
 \$76.5K-\$93.9K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 123/0

Plumbing
Mr. Rooter Plumbing
 Plumbing, drain, and sewer cleaning
STARTUP COST
 \$122.3K-\$263.8K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 259/3

Pool Maintenance
Pinch A Penny Pool Patio Spa
 Swimming pool and spa retail; pool and backyard maintenance and repair services
STARTUP COST
 \$519.9K-\$837.2K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 302/1

Residential Cleaning
The Maids
 Residential cleaning
STARTUP COST
 \$117.7K-\$141.2K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 1,496/142

Restoration Services
Servpro
 Fire, water, and other damage cleanup, restoration, and reconstruction
STARTUP COST
 \$258.8K-\$379.5K
TOTAL UNITS
 (Franchised / Co.-Owned)
 2,345/0



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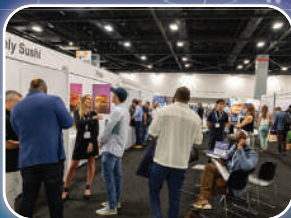
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START A BUSINESS



→ ZOOM ROOM

Window Cleaning Fish Window Cleaning

Low-rise commercial and residential window cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$107.2K-\$173.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
273/1

Miscellaneous Maintenance Businesses

Conserva Irrigation

Irrigation repair, maintenance, installation, and efficiency upgrades

STARTUP COST
\$125.8K-\$159.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
202/0

PERSONAL CARE

Hair Care (General)

Great Clips

Hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$187.8K-\$419.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
4,439/0

Hair Care: Children's

Sharkey's Cuts For Kids

Children's hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$197.4K-\$336.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
189/1

Massage & Spa Services

Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa

Massage, facial, skincare, body contouring, and waxing services

STARTUP COST
\$578.5K-\$871.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
645/15

Med Spas

VIO Med Spa

Skincare, cosmetic health, and wellness products and services

STARTUP COST
\$642.7K-\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
65/2

Salon Suites

Sola Salons

Salon studios

STARTUP COST
\$12M-\$19M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
671/69

Saunas

Perspire Sauna Studio

Infrared sauna and wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$565.5K-\$989.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
83/3

Senior Care

Senior Helpers

In-home senior care

STARTUP COST
\$149K-\$201K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
417/13

Skin Care

Clean Your Dirty Face

Facials, skincare products

STARTUP COST
\$130.5K-\$224.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
32/0

Tanning

Palm Beach Beauty & Tan

Tanning and wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$648.5K-\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
325/310

Waxing

European Wax Center

Body waxing services, skin and beauty products

STARTUP COST
\$327.6K-\$836.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,060/5

Miscellaneous Personal-Care Businesses

Restore Hyper Wellness

Wellness and recovery services

STARTUP COST
\$777.2K-\$1.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
205/12

PETS

Dog Training

Zoom Room

Indoor dog training and socialization, pet products

STARTUP COST
\$318.5K-\$497.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
60/4

Pet Care: Daycare/Boarding

Dogtopia

Dog daycare, boarding, and spa services

STARTUP COST
\$664K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
268/6

Pet Care: Dog-Walking/Pet-Sitting

Woofie's

Pet-sitting, dog-walking, mobile pet grooming

STARTUP COST
\$180.4K-\$294.7K

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

Pet Grooming

Aussie Pet Mobile

Mobile pet grooming

STARTUP COST
\$167.3K-\$208.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
152/0

Pet Stores

Pet Supplies Plus

Pet food and supplies, bathing/grooming services

STARTUP COST
\$520.3K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
495/234

RECREATION

Adventure Parks/

Entertainment Centers

Urban Air Adventure Park

Adventure parks

STARTUP COST
\$2.9M-\$7.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
201/4

DIY/Paint-&- Sip Studios

Color Me Mine

Paint-your-own-pottery studios

STARTUP COST
\$180K-\$437.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
136/1

Escape Rooms

Escapology

Escape rooms

STARTUP COST
\$626.5K-\$2.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
82/17

Golf

X-Golf

Indoor golf entertainment venues

STARTUP COST
\$993.5K-\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
129/4

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→ DREAM VACATIONS



Recreational Tours

TourScale

Mobile entertainment tours

STARTUP COST
\$140.1K-\$683.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
70/10

Sports Equipment & Apparel

Destination Athlete

Equipment, apparel, fundraising, and performance solutions for youth, high school, and college athletic teams

STARTUP COST
\$28.3K-\$93.6K

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

Travel Agencies

Dream Vacations

Travel agencies

STARTUP COST
\$2.6K-\$20.97K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,363/0

Virtual Reality

Sandbox VR

Virtual reality games

STARTUP COST
\$250.7K-\$2.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
26/37

Miscellaneous Recreation Businesses

American Poolplayers Association

Recreational billiard leagues

STARTUP COST
\$22.2K-\$30.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
373/5

RETAIL

Apparel & Accessories

Pro Image Sports

Licensed sports apparel and accessories

STARTUP COST
\$109.8K-\$605.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
172/0

Furniture & Appliances

Slumberland Furniture

Home furnishings

STARTUP COST
\$829.5K-\$3.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
69/50

Tools Distribution

Snap-on Tools

Professional tools and equipment

STARTUP COST
\$221.8K-\$500.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
4,396/212

Miscellaneous Retail Businesses

Ace Hardware

Hardware and home improvement stores

STARTUP COST
\$603.9K-\$2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
5,520/262

SERVICES

Dry Cleaning & Laundry Services

Tide Cleaners

Dry cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$709.7K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
256/0

Dumpster Rentals

Bin There Dump That

Residential-friendly dumpster rentals

STARTUP COST
\$116.2K-\$235.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
279/0

Embroidery & Screen Printing

Fully Promoted

Branded products and marketing services

STARTUP COST
\$129.4K-\$393.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
289/0

Home Inspections

WIN Home Inspection

Home inspections and residential maintenance inspections

STARTUP COST
\$38.3K-\$45.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
276/0

Hydraulic Hose Services

PIRTEK

Hydraulic and industrial hose maintenance, repair, and replacement

STARTUP COST
\$235.1K-\$666.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
772/0

Laboratory Services

Any Lab Test Now

Direct-to-consumer health, wellness, and DNA lab testing services

STARTUP COST
\$60K-\$298.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
241/7

Laundromats

WaveMax Laundry

Laundromats

STARTUP COST
\$356.5K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
63/1

Locksmith Services

Pop-A-Lock

Mobile locksmith and security services

STARTUP COST
\$117.6K-\$190.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
423/7

Moving/Junk-Removal Services

Two Men and a Truck

Moving, storage, and packing services

STARTUP COST
\$92.1K-\$506.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
384/1

Postal & Business Centers

The UPS Store

Shipping, packing, package management, mailboxes, printing, faxing, shredding, notary services

STARTUP COST
\$57.2K-\$608.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
5,818/15

Real Estate

Realty One Group

Real estate

STARTUP COST
\$47.3K-\$227.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
464/13

Real Estate Investing

Red Barn Homebuyers

Real estate investing

STARTUP COST
\$59.5K-\$257.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
141/9

Senior Relocation/Transition Services

Caring Transitions

Senior transition and relocation, online auctions, and estate liquidation management

STARTUP COST
\$70.8K-\$117.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
405/0

Miscellaneous Services

Signal

Private security guard and patrol services

STARTUP COST
\$157.7K-\$5.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,647/0

TECH

Electronics Repairs/Sales

Techy

Selling, buying, trading, and repair of consumer electronics

STARTUP COST
\$112.5K-\$399.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
164/3

IT Services

TeamLogic IT

IT managed services for businesses

STARTUP COST
\$109.5K-\$144.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
344/0



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The Unlikely Inspector

Jacqueline Gathers' husband died just before opening a franchise. She decided to build the business herself—and became the success nobody expected. **by KIM KAVIN**

Joseph Gathers wanted to own a home inspection franchise, and back in 2016, he was close to opening a Pillar To Post location in Brooklyn, New York. Then his cancer returned. He died soon after.

His widow, Jacqueline Gathers, didn't know anything about the home inspection industry, and she didn't have a license. At first, she had no interest in running the business. She even reached out to Pillar To Post about selling her husband's location back to them.

"But then I thought about all the hard work he had put into training and getting his license and starting the business," Jacqueline says. She wanted to honor his memory. And she realized she was being given a midlife opportunity. She was in her 50s, and after 30 years with the New York City Housing Authority, she was skilled at managing people and customer service. That's a competitive advantage with home inspectors, because many inspectors are, as she puts it, "a little rough around the edges."

After training and getting her New York State license, she finally opened her husband's location in 2018. "Home inspection is a white-male-dominated industry," says Gathers, who is Black. "I thought, *What in the world? How am I going to fit in here?* But I put one foot in front of the other."

It must have been incredibly difficult to take over your husband's franchise when he died.

It actually helped me through my grief. My youngest son had gone away to school, so I was in the house by myself. The business gave me a reason to get up, to go out every day, to manage my grief. It was rewarding.

What was it like as a woman doing home inspections?

A lot of the male brokers—they were very dismissive, to put it nicely. One even told me, "Who's going to give you busi-

ness?" I wish I were kidding. He was saying, *You don't belong here*. But not for nothing, I was probably smarter than my male counterparts. People started to pay attention. Most of my female realtors said they'd never seen a female inspector.

Do you still perform the property inspections yourself?

I don't do a lot of inspections now. I don't want to be on roofs or in basements anymore. I'll do some condos here and there, but I have a team. I spend my time teaching the home-inspection



component in seminars for first-time homebuyers.

How are you centering technology in your offering?

We have a package that includes a virtual tour and floor plan. In this day and age, people want a digital copy of their property, and they'll pay for it. For insurance purposes with an investment property, say, they have a virtual copy of what that property looked like before anything might happen. You can zoom in as close as a switchblade. We do a lot of million-dollar condos, and they don't bat an eye. They'll take that virtual tour and floor plan and email it to their contractor for a home-improvement project.

What else do you consider critical to your success?

Customer service. If you give somebody exceptional customer service, first they're shocked,

and then they're going to come back and tell their friends. I take those extra steps. I make a phone call to the client and say, "How did the inspection go? Do you have any questions?" Sometimes a client will call or email at 10:30 at night, and I respond. They always say, "Thank you for your quick response." I've had families where I did the mom's inspection, the daughter's inspection, the aunt's inspection—because they felt they got good service.

Some people might worry about starting a business in their 50s or 60s. What do you say to that?

Being older has helped me really be successful. I understand how to pick and choose battles. Some are not worth fighting. It's a waste of energy. I just remove myself from those scenarios and keep on doing what I'm doing.

The National Franchise Show



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Franchising From All Angles

Charles Bonfiglio has done a little of everything in franchising, including building and selling a franchise company to private equity. Here's his growth plan. **by KIM KAVIN**

If you want to understand franchising, ask Charles Bonfiglio. He's seen it from an unusually large number of angles.

First he became an area developer for Meineke in 1983, developing and owning six locations. Then he purchased a brand called Tint World, which specialized in automotive accessories and window tinting, and started franchising it in 2007. He grew it from six to 150 locations, which teed up his final act: a successful exit. He sold a stake of Tint World to Susquehanna Growth Equity in 2025, and has stayed on as CEO.

Now, even though he's in his 60s, Bonfiglio believes there's so much more to do. Susquehanna has surrounded him with an experienced executive team, and they see lots of growth ahead. "With these people they helped me bring in," Bonfiglio says, "I realized that I'm just getting started."

Here, he shares what he's learned about growing a company, and finding the right financial partner for the next chapter.

Some of your success with Tint World has included government contracts, like tinting windows for police cars. How did you get into that business?

When I started to open up bigger Meineke centers, they were costing more than the average Meineke. I had to go to all these meetings with the cities to get approvals. They started to know me. So I'd go to the Department of Labor and say, "Let me do your cars." I'd give a deal to all the teachers in the teachers' union.

How did you get involved with Susquehanna Growth Equity?

Up through 2024, I had all these

private equity people knocking on my door, and I said, "I'm not selling this unless I have a health issue or my son doesn't want to work with me or there's a downturn in the market." But then that year [2024], my son, who was at Emory business school, said, "I know you want to do it all yourself, but Mom wants a break." He's my son, and he cares about us, and he's smart.

We ended up with 142 private equity firms interested in Tint World. We narrowed it down, and on July 4, 2025, I got the Susquehanna offer. They really listened to what I wanted.



That sounds fast to close a deal of that nature.

I happen to be a very diligent person. I am careful with my folders, my subfolders, my naming conventions. I keep everything very organized. When I went through the due diligence process, I was so proud to give them all this great stuff. Boxwood Partners, which was my adviser, said that out of all the companies they ever sold, nobody had ever been more detailed. It cut the process down by months.

Looking back, what helped you get Tint World to where it is today?

What I focused on in the first 10 years was building the system and the business process.

I had to make a model where someone with less knowledge than me could come in and operate the system. After that, the brand identity—the interior of the store, the website, and the social media marketing. And then the right tech stack. Marketing without technology doesn't work. You have to be able to market to people, remarket to them—I learned all of this at Meineke.

When I was a franchisee, they used to spend 65% of our advertising fund on the brand and 35% on local stores. I flipped it around. Only 20% is brand awareness. The other 80% is direct-marketing leads for franchisees. Because as we grow the business, the brand awareness will grow.

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Burger King president
Tom Curtis has
become the brand's
new public advocate.

Burger King's president
is turning the brand
around—by taking
86,000 (*and counting*)
customer phone calls.

by **JASON FEIFER**

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF BURGER KING



Tom Curtis is the president of Burger King. But the average person had never heard of him.

That changed on February 17, 2026.

That's the day Burger King went live with a new video on TikTok and Instagram. It features Curtis walking through a Burger King and introducing himself to the camera. Then he shares his phone number and says, "I'd love to hear from as many of you as possible. So give me a call."

So far, more than 86,000 people have taken him up on it, sharing what they love and hate about the brand. Curtis takes as many of the calls as he can. His team takes the rest, gathering data and tracking what people are saying.

Why do this? Because Curtis believed that Burger King had lost its way. Over the past two decades, the King's crown became tarnished. The brand began relying heavily on discounts, was overshadowed by the savvy marketing of other fast-food brands like Popeyes and Wendy's, and began financially spiraling. In 2022, Burger King stores were driving about half the business of an average McDonald's. Franchisees were furious. Some went bankrupt.

Curtis saw this himself. He used to love Burger King as a consumer, but stopped going after a bad experience. "Then I watched the brand as a non-guest, and I didn't see any changes in the restaurant," he says. "So I was never inspired to go back for maybe 15 years."

And yet, he also saw something else: People still wanted to love Burger King. "The brand had gotten old, tired, irrelevant," he says. "But there was a latent love and nostalgia around the brand. People

wanted to return to it. They just needed a reason."

Curtis knew how to give them one. He'd spent a career at Domino's, rising through the ranks to become executive vice president of U.S. operations, and helping lead the pizza brand through its own famous turnaround. Burger King hired him as COO in April 2021, and he became the brand's president for the U.S. and Canada a few months later. That's when he began a quiet, steady process of fixing Burger King.

This is what most consumers didn't see, he says:

Although he gave out his phone number in 2026, the actual work of fixing Burger King started five years earlier. The phone-number stunt wasn't truly the beginning of a conversation; it was the announcement of an improved Burger King, and an invitation for fans to take another look.

So what happened in the years before that phone number appeared on-screen? Here

are four things Curtis did to turn the brand around.

1/ Rebuild trust by investing first, asking later.

When a new leader takes over a franchise brand, they usually do the same thing: They go on a tour, speaking with franchisees. Curtis knew exactly what he'd find: Years of declining sales, increased fees, and top-down mandates had created deep mistrust.

This dissatisfaction put

→ TOM'S VIRAL MOMENT

Tom Curtis gave out his phone number on social media. Millions saw it.



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Curtis in a bind. He needed to improve Burger King's product, stores, and marketing. All that takes money. But franchisees were likely in no mood—let alone the financial position—to front the cash.

"Franchisees are with these brands much longer than corporate personnel," Curtis says. "Most of the franchisees have been here for 10, 20, 30 years. Sometimes their parents and their grandparents were in the business." Which is to say: They've seen many new executives, and many new plans. Curtis needed to do more than just ask for their trust.

So when he launched his "Reclaim the Flame" plan in September 2022, it came with a two-step financial mechanism: Burger King corporate would invest in marketing and restaurant improvements first, before requiring any franchisee investment. Then, once restaurant-level profitability improved and the plan had been proven, franchisees would be expected to

reinvest in their locations.

Burger King began by investing heavily in operations—improving restaurant equipment, accelerating remodel programs, and working with franchisees to improve the actual guest experience. It also had to solve a marketing problem: Because Burger King's sales had declined for so long, the brand's advertising fund (which is fueled by franchisee sales) had gotten thinner and quieter. So corporate injected money into the fund to strengthen the brand's voice again—helping to drive business back into stores, which would then give franchisees the extra money they needed to reinvest in their restaurants.

This created what Curtis calls a virtuous cycle. Better operations led to better customer experiences, which led to increased sales, which provided more resources for further improvements.

The approach required patience and discipline.

Although Burger King saw improvements within the first year, it didn't make any immediate announcements about its plans or turnaround. "I would not have been comfortable going out and talking about Burger King or inviting people to come back to Burger King and promising them a better experience if we hadn't done the work first," Curtis says.

That point matters. A lot of brands want to apologize first and improve later. Curtis doesn't believe that's enough. "You cannot just say, 'I'm going to be better,'" he says. "The proof has to be in the pudding."

Once Burger King addressed its operational issues, it started to look more closely at the product—and asked what might be the biggest question of all: *Should it change the Whopper?*

2/ Innovate without undercutting.

The Whopper has been Burger King's signature product for almost 70 years. This is great,

in a way: It's known around the world, and many customers have been eating it their whole lives.

But as Curtis thought about refreshing the Burger King menu, he faced a delicate challenge. How do you improve an iconic product without alienating loyal customers?

His approach was methodical and customer-driven. His team explored every possible option, including some very large changes, but they also talked with customers. "Consumers told us loud and clear: 'Don't mess with it like that. Don't change it that much. We love the Whopper,'" he says. "Those conversations lead you to a different place than just the spreadsheet-driven consumer feedback that you get from doing focus groups on specific aspects of the burger."

So instead of dramatic reinvention, Curtis focused on "nuanced changes to elevate how we treat the Whopper and how we serve the Whopper." The improvements included a pillowy, glazed bun that helps sesame seeds stay on uniformly, creamier mayonnaise, and premium packaging that, in his words, wraps "this iconic product in a tuxedo instead of a leisure suit."

The changes were subtle but meaningful. "You could almost call those unremarkable changes," he says. But together, they preserved what customers loved about the Whopper while improving the experience.

That same principle also guided Curtis's thinking about Burger King's broader brand voice. For years, Burger King's marketing had oriented around what he calls the "creepy King"—a guy with an oversized king mask, doing weird and attention-getting things. The marketing was buzzy. It got peo-



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ple talking. But Curtis asked: *Is that actually good for us?*

“Burger King’s always been very interesting,” he says. “But I could introduce you to a lot of extremely interesting people that you probably don’t want to have an entire meal with. You’ve got to, at the same time, be a brand that people want to be around.”

That, too, became part of the turnaround: not just to make Burger King attention-grabbing, but to make it feel more genuine, appealing, and human.

3/ Become the face of accountability.

As Curtis and his team began to see success, they neared a major decision. How were they going to tell their turnaround story?

Burger King’s advertising agency and CMO Joel Yashinsky felt strongly: Curtis himself should face the public, tell everyone that the brand had changed, and invite feedback.

This had precedent. In 2009, when Domino’s Pizza made major changes, it launched a campaign often remembered as “Sorry We Suck.” The brand admitted that its pizza quality had suffered, and that people didn’t like it—and then essentially said: We hear you, and here’s how we’ve improved.

Curtis saw that campaign firsthand while working at Domino’s. Still, when he was asked to do something similar at Burger King, he hesitated.

“My first, second, third, and maybe fourth answer was absolutely not,” he says. “I’ve lived a life of anonymity and it’s been a happy life.” He also knew “how fickle social media can be,” and worried that his personality might not come through accurately in short-form content.

But his agency and CMO kept pushing. Then they made an

argument he couldn’t ignore.

“They said that if you are the leader of this brand and you speak passionately about it with us, why wouldn’t you be willing to share your point of view and how much you care about the brand with the public?” he says. “If the buck stops here with me and if I really am accountable to what goes on here, then I should be able to stand up and say that.”

This shaped the way he now thinks about executive visibility. He doesn’t think he should be the face of Burger King or appear in traditional advertising to brag about the company. But he *does* think executives can play a different role: the face of accountability.

“There’s a role for the leader to acknowledge that the buck stops here and that there’s a real

4/ Make customers your strategic intelligence.

This brings us back to February 2026, when Curtis gave out his phone number and 86,000 (and counting!) calls came in.

To handle the volume, Burger King had assembled a team months in advance. “We have people who will engage with every guest,” he says. If a customer strongly wants to talk directly to Curtis, they’re placed in a queue for him to call back. If the issue is specialized (say, a complaint about the digital experience), then a relevant senior leader may return the call.

This is what makes the campaign more than a stunt. Burger King is not just collecting anecdotes; it is routing and categorizing feedback, analyzing patterns, and turning them into action.

highly specific details about individual locations, as well as broader lessons that can shape future products and brand decisions.

“We are learning data points that we can use for brand actions,” Curtis says, including “new products that we should launch, products we should elevate, or products we should protect.”

Just as importantly, many of the calls are not complaints at all. Curtis says a surprising number come from customers who simply want to share a good experience—a great meal in eastern Maryland, a memorable visit in Paducah, Kentucky, a moment that reminded someone of childhood. He passes that praise back to store teams directly.

“A culture of praise will go a lot farther than a culture of criticism,” he says.

“

THE BRAND HAD GOTTEN OLD, TIRED, IRRELEVANT. BUT THERE WAS A LATENT LOVE AND NOSTALGIA AROUND THE BRAND. PEOPLE WANTED TO RETURN TO IT. THEY JUST NEEDED A REASON.”

human being that feels accountable to what every person feels when they go visit a Burger King,” he says.

To Curtis, that accountability is personal. “It hurts when I get a call and somebody’s been mistreated, or they got a bad product when they’ve spent their time and their money to come to our brand and given us their trust,” he says. “And it makes my day when somebody tells me about a special experience that they had with their family.”

That is the role he now sees for himself: not as the face of brand promotion, but as a reminder that real people are behind the brand—and that those people are listening.

Curtis says the company is using AI and spreadsheets to sort through the 86,000-plus data points. But he’s also careful to say that data alone is not enough.

“We have to prioritize the human interaction and listening to people and the emotion in their voice and the things that they’re passionate about directly,” he says.

That combination of human contact and structured analysis has produced practical insights. For example, Burger King learned that customers still love its Original Chicken Sandwich. They want better french fries. They see inconsistency in hospitality from one restaurant to another. And the company is also collecting

And all this, Curtis hopes, will continue to accelerate the virtuous cycle that began five years ago. Burger King invested in the company, saw a return, and then asked franchisees to invest more in their locations. As they did, profits rose, which allowed for more reinvestment. Now consumers are being invited to speak up, and their insights are being used to improve the brand, which should fuel even more consumer praise and feedback.

And if you have thoughts about it, Curtis would probably like to hear from you too. His number is 305-874-0520. **E**

Jason Feifer is the editor in chief of Entrepreneur.



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Top 150 Franchise Brands for Multi-Unit Owners

Want to own multiple franchise locations? With these brands, you can.

by TRACY STAPP HEROLD



Multi-unit ownership has become increasingly popular in the franchise industry—among both franchisees and franchisors. And there's good reason for that. For franchisees, owning multiple units can create economies of scale, diversify revenue streams, and allow for greater wealth generation. Meanwhile, many franchisors see an advantage in growing their systems via a smaller network of trusted multi-unit operators rather than a large network of single-unit owners.

But which franchisors offer the best opportunities for multi-unit franchisees? To find out, we started with each company's Franchise 500 score, based on an analysis of more than 150 data points in the areas of costs and fees, size and growth, support, brand strength, and financial strength and stability. We then considered factors more specifically related to multi-unit ownership—including multi-unit franchise fee discounts, what percentage of a brand's franchisees own multiple units, what percentage of a brand's total units are owned by multi-unit franchisees, how many units the average franchisee owns, and whether the brand sells only multi-unit or master license deals. After taking all of those elements into account, the 150 top-scoring companies became our Top Brands for Multi-Unit Owners for 2026, which you'll find on the following pages.

This list can serve as a great starting point if you're interested in venturing into multi-unit ownership or in expanding your existing portfolio, but keep in mind that it is not intended as an endorsement of any particular brand. Whether you plan on buying one unit or 1,000, it's vital to do your homework before investing in any franchise brand. So read the company's legal documents, talk to an attorney and an accountant, and meet with as many current and former franchisees as you can.

1

Taco Bell

Mexican-inspired food

STARTUP COST
\$934.8K-\$4.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
8,225/521

2

KFC

Chicken

STARTUP COST
\$1.9M-\$3.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
31,920/482

3

Jersey Mike's Subs

Subs and Philly cheesesteaks

STARTUP COST
\$181.9K-\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
3,107/24

4

Great Clips

Hair salons

STARTUP COST
\$187.8K-\$419.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
4,439/0

5

Sport Clips Haircuts

Haircuts for men and boys

STARTUP COST
\$288.5K-\$475K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,791/88

6

Palm Beach Beauty & Tan

Tanning and wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$648.5K-\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
325/310

7

McAlister's Deli

Sandwiches, salads, baked potatoes

STARTUP COST
\$1M-\$2.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
520/41



8

ihop

Family restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$1.8M-\$5.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,804/10

9

Wingstop

Chicken wings, tenders, and sandwiches; fries, sides

STARTUP COST
\$298.2K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,764/54

10

Jiffy Lube

Oil changes and preventive auto maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$236K-\$452.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,927/321

11

Smoothie King

Smoothies and smoothie bowls

STARTUP COST
\$346.4K-\$1.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,221/44

12

Crunch

Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$2.1M-\$5.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
512/5

13

Pet Supplies Plus

Pet food and supplies, bathing/grooming services

STARTUP COST
\$520.3K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
495/234

14

Goldfish Swim School

Infant and child swimming lessons

STARTUP COST
\$1.7M-\$7.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
186/6

15

Wireless Zone

Wireless devices, services, and accessories

STARTUP COST
\$201.9K-\$532.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
790/0

16

European Wax Center

Body waxing services, skin and beauty products

STARTUP COST
\$327.6K-\$836.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,060/5

17

The Joint Chiropractic

Chiropractic services

STARTUP COST
\$245.3K-\$543K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
880/83



18 Marco's Pizza

Pizza, pizza bowls, subs, wings, salads, cheese bread

STARTUP COST
\$286.7K-\$807.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,203/45

19 McDonald's

Burgers, chicken, salads, beverages

STARTUP COST
\$1.5M-\$2.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
42,059/2,054

20 Wendy's

Burgers, chicken sandwiches, breakfast sandwiches, sides

STARTUP COST
\$393.2K-\$2.99M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
6,945/402

21 The UPS Store

Shipping, packing, package management, mailboxes, printing, faxing, shredding, notary services

STARTUP COST
\$57.1K-\$608.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
5,818/15

22 Pizza Hut

Pizza, pasta, wings

STARTUP COST
\$462K-\$2.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
18,583/59

23 Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar

Family restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$1.8M-\$5.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,568/47

24 Paris Baguette

Bakery cafes

STARTUP COST
\$727.4K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
3,884/139

25 Budget Blinds

Window coverings, window film, rugs, accessories

STARTUP COST
\$100.5K-\$211.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,476/0

26 Sola Salons

Salon studios

STARTUP COST
\$1.2M-\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
671/69

27 Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen

Fried chicken, seafood, biscuits

STARTUP COST
\$504.5K-\$3.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
4,959/94

28 Cinnabon

Cinnamon rolls, baked goods, coffee

STARTUP COST
\$215.6K-\$675K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,127/29

29 Planet Fitness

Fitness clubs

STARTUP COST
\$1.5M-\$5.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,487/275

30 Midas

Auto repair and tires

STARTUP COST
\$341.7K-\$924.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,038/0

31 Bojangles

Chicken, biscuits, and breakfast

STARTUP COST
\$2.7M-\$3.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
564/266

32 Anytime Fitness

Fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$458.8K-\$907.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
5,612/11

33

Pop-A-Lock

Mobile locksmith and security services

STARTUP COST
\$117.6K-\$190.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
423/7

34

Valvoline Instant Oil Change

Oil changes and preventive maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$192.4K-\$3.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,042/942

35

Charleys Cheesesteaks & Wings

Philly cheesesteaks, fries, wings, lemonade

STARTUP COST
\$203.7K-\$984.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
823/69

36

Jack in the Box

Burgers, chicken sandwiches, tacos, salads, bowls, sides

STARTUP COST
\$1.9M-\$4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,032/146

37

My Salon Suite

Salon suites

STARTUP COST
\$994.97K-\$1.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
321/51

38

Auntie Anne's

Soft pretzels

STARTUP COST
\$156.2K-\$638.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,076/11

39

Kiddie Academy

Educational childcare

STARTUP COST
\$405K-\$6.95M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
354/1



Looking for your next brand? Leave the employee headaches behind.

A My Salon Suite® franchise requires zero on-site employees and offers consistent recurring revenue.

We were recently named a Top Franchise for Multi-Unit Owners because our system is built from the ground up for multi-unit growth, in fact, our average franchise partner owns three locations.

- Average EBITDA 40%
- Top Quartile EBITDA 54.8%
- 88.8% Average Occupancy for units open 24+ months



My Salon Suite has been life-changing for me. I worked in the corporate world for 17 years, I worked at several large Enterprise companies. I did a lot of Global traveling and while some of that was sexy we made good money, I was not in control of what I was working on or who I was working with when I had to travel.

My Salon Suite started as a side hustle for us in 2019 and has become the primary source of income for our family. I quit my corporate job and I'm not looking back, I love it!"

John & Melanie Ludden
Multi-Unit Owners
North and
South Carolina



Mark Jameson • Chief Development Officer
214.346.5679 | mark.jameson@propelledbrands.com
mysalonsuite.com/franchise

Part of the Propelled Brands portfolio which is the Franchisor of FASTSIGNS® International, Inc., MY SALON Suite® and Camp Bow Wow®.

*Per the 2026 Franchise Disclosure Document ("FDD"). Results are estimates only, and there is no assurance you will achieve similar results. If you rely on these figures, you must accept the risk. Average center sales are based on gross sales reported by 264 franchised locations operating in the United States for the full year ended December 31, 2025. Average owner benefit is based on unaudited operating statements submitted by franchised locations and derived from the 2025 year-end benchmark study, as described in Item 19 of the 2026 FDD. See Item 19 of the FDD for additional details, including definitions, reporting criteria, assumptions, and limitations.



40 RNR Tire Express

Tire and custom wheel sales and rentals

STARTUP COST
\$711.6K-\$1.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
183/24

41 Wiener schnitzel

Hot dogs, ice cream

STARTUP COST
\$519.1K-\$2.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
320/0

42 Mountain Mike's Pizza

Pizza, wings, salad bar, appetizers, desserts

STARTUP COST
\$476.5K-\$982.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
311/0

43 Hotworx

24-hour infrared sauna fitness studios

STARTUP COST
\$252.2K-\$1.2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
771/7

44 Koala Insulation

Insulation services

STARTUP COST
\$189.1K-\$234.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
395/0

45 Burger King

Burgers, fries, breakfast

STARTUP COST
\$2.1M-\$4.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
18,555/1,177

46 Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers

Frozen custard, steakburgers, hot dogs

STARTUP COST
\$785.9K-\$2.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
529/36

47 Servpro

Fire, water, and other damage cleanup, restoration, and reconstruction

STARTUP COST
\$258.8K-\$379.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,345/0

48 Subway

Subs, salads

STARTUP COST
\$238.6K-\$536.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
35,622/0

49 Del Taco

Mexican/American food

STARTUP COST
\$1.5M-\$3.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
472/116

50 Take 5 Oil Change

Oil changes

STARTUP COST
\$912.2K-\$2.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
496/767

51 Mathnasium Learning Centers

Math tutoring

STARTUP COST
\$127.3K-\$165.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,255/4

52 Pearle Vision

Eye care and eyewear

STARTUP COST
\$71K-\$1.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
460/106

53 Kona Ice

Shaved-ice trucks

STARTUP COST
\$102.4K-\$226.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,930/4

54 Club Pilates

Group Reformer Pilates classes

STARTUP COST
\$385K-\$839.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,319/0

55 Chem-Dry Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning

Carpet, upholstery, wood floor, and area rug cleaning, tile and stone care, granite countertop renewal

STARTUP COST
\$99.6K-\$240.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,545/0

56 Big O Tires

Tires, tire services, auto products

STARTUP COST
\$511.5K-\$1.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
464/0

57 Circle K

Convenience stores

STARTUP COST
\$934.5K-\$8.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
2,873/11,049

58 Slim Chickens

Chicken tenders, chicken wings, salads, sandwiches, wraps

STARTUP COST
\$1.2M-\$4.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
279/11

59 Sylvan Learning

Supplemental education, STEM camps, college prep

STARTUP COST
\$117.6K-\$288.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
604/0

60 Zaxbys

Chicken wings, fingers, sandwiches, and salads

STARTUP COST
\$1.4M-\$3.8M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
835/145

61 Mosquito Shield

Outdoor pest control

STARTUP COST
\$120.5K-\$157.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
392/23

START A FRANCHISE BUSINESS WITH A SYSTEM BUILT TO SCALE

With our top franchise grossing over \$20,000,000* in 2025, PuroClean is a proven system engineered for long-term performance in the essential property damage restoration industry. With 44% of PuroClean Franchise Owners operating multiple units, our model is built to support scale, structure, and sustained performance.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Scan to see how you can build a scalable business with PuroClean.



PuroCleanFranchise.com

*This figure represents the results of a single franchisee identified in Item 19 of our Franchise Disclosure Document ("FDD"). Individual financial performance will vary based on numerous factors. Prospective franchisees should carefully review the full FDD — including Item 19 — and consult with their own legal, financial, and business advisors before making any investment decision.



62 Bin There Dump That

Residential-friendly dumpster rentals

STARTUP COST
\$116.2K-\$235.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
279/0

63 Firehouse Subs

Subs

STARTUP COST
\$379.7K-\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,372/42

64 Five Star Bath Solutions

Bathroom remodeling

STARTUP COST
\$162K-\$293.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
322/3

65 Lawn Doctor

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

STARTUP COST
\$150.1K-\$177.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
660/1

66 ProSource Wholesale

Wholesale kitchen, bath, and flooring products

STARTUP COST
\$945.8K-\$961.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
148/3

67 Superior Fence & Rail

Fence sales and installation

STARTUP COST
\$133.5K-\$275.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
322/2

68 Kitchen Tune-Up

Kitchen remodeling and cabinetry updates

STARTUP COST
\$129.9K-\$188.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
260/0

69 Tropical Smoothie Cafe

Smoothies, salads, wraps, sandwiches, flatbreads

STARTUP COST
\$340.8K-\$814.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,595/1

70 Gameday Men's Health

Men's hormone replacement therapy and wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$224.6K-\$410.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
368/6

71 Orangetheory Fitness

Heart-rate-based group interval workout classes

STARTUP COST
\$821.6K-\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,436/15

72 Snap-on Tools

Professional tools and equipment

STARTUP COST
\$221.8K-\$500.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
4,396/212

73 The Honey Baked Ham Co.

Retail specialty foods, catering, cafes

STARTUP COST
\$581.4K-\$876.95K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
212/233

74 Benjamin Franklin Plumbing

Residential and light commercial plumbing services

STARTUP COST
\$143.3K-\$286.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
400/10

75 Tide Cleaners

Dry cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$709.7K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
256/0

76 Phoenix Salon Suites

Salon suites

STARTUP COST
\$721.3K-\$1.4M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
377/44

77 The Good Feet Store

Arch supports, related products

STARTUP COST
\$256.3K-\$617.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
297/0

78 Ziebart

Vehicle appearance and protection services

STARTUP COST
\$450.1K-\$924K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
340/15

79 PuroClean

Property damage restoration and remediation

STARTUP COST
\$233.5K-\$277.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
505/0

80 The Goddard School

Preschool/educational childcare

STARTUP COST
\$952.5K-\$8.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
675/0

81 Urban Air Adventure Park

Adventure parks

STARTUP COST
\$2.9M-\$7.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
201/4

82 ASP-America's Swimming Pool Company

Swimming pool maintenance, repairs, renovations, and construction

STARTUP COST
\$84.4K-\$210.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
395/0

83 Floyd's 99 Barbershop

Haircuts, hair coloring, shaves, retail products

STARTUP COST
\$399.5K-\$767.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
67/73



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2026

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350+ SCHOOLS
 Open or in Development

~\$2.0M AUV
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Being #1 for 10 years isn't luck – it is the result of a proven model built for franchisee success, growth, and reinvestment. Our franchisees are creating real opportunities to build generational wealth while making a meaningful impact on children's lives. And there is still room at the top for you to join the Goldfish family.

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The offer of a franchise may be made only by delivering a franchise disclosure document. Certain states require that we register the franchise disclosure document in those states. We are not directing the communications to the residents of any of those states. Moreover, we will not offer or sell franchises in those states until we have registered the franchise (or obtained an applicable exemption from registration) and delivered the franchise disclosure document to the prospective franchisee that complies with applicable laws. * Numbers based on 2026 FDD.



99

British Swim School

Swimming and water-survival lessons for all ages

STARTUP COST
\$122.7K-\$176K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
364/0

100

American Family Care

Urgent care/primary care centers

STARTUP COST
\$955.5K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
321/82

101

Hello Sugar

Waxing, sugaring, and laser hair removal

STARTUP COST
\$90.98K-\$736.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
204/19

102

Ace Hardware

Hardware and home improvement stores

STARTUP COST
\$603.9K-\$2M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
5,520/262

103

Denny's

Full-service restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$953.4K-\$3.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,412/62

104

Buddy's Home Furnishings

Rent-to-own home furnishings, electronics, and appliances

STARTUP COST
\$375.7K-\$797.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
189/32

105

Scenthound

Routine hygiene and wellness care for dogs

STARTUP COST
\$323K-\$550.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
161/6

84

ShelfGenie

Custom pull-out shelving for cabinets, pantries, and closets

STARTUP COST
\$55.3K-\$148.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
286/15

85

Aussie Pet Mobile

Mobile pet grooming

STARTUP COST
\$167.3K-\$208.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
152/0

86

Jamba

Smoothies, juices, bowls

STARTUP COST
\$468.9K-\$928.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
783/1

87

Tommy's Express Car Wash

Car washes

STARTUP COST
\$4.98M-\$8.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
250/21

88

The Habit Burger Grill

Burgers, sandwiches, salads, sides, shakes

STARTUP COST
\$1M-\$2.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
76/303

89

PJ's Coffee of New Orleans

Coffee, tea, pastries, sandwiches

STARTUP COST
\$522.5K-\$1.7M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
190/0

90

Express Employment Professionals

Staffing, HR solutions

STARTUP COST
\$131K-\$598.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
838/5

91

Taco John's

Mexican food

STARTUP COST
\$390K-\$2.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
326/7

92

Right at Home

In-home senior care and personal care

STARTUP COST
\$94.3K-\$176.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
777/6

93

RE/MAX

Real estate

STARTUP COST
\$45K-\$245.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
8,588/0

94

Spherion Staffing & Recruiting

Staffing and recruiting

STARTUP COST
\$211.7K-\$423.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
189/3

95

VIO Med Spa

Skincare, cosmetic health, and wellness products and services

STARTUP COST
\$642.7-\$1.1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
65/2

96

Kilwins

Chocolates, fudge, ice cream

STARTUP COST
\$295.4K-\$880.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
174/4

97

Cold Stone Creamery

Ice cream, sorbet, ice cream cakes, shakes

STARTUP COST
\$335.7K-\$655.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,479/2

98

Dogtopia

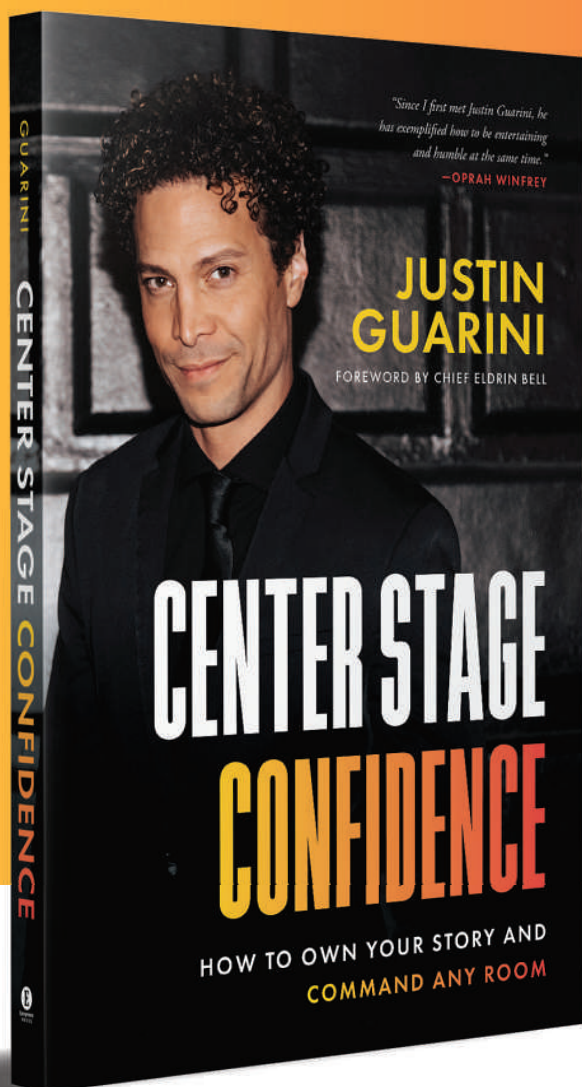
Dog daycare, boarding, and spa services

STARTUP COST
\$664K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
268/6



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→ TRANSWORLD BUSINESS ADVISORS

106 Lightbridge Academy

Early childhood education and childcare

STARTUP COST
\$1M-\$7.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
65/20

107 Mighty Dog Roofing

Residential and commercial roofing, siding, window, gutter, and solar panel services

STARTUP COST
\$171.5K-\$223.97K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
362/0

108 Sonny's BBQ

Barbecue restaurants

STARTUP COST
\$865K-\$1.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
88/2

109 Transworld Business Advisors

Business brokerages; franchise consulting

STARTUP COST
\$104.1K-\$131.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
500/1

110 Massage Envy

Therapeutic massage, hot stone massage, stretch therapy, facial and skin care services

STARTUP COST
\$695.8K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
993/0

111 Aqua-Tots Swim Schools

Swimming lessons

STARTUP COST
\$1.6M-\$2.9M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
171/1

112 StretchLab

Assisted stretching

STARTUP COST
\$269K-\$610.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
528/0

113 That 1 Painter

Residential and commercial painting and cosmetic repairs

STARTUP COST
\$113K-\$142K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
274/16

114 USA Insulation

Home insulation and energy-efficient products

STARTUP COST
\$304.4K-\$476.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
96/1

115 EverLine Coatings and Services

Parking lot striping and pavement maintenance

STARTUP COST
\$183.5K-\$319.3K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
120/1

116 Gatsby Glass

Commercial and residential glass installation products and services

STARTUP COST
\$195.7K-\$255.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
111/0

117 Nothing Bundt Cakes

Bundt cakes and gifts

STARTUP COST
\$667.1K-\$1M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
714/8

118 Glo Tanning

Tanning

STARTUP COST
\$757.2K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
86/6

119 Bumble Bee Blinds

Installation and repair of blinds, shades, and shutters

STARTUP COST
\$164.7K-\$210.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
204/0

120 Scooter's Coffee

Coffee, espresso, smoothies, pastries, breakfast items

STARTUP COST
\$692.2K-\$1.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
854/24

121

Primrose Schools

Educational childcare

STARTUP COST
\$742.9K-\$8.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
541/0

122

Stand Strong Fencing

Fencing, railing, staining, and sealing

STARTUP COST
\$160.2K-\$241.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
199/0

123

Pest Authority

Pest control

STARTUP COST
\$40.5K-\$105.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
346/1

124

Mister Sparky

Residential electrical maintenance, repair, and replacement services

STARTUP COST
\$133.3K-\$276.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
220/6

125

The Learning Experience Academy of Early Education

Preschool/educational childcare

STARTUP COST
\$780.8K-\$5.6M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
418/32

126

Rolling Suds

Commercial and residential power washing

STARTUP COST
\$186.2K-\$251.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
76/2

127

The Maids

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$117.7K-\$141.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
1,496/142



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128
KidStrong
Physical fitness, leadership, and confidence-building training for children

STARTUP COST
\$448.1K-\$600K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
143/10

129
Biggby Coffee
Specialty coffee, tea, smoothies, energy drinks, baked goods, sandwiches

STARTUP COST
\$242.2K-\$973K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
466/0

130
Ellie Mental Health
Outpatient mental health services

STARTUP COST
\$392.3K-\$679.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
255/0

131
Filta Environmental Kitchen Solutions
Commercial kitchen maintenance services

STARTUP COST
\$131.1K-\$153.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
379/0

132
Weed Man
Lawn care

STARTUP COST
\$81.2K-\$109.4K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
336/33

133
One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning
Heating and cooling repairs, replacements, and maintenance; indoor air quality services

STARTUP COST
\$143.3K-\$286.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
403/28

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134

Fyzical Therapy & Balance Centers

Physical therapy, balance and vestibular therapy, preventive wellness services

STARTUP COST
\$167.9K-\$518.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
561/54

135

Molly Maid

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$139.9K-\$197.2K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
444/0

136

Batteries Plus

Batteries, light bulbs, and related products; device repair

STARTUP COST
\$262.6K-\$496.99K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
604/135

137

Estrella Insurance

Auto, home, and business insurance

STARTUP COST
\$12.3K-\$84K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
240/0

138

Skyhawks & SuperTots Sports Academy

Children's fitness programs

STARTUP COST
\$57.8K-\$89.8K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
79/51

139

Re-Bath

Bathroom remodeling

STARTUP COST
\$275.9K-\$606.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
139/3

140

Wetzel's Pretzels

Soft pretzels, lemonade, hot dogs

STARTUP COST
\$183K-\$712.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
426/35

141

Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa

Massage, facial, skincare, body contouring, and waxing services

STARTUP COST
\$578.5K-\$871.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
645/15

142

Schlotzsky's

Sandwiches, pizza, soups, salads

STARTUP COST
\$647.9K-\$1.95M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
275/28

143

Amada Senior Care

Home care, medical staffing, assisted-living placement

STARTUP COST
\$118.2K-\$430.1K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
275/6

144

The Little Gym

Child-development/fitness programs

STARTUP COST
\$420.3K-\$722.7K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
370/1

145

Wild Birds Unlimited

Backyard bird-feeding supplies and nature gift items

STARTUP COST
\$226.6K-\$378.98K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
363/1

146

Golden Chick

Chicken

STARTUP COST
\$497.5K-\$2.3M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
209/19

147

Gold's Gym

Health and fitness centers

STARTUP COST
\$1.8M-\$4.5M

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
520/60

148

Two Maids

Residential cleaning

STARTUP COST
\$93.4K-\$149.9K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
165/0

149

Griswold

Nonmedical home care

STARTUP COST
\$99.6K-\$180.6K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
210/11

150

Two Men and a Truck

Moving, storage, and packing services

STARTUP COST
\$92.1K-\$506.5K

TOTAL UNITS
(Franchised / Co.-Owned)
384/1



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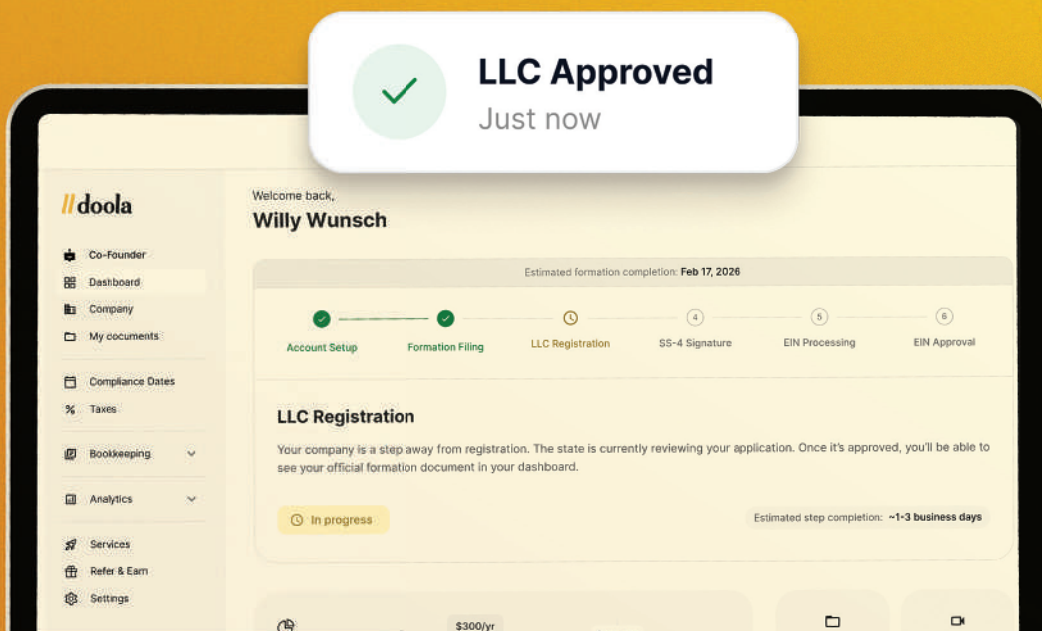


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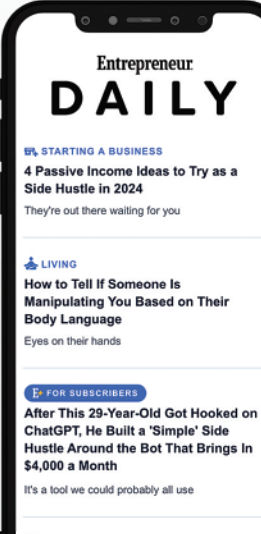
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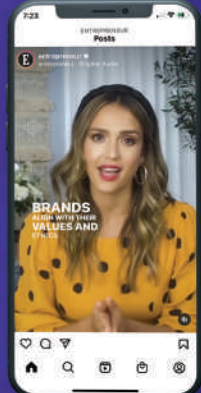
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Keep Going When Everything Hurts

by Leah Solivan, founder, Taskrabbitt

I keep a pair of worn ballet slippers in my closet. The fabric is faded from hours of rehearsal, and the soles are marked from years of turning, stopping, and starting again. Sometimes I put them on just to feel that muscle memory come back. These old shoes remind me of something important: *You must keep going when everything hurts.*

Long before I founded Taskrabbitt or ever pitched a venture capitalist, I spent years training as a ballerina. Ballet teaches you both physical and psychological discipline. You are expected to make something incredibly difficult look effortless, and to move with control and precision even when your body aches.

There is no moment when you stop and explain that you are struggling. There is no pause to let the audience in on what your feet feel like. You learn early that your job is to hide the pain—and to perform in spite of it.

That same skill set would become useful later, as I built a technology company. Rejection came regularly. Mistakes happened often. My job was to *perform anyway*. Once, as I arrived at an investor meeting, I accidentally slammed my hand in a car door. I knew instantly that it was broken. I also knew I did not have the luxury of stopping, because I was already fighting an uphill battle as a solo female founder trying to raise capital. So I took a moment to reset, and then walked in and shook every hand with full contact—the kind that says: *You can trust me.*

In this way, I controlled what the room could see. People saw a confident tech executive, because that's what I chose to show them.

Today, as an investor with my fund Precedent.vc, I want to see this same skill in founders. I'm not looking for someone who has it all figured out. Instead, I'm looking for someone who can execute when things break. I want founders who feel the pressure, but who don't let it define or distract them. They must learn to *execute* confidence, just the way they'd execute any other deliverable. Because after you do that enough times, you can carry confidence into any room.

Just like a ballet dancer does on any stage.



→ **ON POINTE**
Leah Solivan's
ballet slippers.

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