Most Entrepreneurs Approach Culture the Wrong Way. Here's What They're Missing.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Entrepreneurship is not simply a matter of innovation or capital investment. It is the act of entering a domain — an economic spacetime — defined by its own norms, expectations and conduct. Entrepreneurs often refer to these contextual forces as "culture," but they rarely unpack what this term truly means. In practice, culture is not an abstract or academic concern; it is the very infrastructure that governs business behavior in a given domain.

A business domain is not just a market opportunity. It is a new geography or a different industry that an entrepreneur steps into to venture a business or to initiate a new transaction. Each domain is embedded in a specific spacetime, and each spacetime inherits a living, breathing culture. Entrepreneurs who fail to understand this culture face constraints not because of written laws, but because of unwritten norms — what people expect, how they interact, what they value and how they trust.

The interdependency between law and culture

Culture is not separate from the law. It is the foundation of it. Contemporary legal systems are not engineered in a vacuum; they are legislated through the lens of prevailing socio-economic customs. These customs form the invisible boundary of

what is acceptable or expected. Thus, culture is the primary source of legal context, not merely its reflection. Laws are written with assumptions about how people behave. They are structured around what society permits and prohibits, which is itself a derivative of culture.

Understanding this interdependency between law and culture is not optional for entrepreneurs – it is foundational. The governing rules of any spacetime, be they legal or commercial, reflect the conduct of the people within it. They mirror the accepted norms, the unwritten etiquette of interaction and the systemic trust or distrust that fuels the economy. In simpler terms, the rules of the game are set by how the society functions. And society functions according to the culture that shapes it.

Yet most entrepreneurs approach culture as a peripheral topic, something to be managed through branding, communication or internal HR. That is a mistake. Culture is not an add-on to business. It is the context in which the business exists. Studying regulations without studying culture is like learning the words of a language without understanding their meaning. You may comply on paper but fail in practice.

Business culture must not be generalized or imported. It must be adaptive and contextual. Every entrepreneurial venture is embedded in a local spacetime, and the organization's culture must reflect that. A business operating in Tokyo cannot assume the cultural rules of Seattle. A startup in fintech must not adopt the same cultural principles as a legacy manufacturing firm. Organizational culture, in this sense, is not a choice – it is a necessity. It must reflect the spacetime in which the business operates.

This is why cultural studies are more essential than regulatory studies for entrepreneurs. Legal compliance is procedural. Cultural alignment is strategic. Councils and legal advisors may provide interpretations of existing

regulations, but it is the entrepreneur – who architects the enterprise – who must understand the deeper context that surrounds those laws. Without this understanding, legal compliance becomes shallow, and the organization remains culturally incompatible with the domain it seeks to serve.

Entrepreneurs must become anthropologists of their target spacetime. They must study the living patterns of behavior, the symbolic codes, the assumptions and the embedded logics that people carry in their daily economic transactions. These are not just soft insights. They are the operating system of the domain. The more an entrepreneur understands these codes, the better positioned they are to design a business model that fits, rather than disrupts, the flow of that spacetime.

Cultural alignment is not only about market entry. It defines internal operations as well. How people work, how they communicate, how they evaluate risk and how they define leadership – these are all cultural constructs. An organization built without reference to the culture in which it operates will struggle with internal coherence. It may recruit the right talent, develop the right products and access the right capital, but it will suffer from persistent misalignment with its environment. That misalignment is what causes business models to fail – not the lack of innovation, but the lack of resonance.

Furthermore, understanding culture allows the entrepreneur to decode the “why” behind every regulation. When you grasp the cultural foundations of a society, you no longer see laws as arbitrary rules to follow. You see them as social contracts emerging from a collective understanding of order, fairness and risk. This is crucial because it transforms the entrepreneur’s relationship with the legal environment – from external compliance to internal coherence.

The mindset shift you need to make

What does this mean in practical terms? It means the entrepreneur must shift from a legalistic mindset to a contextual one. Instead of asking, “What are the rules?” they must ask, “Why do these rules exist in this form, at this time, in this place?” That question leads to a deeper appreciation of the spacetime context and informs better decision-making – not only for legal and operational planning but also for brand positioning, partnership formation and long-term scaling.

The entrepreneur’s role is to synthesize. Not just to bring together capital, labor and technology, but to fuse their venture with the cultural DNA of the domain they enter. This synthesis is what makes a business not just viable but sustainable. It allows the business to evolve with its spacetime rather than against it.

In the end, entrepreneurship is a contextual act. It does not exist in a vacuum. It is always situated, always embedded, always bound by the spacetime it occupies. Success does not come from disrupting blindly; it comes from aligning wisely. Entrepreneurs must, therefore, treat culture not as a variable but as a constant – one that defines the possibilities and limits of their business domain.

Entrepreneurship is not simply a matter of innovation or capital investment. It is the act of entering a domain – an economic spacetime – defined by its own norms, expectations and conduct. Entrepreneurs often refer to these contextual forces as “culture,” but they rarely unpack what this term truly means. In practice, culture is not an abstract or academic concern; it is the very infrastructure that governs business behavior in a given domain.

A business domain is not just a market opportunity. It is a new geography or a different industry that an entrepreneur

steps into to venture a business or to initiate a new transaction. Each domain is embedded in a specific spacetime, and each spacetime inherits a living, breathing culture. Entrepreneurs who fail to understand this culture face constraints not because of written laws, but because of unwritten norms — what people expect, how they interact, what they value and how they trust.

The interdependency between law and culture

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-culture-shapes-success-more-than-capital-or-innovation/493941

‘Consumers Deserve Better’: How Superstar QB Patrick Mahomes Is Brewing a Better Future for Coffee Drinkers

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Whether you’re a three-time Super Bowl champion or an aspiring entrepreneur, most Americans share one thing: a love of (and borderline *addiction to*) coffee. Those ground, roasted beans

are arguably the backbone of the American workforce, fueling star quarterbacks to office workers — and everyone in between.

Unfortunately for health-conscious consumers, options can be limited. You're often stuck choosing between a sugar-packed latte or a bitter cup of black coffee. Throne SPORT COFFEE is here to change that.

Backed by lead investor and Chiefs superstar Patrick Mahomes, Throne SPORT COFFEE is a healthy, ready-to-drink coffee option designed to give you the boost you need to compete at a high level, whether on the field or in the office.

"Consumers are more informed about what they put into their bodies," CEO and founder Michael Fedele tells *Entrepreneur*. "And the reality is, especially with some of the leading products out there, they deserve better."

Related: Travis Kelce and Patrick Mahomes Are Opening a Restaurant in Homage to Their Football Careers

Brewing the next big brand

Fedele is no stranger to the beverage industry. Before founding Throne, he worked at Coca-Cola, managing major brands such as Powerade and Vitaminwater. His success there caught the attention of Vitaminwater's co-founder, who brought him on to a new startup: Bodyarmor.

Fedele took the leap, leaving his comfortable role at Coca-Cola to become Bodyarmor's Director of Marketing. It proved to be the right move. He spent over nine years at the company, leading all marketing efforts from 2012 to 2021, when Bodyarmor was, fittingly, acquired by Coca-Cola.

"In 2012, I was basically a one-person marketing team," Fedele says. "By the time I left in 2021, I was leading a team of over 35 people, overseeing everything from brand management and product innovation to packaging, creative, athlete

partnerships, media, digital and social.”

After the 2021 sale of Bodyarmor, Fedele wore several hats — consultant, advisor, investor — until the idea for Throne Coffee struck.

Reflecting on his time at Bodyarmor, Fedele realized nearly every athlete he worked with had one thing in common: they always had coffee in hand during meetings.

“I started asking, why coffee?” he recalls. “They said it’s clean caffeine, low in sugar and cream, and gives them the energy to power through the day.”

That prompted a follow-up question: What brand do they reach for?

“They were like, ‘we don’t have one,'” Fedele says.

So he seized the opportunity.

Related: How You Brew Your Coffee Could Be Harming Your Health

MVP caliber ingredients

What sets the company apart, aside from having a three-time Super Bowl champion as its lead investor, is its focus on clean, natural ingredients. According to Fedele, the top-selling ready-to-drink coffee has roughly 300 calories and 47 grams of sugar.

“For anyone mindful of what they put into their body, it’s frustrating to settle for low-quality caffeine options,” he says.

Throne SPORT COFFEE products, by contrast, are independently tested and NSF Certified for Sport. Its Premium Charged Cold Brew Line is dairy-free with 150mg of natural caffeine, and 40% less sugar and calories than some well-known competitors, while the Premium Charged Lattes contain 10 grams of protein.

“There’s growing awareness around ingredients and the impact they can have on your body,” Fedele says. “We’re intentional about everything we include. We use natural caffeine, flavors and sweeteners.”

For Mahomes, it’s a game-changer.

“I didn’t use to drink coffee before working out, because I didn’t like how it made me feel,” Mahomes tells *Entrepreneur*. “I was only drinking black coffee at the end of the day because I didn’t want the sugar.”

Now, he can’t get enough of it, knocking back Throne SPORT COFFEE daily.

“I drink probably too much,” the quarterback laughs. “Usually before my early morning workouts, but I also use it throughout meetings and even in the evenings while putting my kids to bed.”

Making a versatile beverage was central to Fedele’s strategy. He didn’t just want to serve pro athletes; he wanted something that fit into anyone’s routine.

“We wanted to create a product that keeps you going, whether you’re throwing touchdowns like Patrick or gearing up for a day of Zoom meetings like me,” Fedele says.

Related: A ‘Higher’ Purpose: NBA Legend Carmelo Anthony is Entering a New Industry — and Breaking Barriers for Black Entrepreneurs

Mahomes takes the throne

Mahomes has dozens of endorsement deals, with brands like State Farm, Adidas and Oakley in his portfolio. But his relationship with Throne is different. He’s not just a spokesperson for the brand — he’s its second-largest shareholder behind founder Michael Fedele, having invested a

substantial amount of his own money.

His involvement began in 2023 when Fedele personally pitched him the idea.

“As someone who loves coffee and truly cares about what I put into my body, it felt like the perfect match,” Mahomes says. “It was really cool to be involved from the start – talking about ingredients and finding something that was both healthy and tasted great. I’m grateful to Michael for letting me be part of the process.”

Despite his demanding schedule, Mahomes stays actively engaged with the company.

“Michael sends out updates in a group message every day to keep us in the loop,” he says. “Whenever I have free time, I try to give input.” He’s also a regular presence in offseason meetings, helping shape the brand’s growth strategy from the inside.

Externally, Mahomes is the face of the brand, most recently spearheading its new ad campaign, ‘This. Not That.’

“Consumers work hard to stay healthy, so it’s crazy they have to compromise just to grab a ready-to-drink coffee,” Fedele says of the new campaign. “They deserve better. Throne SPORT COFFEE offers a clean alternative, and when you compare the ingredients and nutrition panel, the difference is clear.”

Just two years in, Throne has already secured a major investment from one of the world’s premier athletes, bringing both visibility and credibility to its nutritional claims. And with Mahomes still in his prime at 29, the brand’s potential is only beginning to take shape.

“Our vision is to disrupt the coffee category and bring something truly new to the table,” Fedele says. “Ready-to-drink coffee has become a stale, predictable space. It’s time

for something bold.”

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/consumers-deserve-better-how-superstar-qb-patrick/494557

Value-Based Pricing Has Gotten Popular — But It Doesn’t Always Work. Here’s How It Could Derail Your Business.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Value-based pricing has become something of a holy grail in the world of service businesses. The theory is seductive: Instead of charging by the hour or offering rigid packages, you price your services based on the value they deliver to the client. If your support helps someone generate $100k in revenue, why shouldn’t you charge $10k instead of $2k?

This approach can lead to higher margins and more premium clients, but it comes with downsides. When it doesn’t work, it can quietly eat away at your profitability, create client resentment and hold up your growth.

Related: The Price Is Right: How to Price Your Product for Long-Term Success

Why everyone’s talking about value-based pricing

Value-based pricing has gotten a lot of attention in the last few years. In short, value-based pricing is the idea that you can charge for your services based on the value it adds to the business purchasing them, rather than based on the cost of delivery for you as the service provider.

There are real reasons why this makes sense. Research shows that higher prices can increase the perceived value of your services. By undercutting your price, you may actually be devaluing your services – so there is good reason to keep your prices above rock bottom. Lower prices can attract clients looking for the cheapest option on the market, which are often the most difficult to service.

There is also compelling evidence that women tend to underprice their services in order to try to secure business, which can be exacerbated in industries historically dominated by men. The value-based pricing movement has helped to empower women to price their services closer to market or even above market standard.

If pricing is too high, customers can feel resentful after they’ve made the purchasing decision. Too often, a business owner purchases out of emotion, pays too much and later realizes they overpaid. That immediately strains the client relationship with the service provider and sometimes even results in a more difficult journey between the two parties.

Value-based pricing can work, especially when the value you provide is clear, measurable and ideally tied to revenue, like a sales consultant who increases close rates or an ad strategist who drops cost-per-lead. However, there are downsides to both the business and the market for service delivery to small businesses, especially.

Related: **Did You Price Your Product Right? How to Know.**

When value-based pricing doesn’t work

On the other hand, value-based pricing has often gotten out of hand. Entrepreneurs are being encouraged to continue to increase their pricing based on the maximum potential impact their services could have. More than 50% of businesses fail in their first year, and overpricing the market standard or the amount you can reasonably expect to be paid if you’re early in your business evolution can put you on a difficult path as a business owner.

It’s increasingly common to meet founders who are struggling to sell and yet are priced above market. Just because services can provide value doesn’t mean you are in a position to charge those premium prices from early on. If you aren’t selling, your pricing might just be too high, too soon in your business’s growth.

Value-based also compromises the purchasers in a way that has become detrimental to the small business market at large. As service providers continue to raise their prices much faster than their costs increase, the potential customers of these businesses are put in a difficult position.

For example, if, as a brand-new founder, you are being asked to pay $10k for a website when it only costs the provider $1k, that creates a predatory pricing situation for the customer.

It’s time for this race to the bottom to stop to protect both the customers and the service providers.

Related: **6 Strategies for Avoiding the ‘Race to the Bottom’ Price War You Don’t Want to Win**

What to do instead

There are quite a few other options to integrate value-based principles while keeping things fair.

Milestone-based pricing or incentive pricing is a way for service providers to share in the benefits that their services provide, without locking customers into a high price upfront. For example, an ads specialist can charge a base price plus a per-lead or per-signing fee. This incentivizes the specialist to do their best work while enabling them to share the upside and protecting the customer from potential downside.

Modular pricing is another option for right-sizing pricing. Offering an à la carte pricing menu allows clients to choose the services they truly need, instead of being locked into choosing from one or two fixed packages.

Regardless of your pricing strategy, consider where you are in the market and where that puts your margin. If you are priced in line with your market, and your margin is in a reasonable range for your industry, you are likely fairly priced. If you're significantly above market, making above-average margin, or if you aren't selling as much as you want to, try one of the strategies above and observe how it impacts your sales.

It's time that we find a middle ground, where service providers are paid fairly for their time, and customers are paying a fair markup on the cost.

Value-based pricing has become something of a holy grail in the world of service businesses. The theory is seductive: Instead of charging by the hour or offering rigid packages, you price your services based on the value they deliver to the client. If your support helps someone generate $100k in revenue, why shouldn't you charge $10k instead of $2k?

This approach can lead to higher margins and more premium clients, but it comes with downsides. When it doesn't work, it can quietly eat away at your profitability, create client resentment and hold up your growth.

Related: The Price Is Right: How to Price Your Product for Long-Term Success

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-value-based-pricing-can-harm-your-business/493971

No More 'Press 1 for Service' — Here's How to Bring Phone Systems into the Age of Personalization

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

For over 50 years, automated phone systems have been a mainstay of customer interaction. Early Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems freed employees from repetitive tasks, yet left customers navigating frustrating menus with impersonal, robotic responses.

In an era where personalization drives customer satisfaction

and loyalty, these outdated systems are no longer enough. While well-designed IVR systems today achieve a first call resolution rate between 70-75%, the cold and impersonal experience remains, constantly testing callers' patience with the labyrinth of keypad-navigated menus and limited options.

This is particularly evident in industries like healthcare, insurance and local services, where every call carries weight and customers often face the frustrating prospect of repeating their details over and over to an automated voice or navigating endless, irrelevant options. Phone systems remain a significant touchpoint between businesses and customers, but have yet to evolve to meet the demands of the personalization era.

This potential is already being realized through AI phone agents, which are turning this vision into reality. Unlike legacy systems, these agents use advanced voice recognition and adaptive AI to engage customers in dynamic, human-like conversations.

They remember previous interactions, answer with localized nuance and respond to inquiries with warmth and intelligence. This capability makes it possible to deliver personalized experiences that strengthen customer relationships while maintaining operational efficiency.

For example, imagine if your phone system could recall past conversations: When John calls again, it could ask how his daughter's birthday party went, adding a personalized touch that deepens the connection. These subtle, tailored gestures could shift customer perceptions from purely transactional to genuinely relational, setting your brand apart in a competitive marketplace. It's no surprise that businesses embracing AI for personalization are projected to reach $2 trillion in revenue over the next five years, underscoring the transformative potential of these technologies.

AI agents can even be fine-tuned to reflect brand tone and values, whether that's efficiency, empathy or a sense of humor. Voice agents are designed to resolve issues and help customers feel heard and understood, delivering a more natural and 'human' experience than traditional phone systems ever could.

Related: Stop Losing $500+ a Month — The Mistake Starts With a Missed Call

More than personalization: Elevating customer service

AI phone agents do more than personalize interactions; they redefine what phone systems can achieve. From scheduling appointments and processing orders to troubleshooting technical issues and qualifying inbound sales leads, AI agents extend far beyond the limited scope of traditional IVRs.

They can provide instant answers to frequently asked questions, guide users through complex product setups and even process secure payments, effectively transforming a basic phone system into a streamlined customer service center.

This functionality results in higher first-call resolution rates and a seamless experience for customers.

Moreover, AI agents can dynamically scale to handle call surges, eliminating hold times and ensuring 24/7 availability. Businesses can now offer consistent, high-quality service after hours, avoiding the cultural and language barriers often encountered with outsourced support.

For a small business, this means no more missed sales opportunities because a call came in after 6 PM, or frustrated customers waiting until morning for a simple answer. By replacing outdated systems, AI agents reduce costs while delivering a superior customer experience.

Related: 2 Major Career Companies Are Laying Off 1,300 Employees: ‘AI Is Changing the World’

Integrating AI agents into your workflow

Adopting AI phone agents doesn’t have to be a full-scale transformation. Businesses should start small by assigning these agents to handle routine inquiries. As their capabilities grow, they can take on more complex tasks.

Key steps for successful integration include:

- Starting with small, well-defined tasks such as appointment scheduling or taking notes. This allows businesses to quickly see the value of AI without overwhelming their existing operations.
- Training employees to collaborate with AI agents as part of the team. Successful AI implementation is about augmentation, not replacement. Human oversight and collaboration are key to refining the AI’s performance and ensuring a cohesive customer journey.
- Measuring AI agent performance against human agents. Quantifying key metrics like resolution rates, customer satisfaction scores and time savings helps demonstrate ROI and identifies areas for further optimization.
- Continuously identifying new tasks AI can automate
- Ensuring seamless CRM and other system integrations. Integrating AI with existing tools ensures data flows smoothly, providing the AI with necessary context and updating records in real-time, making it truly intelligent and valuable.
- Defining escalation protocols. Knowing when to pass calls from AI to human agents is also important and ensures a safety net for complex issues.

AI phone agents represent a profound leap forward for customer

service, leaving behind the outdated era of keypad navigation and rudimentary voice prompts. By leveraging these tools, businesses can not only create deeper, more personalized connections with customers but also transform phone systems from impersonal necessities into strategic assets, positioning themselves for success in a rapidly evolving environment.

For over 50 years, automated phone systems have been a mainstay of customer interaction. Early Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems freed employees from repetitive tasks, yet left customers navigating frustrating menus with impersonal, robotic responses.

In an era where personalization drives customer satisfaction and loyalty, these outdated systems are no longer enough. While well-designed IVR systems today achieve a first call resolution rate between 70-75%, the cold and impersonal experience remains, constantly testing callers' patience with the labyrinth of keypad-navigated menus and limited options.

This is particularly evident in industries like healthcare, insurance and local services, where every call carries weight and customers often face the frustrating prospect of repeating their details over and over to an automated voice or navigating endless, irrelevant options. Phone systems remain a significant touchpoint between businesses and customers, but have yet to evolve to meet the demands of the personalization era.

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-bring-phone-systems-into-the-age-of-personalization/494115

‘Beyond Our Wildest Dreams’: This Founder’s Scrappy Startup Has Raised More Than $39 Million — and Counting — for Small Businesses ‘Facing an Extinction Event’

When Andy Hunter, founder and CEO of Bookshop.org, followed his lifelong passion for books into the publishing industry in 2009, he noticed an unsettling shift: The bookstores that had defined his childhood and communities were going out of business — rapidly losing market share to Amazon.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Bookshop.org. Andy Hunter.

The number of U.S. bookstores decreased more than 50% in the span of about two decades, falling from 12,151 in 1998 to 6,045 in 2019, according to data from the Census Bureau's County Business Patterns.

Jeff Bezos founded Amazon, which initially focused on selling books online, in July 1995. Today, book sales make up roughly 10% of Amazon's profit at an estimated $28 billion; in 2020, the House Judiciary Committee found that the ecommerce giant controlled over 50% of the total print book market and more than 80% of the ebook market.

Related: Why Purpose-Driven Marketplaces Are the Antidote to Amazon

> *“Bookstores are advocates and activists for the importance of reading in all their communities.”*

Amid Amazon and ecommerce’s quick, concurrent growth, Hunter realized that bookstores were “facing an extinction event.”

“It is really like the environment, where you can have coral reefs, and when the coral reefs die, then everything is hosed,” Hunter explains. “Bookstores are advocates and activists for the importance of reading in all their communities. As those start to die out, the importance of books in our culture also starts to recede.”

Hunter built his career in publishing for more than a decade, during which he co-founded literary websites Electric Literature and Literary Hub and the independent publisher Catapult.

Related: 5 Books Every Small Business Owner Should Read

Over the years, Hunter waited for someone to acknowledge what was happening to the nation’s bookstores, for “some champion to come along” and save them. Then, at a dinner in 2018, Hunter sat next to a member of the American Booksellers Association’s board of directors who pointed out that Hunter had internet expertise — could he help with the organization’s online sales strategy?

That’s when Hunter came up with the idea for Bookshop, the online book seller that funnels profits back to independent bookstores across the country. If shoppers choose a specific local store to support, that small business receives 100% of the sales profit; otherwise, 33% of the profit is distributed among all of the bookstores on the platform.

> *“Fortunately, it did succeed — and it actually succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”*

“ It was kind of a Hail Mary,” Hunter recalls. “At the time, I was like, *Well, this almost certainly won’t succeed because I’ve never done anything like this before, and the odds are completely against us.* Nobody wanted to invest in it. But nothing is going to get better if you don’t do anything about it, so at least [we were] going to try to do something about it. And, fortunately, it did succeed — and it actually succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”

Bookshop launched in January 2020, and in the early days, the “very small, very scrappy” startup didn’t have a customer service team and saw modest sales. That changed when the pandemic hit about eight weeks later. Hunter says that Bookshop’s daily sales grew from $10,000 to $50,000 to $150,000 in short order. In the same period, the number of bookstores on the platform increased from 250 to more than 1,500.

Related: Why Your Business Should Be a Benefit Corporation, or B Corp

Now, Bookshop is a certified B Corp that has raised more than $39 million for independent bookstores to date.

> *“Our profit is not huge because if our profit is huge, then it’s off of our mission.”*

The startup’s explosive growth began to wane in 2022, as customers returned to buy in-person at their local bookstores, Hunter says. Bookshop was profitable in 2020 and 2021, then lost money every year through 2024.

”This year, we’re profitable again,” Hunter says, “but we’re really lean. Our expenses are less than 13% of our total sales. We have something like $1.5 million of revenue per employee. We stay super lean because we are trying to always give the maximum amount to the bookstores. Even when we are profitable, our profit is not huge because if our profit is

huge, then it's off of our mission [to] support local bookstores."

Earlier this year, Bookshop tackled its next frontier: ebooks. The goal was to build a "really easy to use" application that would function across devices in the U.S. and other countries, Hunter says. The initiative, launched in January, has been a challenge for the small company, which lacks the substantial financial backing of competitors. Digital reading subscription service Scribd has raised more than $100 million; Bookshop raised $2.3 million to support its ebook platform.

Related: Why (and How) Amazon Created the Kindle and Changed the Book Industry Forever

" So we're talking about a platform that has competitors that are 50 times better funded," Hunter says, "and that doesn't even go into Amazon and how much money Amazon has spent on the Kindle. So we are a scrappy, ragtag band of hopefully talented enough people to be able to pull us off."

Additionally, because Bookshop gives so much of its profit to independent bookstores, it doesn't have a large digital marketing budget. Bookshop spends about 2% of its revenue on advertisements and marketing. In contrast to the direct-to-consumer brands that saw major growth during the pandemic and spend 15% to 30% of their topline revenue on digital marketing, Bookshop relies heavily on word-of-mouth and referrals, Hunter says.

So far, Bookshop's word-of-mouth marketing strategy is paying off: The company is about a year ahead of its projections for ebook sales, which already make up 5% of total sales.

> *"For us, winning is, we got 5% of Amazon customers to switch to independent bookstores."*

Of course, getting Bookshop's ebooks on Amazon's Kindle

devices could bring even more significant growth. Although the Kindle supports some third-party applications like the library reading app Libby, ebooks from other platforms, including Scribd, aren't available on the device. Access requires Amazon's permission, and the request letter that Hunter sent to the company about four months ago has yet to receive a reply.

Bookshop is doing roughly three times the total independent online bookstore sales in 2019, Hunter says — and he's determined to grow that number.

" Amazon is really powerful and has tons of resources," Hunter says. "They've got Prime and a lot of ways to lock in customers. So we try to be realistic, but for us, winning is not beating Amazon. For us, winning is, we got 5% of Amazon customers to switch to independent bookstores — that would be a huge lifeline for independent bookstores."

Related: A Beloved 130-Year-Old Small Business in California Is Seeking a New Owner — and It Won't Sell to the Highest Bidder: 'Everybody's Talking About It'

The good news is that independent bookstores appear to be making a comeback.

" For the past five years, every single year, more bookstores have opened than closed," Hunter says. "And there are now, from a low of about 1,900 independent bookstores in the American Booksellers Association in 2019, about 2,800 independent bookstores in the American Booksellers Association."

The American Booksellers Association, which advocates for independent bookstores, reported 2,433 bookstore companies in 2,844 store locations in 2024, an 11% increase in membership year over year. Bookshop currently hosts more than 2,200 independent stores on its platform.

“The cost is ultimately what kind of society we’re creating.”

Hunter encourages everyone to consider the future they want for themselves and the next generation — and how the small decisions we make every day will shape it.

“Convenience has a cost that isn’t apparent to everybody at the face, and the cost is ultimately what kind of society we’re creating,” Hunter says. “[People should] make the effort of making good choices because they’re going to be living in the world that those choices created.”

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/how-bookshops-founder-raised-39m-for-small-businesses/494429

How AI Can Free Up Your Time For Less Busywork and More Innovation

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

I’ve always been a tinkerer. If I weren’t, there’s almost no chance I’d be an entrepreneur.

When I released my first product in college, my goal wasn’t to make money — it was to build something for the sake of it. I saw a problem and decided to see if I could create a solution.

Turns out, I could. Not everything I’ve built has worked out the way I wanted it to, but that’s okay. The tinkerer mindset

doesn’t require a 100 percent success rate. You might think that my love of experimenting would have been tempered once my business grew. But actually, I’ve only become more firm in my conviction that great things come from those who tinker.

Even better? Recent leaps in AI capabilities have only made tinkering easier. Here’s why.

Related: How to Prepare Your Small Business for the Next Wave of AI Innovation

Why experimentation is essential

If there’s one trait every founder needs, it’s a willingness to experiment. Great products aren’t born fully formed — they’re shaped by trial, error, feedback and iteration.

When I launched Jotform, I wasn’t trying to build a company. I was trying to solve a problem. That curiosity led to our first tagline, “The Easiest Form Builder.” I obsessed over usability and kept tweaking the product until it felt effortless to use. That mindset — build, test, improve — has guided every version since.

I often tell the founders I mentor: You don’t need to get it perfect, you just need to get it in front of people. The feedback you get will tell you what to fix, what to double down on and what to scrap.

My 50/50 rule — spending half your time on product and half on growth — is built on the same principle. You’re constantly experimenting on two fronts: what you’re building and how you’re getting it into users’ hands. It’s a push-pull dynamic that inherently requires trial and error.

Why AI is a tinkerer’s dream

Here’s the thing about tinkering: It doesn’t work under

duress.

Today, experimentation is easier and more accessible than ever thanks to AI. In the past, it was extremely difficult to carve out the time and space to be creative, because who has several uninterrupted hours just to play around with a project that may ultimately yield nothing? For me, early mornings and late nights were the golden times for working on my startup, when I didn't have to focus on my day job or any other obligations nagging for my attention.

For many people, those precious off-hours are still the ticket to unlocking creative thinking. But instead of wasting them on exasperating tasks like debugging code, designing a UI or writing copy from scratch, you can offload those responsibilities to an AI assistant. Want to build a landing page, translate it and generate five headline variations? That's now a 30-minute exercise, not a full weekend.

That kind of efficiency is a game-changer. It lowers the cost of experimentation, and more importantly, it removes the friction between idea and execution. You can move straight from "what if?" to "let's find out," which is exactly what tinkering is all about.

Related: Why Smart Entrepreneurs Let AI Do the Heavy Business Lifting

Amplifying creativity

There's a misconception that AI will do all the work for you. It won't. AI, at least not yet, cannot replicate human creativity and ingenuity. What it will do is eliminate the bottlenecks that keep you from doing your best work.

Recently, I returned from an eight-month break from my business. I'd had my third child, and I wanted to take the opportunity to spend time with my family. Once back in the

office, I realized I didn’t want to return to the way I’d been working before, getting pulled in several directions at once and being too stretched thin to focus on what I cared about.

Instead, I decided to dramatically limit the areas of my business I would focus on. Recently, that’s meant working with our architect to design a new office space. It’s something I enjoy, but couldn’t fully commit to previously thanks to a pileup of other distractions.

In the past, I might have had to let it go – just because I wanted to be involved didn’t mean I’d have the bandwidth to do it. It was a project that interested me, but didn’t require my participation. That’s the thing about tinkering – most of it isn’t strictly necessary.

Since I’ve returned, I’ve been able to focus on blueprints and layout concepts for uninterrupted stretches of time. How?

One reason is that I have an executive team that has been able to take over many of the day-to-day functions that previously absorbed my attention. The second is because I’ve deputized AI to take on some of my most annoying, time-consuming busywork. For example, I’ve refined my already-effective email filtering technique even further with the help of an AI agent, which autonomously sorts and in some cases, even responds to routine queries so I don’t have to. That means less time fighting the onslaught of emails, more time investing my energy where it counts.

My goal isn’t to have AI figure out window placements for me, make hiring decisions or determine the strategic direction of my company. Instead, it’s to clear my plate of the time-consuming tasks that have distracted me from what I want to do.

For entrepreneurs, AI has afforded us more of the most valuable resource we have: the space to tinker. And in my experience, that’s where everything worthwhile happens.

I’ve always been a tinkerer. If I weren’t, there’s almost no chance I’d be an entrepreneur.

When I released my first product in college, my goal wasn’t to make money — it was to build something for the sake of it. I saw a problem and decided to see if I could create a solution.

Turns out, I could. Not everything I’ve built has worked out the way I wanted it to, but that’s okay. The tinkerer mindset doesn’t require a 100 percent success rate. You might think that my love of experimenting would have been tempered once my business grew. But actually, I’ve only become more firm in my conviction that great things come from those who tinker.

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/entrepreneurship-is-all-about-innovation-and-ai-can-help/493072

Learn Up to 56 Languages for Just $35

Disclosure: Our goal is to feature products and services that we think you’ll find interesting and useful. If you purchase them, Entrepreneur may get a small share of the revenue from the sale from our commerce partners.

Entrepreneurs are five times more likely to favor flexibility than the potential to generate profits, according to business

insurance specialist Embroker. So, if you're planning to expand your business internationally or you enjoy working remotely from anywhere, it would be very handy to develop conversational skills in the foreign language of your choice.

Lucky for you, a lifetime subscription to all 56 languages in Qlango Language Learning is available through July 20 for only $34.97, which is 71% off the original $119.99 subscription price.

Not everyone learns the same way, and Qlango adapts to the way you learn best by letting you choose from multiple-choice style, words or sentences, matching, translation, dictation and more. You can also learn at a pace that is best for your lifestyle; simply set a weekly goal that suits your schedule.

Qlango uses a spaced repetition technique that is scientifically proven to help you retain new words more effectively by reviewing them at increasing intervals. The platform poses questions until you provide the correct answers to ensure that you're really learning. However, it also includes a built-in hint system so you don't get stuck.

Every language contains over 6,500 of its most commonly used words, plus two example sentences for each word, so you'll develop a strong vocabulary. You can click on a word to hear just that specific word, as many times as you like, to improve your word recognition and pronunciation.

Best of all, Qlango helps to make learning new languages fun by turning it into an engaging game. Smart suggestions in each of the six difficulty levels help to create a personalized learning experience. It's easy to see why Qlango has an amazing rating of 4.8 out of 5 stars on the App Store.

Until July 20, get a lifetime subscription to all the languages in Qlango Language Learning for just $34.97, a 71% discount off the original $119.99 subscription price.

StackSocial prices subject to change.

Entrepreneurs are five times more likely to favor flexibility than the potential to generate profits, according to business insurance specialist Embroker. So, if you're planning to expand your business internationally or you enjoy working remotely from anywhere, it would be very handy to develop conversational skills in the foreign language of your choice.

Lucky for you, a lifetime subscription to all 56 languages in Qlango Language Learning is available through July 20 for only $34.97, which is 71% off the original $119.99 subscription price.

Not everyone learns the same way, and Qlango adapts to the way you learn best by letting you choose from multiple-choice style, words or sentences, matching, translation, dictation and more. You can also learn at a pace that is best for your lifestyle; simply set a weekly goal that suits your schedule.

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/living/learn-up-to-56-languages-for-just-35/494493

Why This Market Dip Is Your Chance to Accelerate Product Velocity, Win Customers and

Own the Next Cycle

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Crypto volumes have plunged from a post-Trump election surge of $126 billion to a mere $35 billion. Tech stocks remain sluggish compared to their former highs, even as the dollar hits a decade low. Venture capital feels like it's collectively holding its breath, with top Silicon Valley firms pivoting their business models. This isn't a collapse — far from it. It's a rare, fragile pause. A "wait and see" moment of equilibrium that, like all market pauses, likely won't last.

Behind the headlines, a far bigger story is unfolding. The United States and China have quietly reopened high-level trade talks aimed at easing the tensions that have defined the past five years of decoupling and protectionism. According to Bloomberg, these negotiations are among the most serious since Trump-era tariffs began reshaping global supply chains. At the same time, China is reportedly loosening capital controls and courting global investors again, which suggests Beijing views the current economic stall as too risky to endure.

If these talks produce breakthroughs — whether tariff rollbacks, a tech export détente or coordinated policy resets — investors can expect a market reaction not seen since early 2021. In short, this stillness may be the calm before the next global bull run. When capital floods back into high-growth sectors, it will do so suddenly and violently.

Founders should see this moment for what it is: a gift. The quiet between cycles is the rarest and most valuable time to build. Attention is cheap. Competition is minimal. Customers are more accessible. And though investors seem quiet, they're

watching closely for the teams that stayed focused while others lost steam.

Related: Today's Biggest Companies Are Acting Like VCs. Here's Why Startup Founders Need to Pay Attention.

For startup founders, the single most important mandate now is to increase velocity. This doesn't mean grinding longer hours or chasing a vague idea of "hustle." It means removing friction from your product cycle and delivering tangible features or updates to users every week. If your roadmap is quarterly, break it down into weekly shippable blocks. Tools like Linear and Notion help teams stay aligned without heavy process overhead. For UI or user-facing experiments, Figma remains one of the fastest ways to move from idea to prototype without slowing development. Founders must get hands-on with their products and focus on delivering value to power users.

Equally critical is user proximity. It's easy to skip customer conversations when fundraising is tough and feature velocity slows, but that's exactly when listening matters most. Even five brief conversations can reshape your roadmap. Ask simple questions: What frustrates power users right now? What features did they stop using, and why? This feedback doesn't live in dashboards or pitch decks — it lives in the space between what users say and what they wish existed.

Another key use of this pause is building owned distribution. Paid channels are overpriced during market stagnation, and unless you've raised a mega-round, you can't outbid incumbents. Instead, focus on organic reach and audience trust. Use content marketing tools like Substack or Beehiiv to grow an email list that's immune to algorithm shifts. Invest time in SEO and keyword ranking. Record short product explainers or vision videos with Loom or Descript — not to "go viral," but to humanize your build process and deepen audience trust through transparency. When markets heat up, people will remember the builders who kept showing up in the quiet— and

say, “I’ve got the alpha on a hot project that’s about to pop.”

Macro signals are aligning. Long-term bond yields are starting to wobble, suggesting markets expect increased government stimulus or monetary easing. Chinese capital markets are showing signs of foreign inflows again, especially in ETF activity across Hong Kong and Singapore. Central bank rhetoric is shifting — from “containment” to “cooperation.” Once that shift becomes public and coordinated, markets will snap back, starting with high-risk, high-reward sectors like crypto, AI infrastructure, e-commerce and frontier B2B tooling.

Here’s the truth most won’t say: you won’t have time to prepare when that happens. The winners of the next cycle won’t be those who waited patiently for conditions to improve. They’ll be the founders who treated this silence like a sprint, not an intermission. Then boom! Silicon Valley’s legendary VC, Tim Draper, wrote a social media post saying, “Slack transforms communication, Microsoft responds with Teams. Tesla enters the market, and suddenly every automaker rediscovers innovation. Progress happens in bursts of energy.”

Related: 6 Hidden Costs of Scaling Your Business Too Quickly

Being first to market matters. That means launching scrappy MVPs before they’re perfect. Writing landing pages before the product is done. Building waitlists and generating buzz, even if customer acquisition costs aren’t optimized. This isn’t the time for polish; it’s the time for presence. Investors remember who shipped, who listened and who made noise without needing a bull market to do it for them.

This moment in the cycle doesn’t feel urgent, but it is. The silence is a setup. The only founders who survive the surge will be those building now, shipping weekly, while the world isn’t watching.

Ship faster. Build deeper. Talk to your loyal users. Grow your

content channels. Engage.

Because when capital returns, it won’t send a save-the-date.

It will kick the door down. And everything you’ve built in this quiet stretch will either stand or be swept away when the big players come in.

Crypto volumes have plunged from a post-Trump election surge of $126 billion to a mere $35 billion. Tech stocks remain sluggish compared to their former highs, even as the dollar hits a decade low. Venture capital feels like it’s collectively holding its breath, with top Silicon Valley firms pivoting their business models. This isn’t a collapse — far from it. It’s a rare, fragile pause. A “wait and see” moment of equilibrium that, like all market pauses, likely won’t last.

Behind the headlines, a far bigger story is unfolding. The United States and China have quietly reopened high-level trade talks aimed at easing the tensions that have defined the past five years of decoupling and protectionism. According to Bloomberg, these negotiations are among the most serious since Trump-era tariffs began reshaping global supply chains. At the same time, China is reportedly loosening capital controls and courting global investors again, which suggests Beijing views the current economic stall as too risky to endure.

If these talks produce breakthroughs — whether tariff rollbacks, a tech export détente or coordinated policy resets — investors can expect a market reaction not seen since early 2021. In short, this stillness may be the calm before the next global bull run. When capital floods back into high-growth sectors, it will do so suddenly and violently.

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/money-finance/why-this-market-dip-is-your-window-to-accelerate-product/491575

Manage Clients, Projects, and Sales Without Leaving Your Dashboard

Disclosure: Our goal is to feature products and services that we think you'll find interesting and useful. If you purchase them, Entrepreneur may get a small share of the revenue from the sale from our commerce partners.

Businesses and agencies juggle a lot — client websites, marketing campaigns, invoices, appointments, and the occasional fire drill. Sellful's ERP Agency Plan aims to simplify all of that by putting every essential tool into one place. It's a fully white-label enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform that covers everything from building websites to managing client communication, automating workflows, tracking sales, and beyond. Through July 20, you can score a lifetime subscription to Sellful on sale for $349.97.

Instead of stitching together separate platforms, you can use Sellful to keep all your useful tools right in front of you in one convenient place.

Some key highlights include:

- AI-generated site creation, automated email and SMS marketing, social media scheduling, CRM tools,

invoicing, and appointment booking
- 10 white-labeled sub-accounts with unlimited contacts, pages, blog posts, users, and products per site
- Built-in point of sale support, inventory syncing across physical stores, and compatibility with more than 20 payment gateways like PayPal, Stripe, and Square (with no extra fees from Sellful!)
- HR tools, payroll, time clocks, accounting, and team chat
- AI chatbot, affiliate management, community building tools, and access to marketing courses and guides
- Custom mobile app, setup wizard builder, and more than 5,000 third-party integrations

For agencies that want to deliver more to clients without bouncing between platforms, this lifetime Sellful plan offers a seriously flexible way to do it all from one dashboard — on sale for $349.97 (reg. $1,497) until July 20 at 11:59 p.m. Pacific.

Sellful – White Label Website Builder & Software: ERP Agency Plan (Lifetime)

See Deal

StackSocial prices subject to change.

Businesses and agencies juggle a lot — client websites, marketing campaigns, invoices, appointments, and the occasional fire drill. Sellful's ERP Agency Plan aims to simplify all of that by putting every essential tool into one place. It's a fully white-label enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform that covers everything from building websites to managing client communication, automating workflows, tracking sales, and beyond. Through July 20, you can score a lifetime subscription to Sellful on sale for $349.97.

Instead of stitching together separate platforms, you can use Sellful to keep all your useful tools right in front of you in

one convenient place.

Some key highlights include:

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/manage-clients-projects-and-sales-without-leaving-your/494296

This $50 Lifetime Travel Hack Is Made for Remote Workers

Disclosure: Our goal is to feature products and services that we think you'll find interesting and useful. If you purchase them, Entrepreneur may get a small share of the revenue from the sale from our commerce partners.

Twenty-two percent of entrepreneurs prefer to choose when and where they work, according to data from popular accounting service FreshBooks. Of course, even people who work primarily in one location will sometimes travel for business or leisure. Fortunately, new users can save up to 60% on global flights and hotels, even after they've been booked, with a lifetime subscription to OneAir Elite. Better yet, it's currently available to new users for its lowest price ever at $49.97 with promo code **TRAVEL**.

This AI-powered platform scans and tracks millions of flight and hotel prices to top global destinations from your home

airport. Members receive instant mobile and email alerts as soon as the prices drop. Best of all, OneAir's Smart Hotel Price Monitoring also tracks your existing hotel reservations and will automatically rebook at a lower rate if the price drops, then refund the difference. No effort or stress on your part, only guaranteed savings.

OneAir also has Smart Flight Fare Monitoring, which works in a similar fashion. Your ticketed airfares are also tracked continuously. If a significantly lower fare is found, OneAir calculates what your savings would be after change or cancellation fees, then guides you through the process of re-ticketing that flight at the lower price.

The company's goal is to revolutionize the hotel and flight industry so that travelers will always pay the lowest prices available for flight and hotel reservations. It has contracts with almost every major hotel supplier, as well as multiple airline wholesalers and consolidators. This allows OneAir to offer wholesale prices to members that are not published to the general public.

You can save up to 60% on exclusive deals on more than two million hotels and resorts. You'll also have exclusive access to airfares from over 700 top airlines that aren't available on public travel platforms or even the airline websites. OneAir prices are always all-inclusive, with no hidden fees.

OneAir also offers real-time flight deal alerts so you can have instant notifications when deals on all flight classes become available from your selected airport. You can even earn up to 10% in cash awards on many flights, insurance and hotels that you can use on future bookings.

Get a lifetime subscription to OneAir Elite to save money on your existing hotel and flight bookings while it's at its lowest price ever for only $49.97 when you enter coupon code **TRAVEL** at checkout.

StackSocial prices subject to change

Twenty-two percent of entrepreneurs prefer to choose when and where they work, according to data from popular accounting service FreshBooks. Of course, even people who work primarily in one location will sometimes travel for business or leisure. Fortunately, new users can save up to 60% on global flights and hotels, even after they've been booked, with a lifetime subscription to OneAir Elite. Better yet, it's currently available to new users for its lowest price ever at $49.97 with promo code **TRAVEL**.

This AI-powered platform scans and tracks millions of flight and hotel prices to top global destinations from your home airport. Members receive instant mobile and email alerts as soon as the prices drop. Best of all, OneAir's Smart Hotel Price Monitoring also tracks your existing hotel reservations and will automatically rebook at a lower rate if the price drops, then refund the difference. No effort or stress on your part, only guaranteed savings.

OneAir also has Smart Flight Fare Monitoring, which works in a similar fashion. Your ticketed airfares are also tracked continuously. If a significantly lower fare is found, OneAir calculates what your savings would be after change or cancellation fees, then guides you through the process of re-ticketing that flight at the lower price.

The rest of this article is locked.

Join Entrepreneur+ today for access.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/living/this-50-lifetime-travel-hack-is-made-for-remote-workers/494502