

A Teen With Cerebral Palsy Pitched a Creative Product in School. He Got a B- – Then Grew the Business to \$5 Million a Year Anyway.

As a young teen, Drew Davis got really into hot sauce.

Davis, who has cerebral palsy, weighed 300 pounds at age 14, and doctors said he'd be bedridden by 18 if he didn't make a major lifestyle change. The low-calorie condiment, along with other dietary adjustments, helped him lose 150 pounds over the course of the year.



Image Credit: Courtesy of Crippling Hot Sauce. Drew Davis.

The following year, Davis had to finish a school assignment –

and his hot sauce passion came into play again. "It was two days before it was due," Davis tells *Entrepreneur*, "so I looked down, and I'm like, *Huh, I like making fun of myself, and I like hot sauce. Let's do Crippling Hot Sauce.*"

Davis's business idea was about much more than the product itself, though: On a mission to inspire and support the disabled community, Davis committed to donating 5% of all sales to cerebral palsy research.

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Davis wrote up his business plan and presented it, convinced that he'd receive 100% on the assignment. But he got an 82%, or a B-. When he asked his teacher why, he was told it was a "good idea" – but "unrealistic." Instead of letting the feedback deter him, Davis just used it as motivation.

Using \$3,000 he'd saved up, Davis launched Crippling Hot Sauce in 2023 out of his parents' kitchen in small-town Missouri. He was 18 years old.



Image Credit: Courtesy of Crippling Hot Sauce

"We're on a mission to show that no matter your situation,

anything is possible.”

Two years later, the brand has sold more than 500,000 bottles, generated \$2 million in 2024 and is on track for \$5 million in 2025. It’s available in over 500 retail stores and has also gone viral on social media, racking up tens of millions of views – all while staying true to its original mission and donating 5% of its profits to cerebral palsy research.

“We’re on a mission to show that no matter your situation, anything is possible,” Davis says. “[We’re] rewriting people’s perceptions around the disabled community through humor and breaking down stereotypes.”

However, like all young entrepreneurs, Davis had to contend with some ups and downs on his journey to success.

Davis put his initial \$3,000 investment to good use. The money funded a trademark, health permit and festival fees. A Google search helped him find a hot sauce base recipe, which he tweaked to make his own flavors.

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Leaning into his original vision for bold, humorous branding, Davis first released Just for the Parking (Mild), Limping (Medium) and Crippling Agony (Hot). Now, the brand boasts three additional flavors: Life’s a Beach (Mild), Special Treatment (Medium) and Ghost Pepper Palsy (Hotter).

“Growing up, the No. 1 thing all my friends that had disabilities and I had in common was our humor,” Davis says. “[But for people who] aren’t in the community, it was always this thing that you couldn’t joke about because they didn’t want to hurt somebody’s feelings. We need people to know that

we don't have to be babied. The disabled community makes jokes just like you. Our humor is how we get through a lot of things in life."



At launch, Crippling Hot Sauce sold out to family and friends within 35 minutes, and Davis was “hooked.” He made another batch the next week and landed his first commercial client, a local butcher shop.

Davis notes that growing a brand requires a lot of “boots on the ground” efforts. Fortunately, he hired his best friend from third grade to help him in that aspect. Although Davis says not being able to do the physical work was challenging at times, he never let it stop his business’s growth. Crippling Hot Sauce built on its momentum at festivals to get into its first big regional grocery store.

Earned media and social media have also been game changers for the young brand, Davis says. The brand’s story took off on TikTok organically – a major marketing push that required zero capital. The wide reach has helped millions of people connect with the brand and its mission, solidifying Crippling Hot Sauce’s seven-figure status.

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Image Credit: Courtesy of Crippling Hot Sauce

"Life is short, and when your time is up, you don't want to have any regrets."

As Davis looks to the future of Crippling Hot Sauce, he's excited to see how growing his platform continues to foster new connections and amplify inspiring stories across the disabled community.

" I want my platform to be a place where people can get

inspired and motivated and not down about their situation,” Davis says. “It can be easy for that to happen no matter if you are old, young, no matter your race. [Hopefully] having a young person that is disabled have [this] platform will resonate with underdogs.”

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For other young entrepreneurs who want to chase big dreams and start businesses of their own, Davis has some succinct but indispensable advice: “Just go out and do it.”

“When you’re young is the time to take all the risk in the world,” Davis says. “I started with \$3,000. You could do it with \$100. You have a way better chance with going out there and trying to achieve your dreams than just sitting on the sidelines and hoping your dreams come to you. Life is short, and when your time is up, you don’t want to have any regrets.”

This article is part of our ongoing Young Entrepreneur® series highlighting the stories, challenges and triumphs of being a young business owner.

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