These Roommates Started a Side Hustle in Their Denver Apartment. Now It’s an 8-Figure Business With $1 Million Months: ‘Go Be Unreasonable.’

This Side Hustle Spotlight Q&A features Colorado-based entrepreneurs Boone Whiteside, 29, and Ben Medalie, 28. Whiteside and Medalie are the co-founders of Highland, a haircare brand that started as a DIY passion project in a Denver apartment and has grown into an eight-figure business in three years. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Highland. Boone Whiteside, left, and Ben Medalie, right.

When did you start your side hustle, and where did you find the inspiration for it?

Whiteside: When Ben and I became best friends during our junior year at CU Boulder, one of the things that brought us close was our shared aspiration of building our own thing – in not walking a 9-5 path working on someone else's dream. This shared passion wouldn't manifest until much later, though.

When I first started dreaming of a hair product company that went beyond styling one's hair with toxic sh*t, I was working at an ecommerce startup in a marketing and operations role. We were a small team, and the company was struggling hard to establish itself. I learned a ton about problem-solving through the early stages of business, but I had one foot out

the door, pulling me toward my calling of being my own entrepreneur.

Related: This 17-Year-Old High School Student Has a $20,000-a-Month Side Hustle — and It All Started With a Skill He Learned in Class

Ben was working at a payroll tech company in an analyst role, but the actual role changed so much during his tenure because he hated doing the same thing every day. Juggling sales, learning to code, handling risk analysis, dabbling in marketing and growth… his managers were constantly breathing down his neck to "JUST FOCUS" on "his main role." Neither of us were happy with those career trajectories.

Sick of the archaic legacy brands that dominated the hair styling space with cheap, chemical-based formulations and wasteful packaging, and unsuccessful in my search for a brand that was disrupting the industry, I stumbled into an idea that would solve my own consumer need. I had a hunch this problem would resonate with people like me.

What were some of the first steps you took to get the side hustle off the ground?

Whiteside: The first steps were hitting the Google machine (BAI, or before AI) to uncover naturally occurring, plant-based ingredients that could replace plastic, endocrine-disrupting formulas. Without a lick of chemistry or cooking experience to my name, I began ordering waxes, clays, oils and other botanical ingredients and started mixing them on my stovetop.

Fortunately I've always been a weirdo, so I was weird enough to start putting these failed concoctions into my hair, weird enough to make all of my friends do the same and give me feedback and weird enough to be unbothered by my roommate, Ben telling me how weird I am… soon to become a hair weirdo himself.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Highland

Are there any free or paid resources that have been especially helpful for you in starting and running this business?

Medalie: Some tech standouts include: Klaviyo for email marketing, Shopify (and all its awesome plugins) to power our site, Triple Whale for attribution metrics, Amped (now Mailchimp) for lead capture, Adobe Premiere for content creation and finally Figma for making the non-designer look and feel like Rembrandt.

Whiteside: Ben covered most of the paid ones. For free, the best resource we tapped into was our polite persistence in demanding help from other business builders. People generally want to help, but you can’t be afraid to ask. We recently

grabbed coffee with Justin Gold, founder of Justin's, the peanut butter brand, and he summed it up nicely: "Be unreasonable." This mentality has been instrumental in building an unbelievably helpful network of people who have helped us build the Highland strategy from the ground up and in avoiding mistakes other founders have made. So go be unreasonable — just be polite about it.

Related: This Couple Started a Side Hustle to Improve a 'Terribly Made' Bathroom Essential. Now the Business Earns More Than $3 Million a Year.

If you could go back in your business journey and change one process or approach, what would it be, and how do you wish you'd done it differently?

Whiteside: I think Highland gets high marks for doing this early, but I wish we'd done it even earlier. Get very serious about your unit economics from day one. Learn what your gross margins are. Make a plan for how you will bring down COGs over time, and know that every penny counts. Get serious about your finances, and figure out how and when you can make your business profitable. For now, the days of raising capital and figuring out how to become profitable later are gone, as are most of the businesses that took this route.

One of the most magical days of Highland was when the June 2023 books closed, and we had $113 in profit. We'd figured out how to make the business self-sustaining, and that meant our runway was unlimited. Become profitable, don't die, then figure out how to effectively scale.

But also, no regrets. The journey was the journey, and it shaped us. Let yours shape you.

When it comes to this specific business, what is something you've found particularly challenging and/or surprising that people who get into this type of work should be prepared for, but likely aren't?

Medalie: Formulations (of any kind, but especially in beauty) that are truly natural are incredibly hard to get right. We learned fast why all of those who came before us cut the corners they did, and we were offered the same formulation shortcuts that ensure consistency and so-called “performance.”

In being adamant that our products would be different, we ran into issues left and right. Our ingredients are volatile and misbehaving; early batches would vary greatly, and they had a much shorter shelf life than the products we were going up against. Multiple times, we lost thousands of units to failed batches, went out of stock as a result and questioned if it was all worth it. In the end, we broke through on the other side of this challenge, now redefining what innovation is possible within “better for you, better for the planet” formulation.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Highland

Can you recall a specific instance when something went very wrong? How did you fix it?

Whiteside: We've never raised a multi-million-dollar round — at least, not yet — but that hasn't spared us from facing serious cash flow challenges. Right after our friends and family round, we hit a rough patch. We were burning about $10,000 a month as we worked toward reducing our losses and slowly ramped up our marketing spend. Still, we weren't too worried. We had three months of runway and what felt like the perfect investor lined up — someone ready to write the full check and bring industry expertise and mentorship that Ben and I had only ever hoped for. We were set. Until, suddenly, we weren't.

The process dragged on for months. Our bank account drained. The deal ultimately fell through. We had to stop paying ourselves, cut expenses to the bone, delay growth plans and strain relationships with our manufacturing partners. It was the first time we really confronted the possibility of losing the company, and it was a gut check.

Medalie: So, we scrambled. We raised less capital than we had planned, but we made it work. We kept a confident front for our investors, got lean and stayed scrappy. Looking back, it was one of the best things that could've happened. It forced us to prove our path to becoming cash-flow positive and helped us retain more ownership. But it was a hard-earned lesson: Fundraising isn't real until the money hits the bank. And no matter how promising a deal looks, you can't build a business on potential alone.

Related: After Losing $5 Million Overnight at Age 25, He Started a Business on Track for $50 Million. Here's the 'Lightbulb Moment' That Made It Happen.

How long did it take you to see consistent monthly revenue? How much did the side hustle earn? What does growth and revenue look like now?

Whitside and Medalie: We didn't start earning consistent monthly revenue ($10,000-$20,000 per month) until mid-2023. The side hustle kicked off all the way back in 2021, when Ben and I were making the batches of our Glacial Clay Pomade in our KitchenAid mixer, packing the units by hand and selling them on our Shopify storefront and to a couple of salons and barbershops. The side hustle probably generated an average of $1,000-$3,000 a month between 2021 and 2023.

Now in 2025, after launching our third-ever SKU, we hit our first million-dollar month and have been profitable for nearly two years straight. It's not a race. Become an overnight success in five to 10 years.

What do you enjoy most about running this business?

Medalie: Honestly, hot take… getting to do this whole thing with the people we love and cherish most in life. People always warn against getting into business with best friends or family, but this part has been the most fun. Every single day is different, and getting to see yourself and friends grow, thrive and even fail in front of each other is incredibly powerful and motivating.

Whiteside: What I enjoy most is waking up each day with a purpose, solving challenging problems with my best friend and co-founder and choosing our own adventure in every facet of what we do. Being your own boss is NOT an overrated part of being an entrepreneur. It’s incredibly hard, but it’s also the best.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Highland

What is your best piece of specific, actionable business advice?

Whiteside: Getting started is often the hardest part, but if someone has, I'd offer a piece of advice from my dear friend and Shopbop founder, Bob Lamey: "Beware the incoming call." It means to be laser-focused on what you think the roadmap is for your business and striving toward those goals with intention. Many emails, phone calls, pitches and day-to-day tasks become a distraction from what you know you need to be working on.

This doesn't mean to ignore opportunities as they arise — it is a call to define your vision and hold yourself accountable in working to bring it to life. You know what you need to be doing; don't let the noise distract you.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/roommates-side-hustle-makes-1m-a-month-no-regrets/490581

Meta Lays Off an Unspecified Number of Virtual Reality Division Employees: 'Deeply Saddened'

Meta is downsizing its virtual reality division.

Meta confirmed to The Verge on Thursday that it had laid off an undisclosed number of employees in its virtual reality and hardware unit, Reality Labs. The layoffs impacted teams working on games for Meta's Quest virtual reality headsets and

the division that built the popular virtual reality fitness app Supernatural.

A note on the official Supernatural community Facebook group of more than 112,000 members confirmed the layoffs.

“We’re deeply saddened to share that [organizational] changes have resulted in the loss of some of our incredibly talented team members,” the post, which was shared on Thursday, read.

Related: Meta Is Reportedly Working on Smart Glasses With a Screen — at a Price Point $1,000 More Than Its Ray-Bans

The post goes on to mention that the number of workouts released on Supernatural per week would decrease because of the layoffs and the resulting smaller number of people working on the app.

A user plays Supernatural. Photo by Randy Shropshire/Getty Images for Meta Platforms Technologies LLC

Meta acquired Within Unlimited, the virtual reality startup behind Supernatural, in February 2023 for more than $400 million after successfully fighting a government antitrust lawsuit.

The tech company conducted a round of performance-based layoffs in February, cutting 5% of its 72,000-person global workforce, or about 3,600 employees. Some fired Meta workers claimed they had a track record of good performance and were surprised by the layoffs.

Related: ‘Creating Fear’: Meta Begins Laying Off ‘Low Performers.’ Here’s a Look at How Those Decisions Are Made.

The performance-based cuts impacted at least 560 employees who worked in Meta's virtual reality division, according to documents seen by Business Insider. A memo obtained by the outlet in February from Meta CTO Andrew Bosworth noted that 2025 was a make-or-break year for the company's virtual reality efforts.

"We need to drive sales, retention and engagement across the board," Bosworth wrote in the memo.

As of the end of February, Meta had fired close to two dozen employees for leaking internal memos, meeting recordings and other company information to the press.

Meta's virtual reality offerings are popular. Meta had sold close to 20 million Quest headsets as of February 2023. It released the $499 Quest 3 in October 2023 and sold at least one million units of the virtual reality headset as of June 2024.

However, Meta's virtual reality efforts are expensive and have resulted in $60 billion in losses for the company since 2020. In its latest earnings report, released in January, Meta noted that its Reality Labs unit generated $1.1 billion in sales in the fourth quarter of 2024 but recorded an operating loss of $4.97 billion. https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/meta-lays-off-some-employees-working-on-virtual-reality/490650

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6 Creative Ways to Improve

Internal Communications at Work

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According to McKinsey, 44% of executives report that communication issues contribute to project delays or failures. Conversely, effective internal communication is linked with improved productivity, satisfaction and alignment among teams.

Taking steps to improve internal communications at work is essential for unlocking your team's full potential. And quite often, a little bit of creative communication could be just what you need to spark better engagement.

Related: 6 Communication Tips to Strengthen Your Company's Culture

1. Make employee emails interactive

The Harvard Business Review reports that the average full-time employee receives roughly 120 messages each day. Obviously, that number of emails can be overwhelming, and it can all too easily cause important messages to slip through the cracks.

Aside from reducing the total number of emails that are sent within the organization, leaders can also improve engagement on important messages by taking steps to make their emails more interactive. For example, emails that include surveys, comment boxes or other interactive elements can help drive engagement on important topics.

2. Let your employees do the talking

Leaders aren’t the only ones with important insights to share. Employees at all levels and in all sectors of the company can help others improve by sharing their own knowledge and experiences.

Many companies encourage this higher level of engagement through an employee blog. Blog responsibility may be delegated as a rotating assignment to different departments, or utilize volunteer signups. Allowing a broader range of perspectives helps keep the blog engaging and diverse. And by enabling comments, thoughtful blog posts can spark additional discussions and idea sharing among team members.

A blog with publicly available content can also make your business more appealing to prospective clients or new hires as they learn of your team’s passion and expertise.

3. Use digital signage to reach non-desk employees

Not everyone spends the entire day at a desk. This is especially true of workers at warehouses, industrial facilities or manufacturing plants, who are on their feet throughout much of the day. Emails tend to be ineffective at reaching these non-desk employees, but placing digital signage throughout the workplace can help ensure workers get engaging and up-to-date information anywhere in the facility.

Switching to digital bulletin boards (rather than continuing to rely on manually updated bulletin boards) is an especially important element of making this form of communication more effective. As a case study by Valotalive reveals, a business with 12 sites can save $17,830 per month by replacing manual

bulletin-board updates with digital signage that uses automatic updates. These also provide significant time savings and improved engagement with messaging as content is updated more frequently.

Related: **10 Measures That Improve Internal Communication**

4. Create a company app

Another way to ensure your communications can reach all employees within the organization is through the creation of a company app. An app designed specifically for your company can serve as the go-to location for getting relevant updates in a timely manner. Your app can be customized to the needs of your company to include features like message boards, push notifications, newsletters and other relevant tools.

Consider the different types of communications your employees could benefit from. Aside from team and project-focused communications, your app could include everything from an internal job board to training materials. Adapt your app based on employee feedback and requests so that it can help them work more effectively. Whether at a desk or not, an app enables everyone to keep in touch.

5. Use virtual focus groups and town halls to get feedback

Communication isn’t a one-way street. Unfortunately, in larger businesses, it can become challenging to effectively gather employee feedback. In-person focus groups and town halls can be good opportunities to collect feedback, but don’t be afraid to use virtual options as well. This can be especially helpful for engaging remote workers, who often feel isolated or overlooked by their organization.

Leaders who are open and willing to answer questions or

receive feedback from employees in both in-person and virtual settings will be far more effective at resolving concerns. Acting on the feedback you receive will help employees feel valued and make them more likely to value your communications in return.

6. Embrace personalization and segmentation

Email personalization and segmentation are often cited as key components of successful marketing to consumers. For example, NotifyVisitors reports that segmented email campaigns see a 20% higher open rate and 11% higher click-through rate than non-segmented emails. This not only drives revenue, but it also reduces the number of subscribers who choose to unsubscribe.

The same qualities can also make a noteworthy difference in internal communications as well. When leaders personalize and segment their communications based on factors like an employee's position, department or amount of time at the company, they can ensure that each person receives messages that are actually relevant to their work. This helps reduce the total number of messages an employee receives, ensuring they give the necessary time and attention to communications that are meaningful to them.

Related: Why Effective Internal Communication is Critical to an Organization's Well-Being

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to effective communication with your team. Quite often, you'll need to incorporate a variety of communication methods so the right messages can reach every member of your organization. By making quality communication a priority, you can keep all team members fully engaged and provide the resources they need to maximize their impact.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/6-creative-ways-to-improve-internal-communications-at-work/489802

You’re Not Too Small for a CRM — Here’s Why It Matters For Your Startup

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The path to growing a successful small business is filled with countless interactions — prospects to follow up with, deals to close and commitments to deliver. Yet surprisingly, over 50% of businesses don’t use a CRM, with nearly half of business owners believing their businesses are too small to need one. This couldn’t be further from the truth, especially as these interactions multiply and the challenge of keeping track becomes increasingly complex.

In my experience, businesses typically engage with at least five to ten prospects for every customer they acquire, and sales cycles can stretch anywhere from a few days to nine or even twelve months.

This is especially true for service-oriented businesses, professional services firms and creative agencies where deal values are substantial and relationships matter. Unlike a simple retail transaction, these businesses often involve complex sales cycles with multiple touchpoints.

I learned this lesson firsthand in my early days as an

entrepreneur. When I was both coding and selling, I constantly found myself switching between multiple roles. I would forget to call prospects back, lose track of where previous conversations had left off and miss follow-up interactions.

After searching unsuccessfully for a solution in the Mac ecosystem, I ended up building Daylite, our CRM at Marketcircle, to solve these exact challenges.

Related: Making A CRM Platform Your Sales Team's Best Friend

When you need a CRM

The first sign that you need a CRM often appears when things start falling through the cracks. Consider this common scenario: you need to make an urgent follow-up call but can't find the client's contact information. You send a request to your team – if you have a team; if not, you waste your valuable non-renewable time waiting for details. While this might seem trivial, these small delays compound over time into significant productivity losses and missed opportunities.

When you appear unprofessional, it affects not just your ability to close deals but also your pricing power. If clients perceive a lack of organization, they might try to negotiate lower prices. Once trust is lost, it becomes exponentially harder to regain.

Start early

The best time to implement a CRM is now! The sooner you start using a CRM in your entrepreneurial life, the better. I've seen this challenge firsthand with businesses that try to implement one after growing to three or four team members.

At this point, everyone has established their own ways of working, making it much harder to break old habits and form new ones. Plus, you want your team to follow your tune, not

make up their own that you then have to follow.

When you're working solo, you have the perfect opportunity to develop the habits that will serve as the foundation for your growing business. These practices become the standard for new team members as they join. Without this disciplined approach, people will inevitably fall back into their old habits; there's always "lots of work to do," and maintaining new systems takes consistent reinforcement.

Related: How CRM and Sales Work Together to Drive Small Business Growth

Keys to successful adoption

1. Model commitment – As the business owner, you must be fully committed to the CRM adoption. If you don't demonstrate its importance through consistent use, your team won't prioritize it either.

2. Choose the right system – Look for a CRM that truly integrates with your daily activities. The upfront time investment will pay off in future returns, as you find your system seamlessly connects your calendar, tasks and email while reducing manual data entry and keeping everything in one place.

3. Start simple – Take time to think about your sales process steps and how you classify appointments, tasks and customer interactions. As you get more comfortable and learn what works in your business, you can keep customizing until you have a system that serves all your needs.

We offer three implementation options tailored to your workflow: self-guided tutorials, onboarding team training or working with a specialist consultant. Many business owners only recognize their unique sales process during setup, which is why personalized support can make a big difference.

Long-term benefits

Beyond keeping customer interactions organized, a CRM creates the foundation for business growth. It enables you, as the owner, to focus on strategic activities and even take vacations without worrying about missing deadlines with clients. If you have a team, it allows you to delegate responsibilities effectively.

Remember that while technology evolves, your CRM should provide stability for your core business processes. Look for a vendor that makes thoughtful, non-disruptive updates that won't break your established workflows. The journey of implementing a CRM might seem daunting, but the alternative – losing opportunities and appearing unprofessional – is far more costly.

By starting early and maintaining consistency, you'll build a strong foundation for sustainable business growth.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/youre-not-too-small-for-a-crm-heres-why-it-matters/489798

Make These Smart Moves to Turn Your Side Hustle Into a 6-Figure Business (Without Burning Out)

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Does the challenge of turning your side hustle into a six-figure business excite you? If you are a beginner or on the way to growing your side hustle, this post is for you. Today, we will share expert tips and strategies to manage your time and work without burning out.

A side hustle gives the flexibility to test ideas, learn new skills and create an additional income stream.

There is no exact science to turn a side hustle into six figures without consistency, hard work and long-term strategy.

Related: Can You Turn Your Side Hustle into a Business? Consider These 3 Things.

Start by self-funding your business

One of the most sustainable ways to grow a side hustle into a six-figure business is through bootstrapping. It means that you fund the business yourself without relying on outside investors or loans. With this approach, you can maintain complete control and minimize financial risk.

For example, when I started my digital products business as a side hustle, I relied entirely on income from my full-time corporate job to cover my expenses. Every dollar my side hustle earned went straight back into growing the business. Whether it was for better tools, marketing or improving my products. I didn’t take a single dollar for myself in the early stages.

Many successful entrepreneurs start precisely this way. They use their day job as a financial safety net and reinvest business earnings to fuel long-term growth. So, instead of rushing to quit your job too soon, use this phase to refine your business model. Start testing different strategies and build a solid foundation before entering full-time

entrepreneurship.

Clarify your vision and define success

Knowing what success means to you before transitioning from a side hustle to a six-figure business is essential. This clarity will help guide your decisions. It will also keep you aligned with your long-term goals.

Set specific income goals:

The goal of six figures is clear, but at the start, break it down. Start with less and gradually increase your expectations. Clarify your goals: Do you want to make $100,000 in revenue? Or is your goal generating $100,000 in profit? This difference can help you structure your approach effectively.

Identify your "why":

Understand the reason behind starting the business. This strategy keeps you motivated all the time. Here were my reasons for starting mine:

- I am looking for more freedom.
- I need a chance to make an impact.
- I need a path to financial independence.

Keep your motivation front and center as you scale.

Plan for sustainability:

A common mistake is that everyone focuses only on rapid growth. True success is sustainable, so factor in how to build a business that can thrive without burning you out.

Related: **From Side Gig to 6-Figure Success – How I Built a Thriving Home-Based Business as a Busy Family Man**

Focus on systems over hustle

To scale a side hustle, you must move from a “hustle” mindset to one of systems and processes. In the early stages, you do everything, such as marketing, sales, customer service and even product delivery. But if you continue doing everything yourself, you’ll quickly reach a point where you can no longer grow without sacrificing your well-being.

Automate tasks:

Consider investing in tools and AI software that can automate parts of your business. Email marketing automation, accounting software and scheduling tools can free up significant amounts of time.

Outsource and delegate:

When the business starts growing, divide tasks that don’t require your expertise. You can hire a virtual assistant, an accountant or a content creator to focus on what drives the business forward.

Create repeatable processes:

Create standard operating procedures (SOPs) for your business. These will help every part of your business run smoothly and consistently, so anyone can handle any task easily.

Master time management

Burnout occurs when there is an imbalance between work and personal life. When shifting from a side hustle to a full-time business, set boundaries and manage your time to avoid burnout.

You can set clear boundaries for your work hours. For example, decide that evenings or weekends are reserved for personal time. Schedule specific hours each day for focused work. Protect your time fiercely to avoid always being "on."

You can block time on your calendar for deep work, meetings and personal activities. This helps you stay organized and allocate your time effectively to grow your business without sacrificing other aspects of your life.

Invest in the right resources

Make strategic investments in the right resources to grow your business. It includes anything that can help fuel your business growth.

With the growth of your business, your tools and technology should scale with you. To streamline operations, consider upgrading to a more comprehensive CRM, email automation system or project management software.

If you want to stay competitive in your industry, continue your education. Whether it's a business mastermind, an online course or reading books, learning is a priority. This not only helps your business but is also vital for your growth.

Getting professional advice can also help to grow in the right direction. A mentor who has successfully scaled a side hustle can provide invaluable insight. They can help you avoid common mistakes, share growth strategies and help you stay on track.

Related: This Mom Used an 'Overlooked' Ingredient to Grow a 6-Figure Side Hustle From Her Kitchen: 'Like an Intensive MBA Program'

Maintain mental and physical health

The journey to a six-figure business can be challenging, but

protecting your mental and physical health is essential. Success doesn't happen overnight. Set realistic expectations about what you can achieve and when. This will help you stay grounded and avoid unnecessary stress.

Breaks are an essential part of the work. It is not just for relaxation; it helps you recharge and maintain productivity. Schedule time for self-care, exercise and social activities.

It can feel isolating when building a business, but it doesn't have to be. Surround yourself with a supportive community of entrepreneurs who can offer advice, support and motivation.

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She Runs a James Beard Award-Nominated Restaurant. Here's Her 2-Step Process for Hiring the Best Employees.

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Located in the heart of Portland, Maine, Sur Lie is a James Beard Award-nominated tapas restaurant with a menu spearheaded

by chef Mimi Weissenborn, a recently announced contestant on Bravo's *Top Chef*.

While Weissenborn takes the helm in the kitchen, owner and James Beard Award semifinalist Krista Cole works behind the scenes to ensure a smooth service night after night. She first opened the restaurant out of her love for tapas and wine pairings, filling a gap she couldn't find in Portland. Then, Weissenborn came along and changed the game. Now, their unique dynamic is a key component to their success at Sur Lie.

"[We're] this incredible dynamic duo," Cole says. "I'm very data-oriented, organized and efficient, and she's the brilliant, creative brain that comes up with the menu, which is why people come into Sur Lie as well. We have a really good relationship that way. As women in the industry trying to break down barriers, we focus on what we're both really good at and how to complement each other."

Related: This CEO's Paint-Your-Own Pottery Business Has 130 Locations — But Anyone Can Use Her Tips for Creating a Customer-First Experience

Together, the pair has crafted innovative menus and an even more impressive tapas service. One customer, Mike C., visited the restaurant on a post-holiday trip and still remembers his server's name today.

"Service makes the meal, and it can break the meal," Mike says. "Meg — because I do remember her name — she was really great, super friendly, nice and casual but professional. The service that we got was attentive but not overbearing. I'm not looking for them to come up and check on me every second, but I also don't want to have to look around when I need them. That's service: learning that knowledge, that experience, that know-when-to and when-not-to."

Cole says she isn't sure if the sixth sense for exceptional service can be taught, but she encourages her team to develop

pride in their work. She notices a clear improvement in service when servers treat their work as a craft and feel empowered to add their own personal touch.

Related: Expert Strategies to Add to Your Small Business's Playbook This Tax Season

It also helps to have a passionate chef running the show. "I think the most important thing, too, is [Mimi is] an amazing leader, and that, to me, speaks more than being an amazing chef because when you can lead a team of people and really inspire in our industry, then that translates into the guest experience," Cole says.

Building a dream team doesn't happen by mistake. Cole uses two hiring tactics to find employees who show promise. First, she reviews the applicant's resumé and researches their previous workplaces to understand their past work cultures and see if they would be a natural fit at Sur Lie. Second, she asks about the applicant's favorite workplace and why, gaining insight into their values and cultural contributions.

From hiring to inventory, Cole does it all, emphasizing the importance of organization to stay on top of everything. Before becoming a restaurateur, Cole worked as a healthcare manager and studied entrepreneurship, gaining expertise in team and organizational structure that still serves her today.

"Having systems and processes in place is super important to providing quality and consistency," she says. "[That translates into] having your team really engaged in the work they're doing and being able to hold people accountable. It should be a well-oiled machine, and there should be very clear expectations and one way of doing things."

Related: The Training (and Business) Philosophy That Sets This Self-Defense Studio Apart

With such systems and expectations in place, Cole is able to

protect her limited time. She owns and runs two other eateries in Maine in addition to Sur Lie. Something as simple as creating an Amazon order request form or preparing a meeting agenda saves her precious time and ensures she addresses every issue with her team.

Reading customer reviews is always an item on Cole's to-do list and an essential component of Sur Lie's well-oiled machine. She appreciates anyone who takes the time to provide feedback, but she really takes it to heart when it comes from a local resident.

When she first took over the restaurant Gather, she invested in the brand by hiring experts and sourcing local ingredients, resulting in higher menu prices. "[We were] hearing from the community that it was getting too expensive," Cole says. "We definitely took that feedback seriously because you're not a destination restaurant in a small town. Usually, you're supported by your community and the locals. So that was something that we shifted and tried to make a little more approachable for people, especially in a family-oriented community."

Related: What Small Businesses Can Learn from Yelp's Trend Tracker

From starting in healthcare to owning three restaurants, Cole continues to steer her entrepreneurial journey with these key lessons:

- **Pick up transferable skills along the way.** The entrepreneurial journey is often a winding road, but skills from other industries can prove invaluable in the long run.
- **Listen to locals.** Community is the driving force behind all local businesses. Make sure to listen to locals and value their opinions to foster long-term loyalty.
- **Get a good read on the market.** Determine if there's a

hole in the market your business can fill and assess how you can differentiate yourself from competitors.

- **Service is a craft.** Service leaves a lasting impression, good or bad. Encourage your team to bring their own flair to customer service and take pride in their craft.
- **Protect your time.** Set clear expectations with your team on when and how you're available. Whether it's a form for inventory requests or an agenda item for the all-hands meeting, having a system in place will help you work smarter, not harder.
- **Hire to enhance your culture.** If you don't invest in your staff's careers, they won't invest in the customer experience. Recognize their value and how it aligns with your company culture.

Listen to the episode below to hear directly from Cole and Mike C., and subscribe to Behind the Review *for more from new business owners and reviewers every Thursday.*

Editorial contributions by Erin Palmero and Kristi Lindahl

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How to Scale a Business Without Wasting Millions (Or Collapsing Under Your Own Growth)

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Ask any founder what their biggest dream is, and most will say "growth." And that makes sense — growth is proof that you've built something people want. But ask seasoned operators what they fear most, and they'll say the same thing.

Why? Because growth done wrong can break a company faster than failure ever could.

I've scaled a company from scratch. I've done it without outside funding, without flashy campaigns and without burning cash just to show hockey-stick charts to a boardroom. And I've seen companies grow five times faster than we did — only to disappear within a year.

If you're building a business and looking to scale, here's the hard truth: speed doesn't matter if you can't handle what's coming at you. Growing too fast, before you have the structure, systems, and discipline in place, is like pouring concrete before checking the foundation.

So, how do you scale without collapsing under your own weight, or wasting millions trying?

Here's what I've learned.

Related: 5 Crucial Steps to Help You Scale Your Business

Growth isn't a goal — it's a result

First things first: growth isn't the mission. Execution is. Growth is what happens when your product solves a real problem, your team can deliver consistently and your operations can scale without friction. If you focus on growth as the goal itself, you'll cut corners, overhire, overspend and end up with a bloated organization that looks impressive but can't support itself.

There’s a reason startups raise massive rounds, hire hundreds of people overnight, and light up Times Square with branding before hitting breakeven. The market rewards the appearance of momentum.

But that kind of growth isn’t free — it’s financed with dilution, debt or deferred failure. It’s tempting to spend big to look big, especially when competitors are making noise and investors are cheering you on. But every dollar you raise comes with expectations, and every expectation adds pressure.

I bootstrapped my company from day one. That meant no lifelines, no safety net and constant awareness that every decision had to make financial sense, not just strategic sense. The result? We grew slower than others, but we didn’t waste money chasing validation. We earned our way into new markets, built real revenue and stayed alive long enough to scale on our own terms.

Related: **How I Learned to Scale Without Adding More Hours**

Fix the leaks before you add more pressure

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is trying to scale operations that already have problems. If you’ve got inefficiencies in your onboarding process, your supply chain or your tech stack, and you scale demand, you’re scaling your pain.

Before you expand, identify the friction points. Where are you losing time, money or customer satisfaction? Where are the systems fragile, or the responsibilities unclear?

In my company, we adopted a mindset early on: never add pressure to a broken system. That meant building systems that could run lean and handle stress before we layered on growth. And it meant building a team that understood the importance of

operational readiness over surface-level metrics.

Don’t build the team you think you’ll need — Build the one you can support

Hiring is one of the fastest ways to burn cash — and one of the easiest ways to screw up scale.

When companies raise funding or get that first big contract, they often start hiring based on projections. “We’re going to grow 200% next year, so let’s hire the team we’ll need now.”

But growth is never linear, and what you end up with is a payroll that outpaces your revenue, and a team of people solving problems that haven’t materialized yet.

Growth magnifies both strengths and weaknesses. If your unit economics are shaky, scaling will expose them fast. That means before you expand into new markets, new verticals or new offerings, you need to understand exactly how and where you’re making money — and where you’re not.

We learned early that revenue is vanity if it’s not profitable. Growth that doesn’t strengthen your core metrics is just noise. Before you chase more customers, make sure you’re delivering value efficiently to the ones you already have.

Related: 6 Simple Ways to Scale Your Business Without Compromising Quality

Avoid the infrastructure trap

This one’s specific, but important. Too many businesses scale by stacking systems — adding new platforms, tools, vendors and workflows to meet demand. The result is a spaghetti mess of

infrastructure that no one understands and everyone blames when something breaks.

Instead, focus on systems that scale naturally. Look for infrastructure that’s cloud-native, integrated and automation-ready. Use platforms that give you visibility across departments. Invest in tools that grow with you, not tools that get rebuilt every time your needs change.

The hardest part of scaling deliberately is knowing when to hold back. When new deals come in, when competitors are making moves, when the team’s pushing to grow faster — it’s hard to pump the brakes.

But saying yes to everything is a recipe for distraction and burnout. Scaling successfully means saying no to opportunities that don’t align with your core strengths or stretch you be yond operational readiness.

At several points in our growth, we passed on deals that would have looked great on paper, but we weren’t ready to support them without breaking our delivery model. It cost us short-term momentum, but it saved us from long-term damage.

Scale isn’t a race

There’s no prize for being the first to reach a milestone if you can’t sustain it.

Real scale isn’t about speed — it’s about durability. It’s about building a business that can handle pressure, adapt quickly and grow with purpose.

If you can do that — if you scale deliberately, with discipline and clarity — you won’t just grow fast. You’ll grow strong.

And that’s what actually lasts.

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‘We Can’t Possibly Do It All Ourselves’: People Are Hopping Into Robotaxis 250,000 Times a Week, Says Waymo

Remember when there was a big question if anyone would be comfortable enough to climb into a driverless car to get from point A to point B? Well, according to Waymo, the answer is definitely yes.

Waymo, the autonomous vehicle unit of Alphabet, reports that it is booking 250,000 paid rides per week in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Austin. That marks a 50,000 ride increase since February.

CEO Sundar Pichai told analysts on an earnings call that Waymo is actively exploring ways to scale up its business, saying, “We can’t possibly do it all ourselves.” They are working on partnerships with Uber and automakers, as well as maintenance businesses.

Related: **Man Gets Stuck in a Circling Waymo, Goes Viral From Backseat**

“Waymo is continuing to progress in building on its impressive technological achievements to scale rapidly and develop a sustainable business model,” noted Alphabet Chief Financial Officer Anat Ashkenazi on the call.

As *CNBC* reports, Waymo beat Elon Musk’s Tesla in the race to bring autonomous vehicles to the masses. Musk, on an earnings call this week, says he is not impressed. Musk told investors that Waymo’s vehicles “cost way more money” because of their “expensive sensor suite.” He said Tesla’s tech is much cheaper to scale and predicted they would have “99% market share or something ridiculous.”

John Krafcik, former Waymo CEO, clapped back, telling *Business Insider*, “Tesla has never competed with Waymo – they’ve never sold a robotaxi ride to a public rider, but they’ve sold a lot of cars.” His email continued, “And although Tesla hopes to compete with Waymo someday, they’ve failed utterly and completely at this for each of the 10 years they’ve been talking about it.”

Other players in the robotaxi competition include Amazon’s Zoox, Mobileye, May Mobility, WeRide, and Baidu’s Apollo Go. But as of now, Waymo seems to be far ahead in the race.

Related: Tesla CEO Elon Musk Will Spend Less Time at DOGE

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/waymo-reports-robotaxis-are-booked-250000-times-a-week/490644

Most Coachella Attendees

Bought Their $600 Tickets This Year with a Buy Now, Pay Later Option

Coachella, the music festival that occurred across two weekends this month, drew crowds of 125,000-plus attendees each day.

A report published by *Billboard* last week shows that most of the crowd, about 60%, used Coachella's payment plan system to pay for their $600-and-up tickets. The plan allows attendees access to Coachella with an upfront cost of as little as $49.99.

Tickets started at $649 for the first weekend of Coachella from April 10 through 12 and $600 for the second weekend from April 17 through 19. *People* reported that tickets used to cost $429 per weekend in 2020. When Coachella started in 1999, tickets were $50.

Related: Jeff Bezos Was Caught on Video Dancing at Coachella, But It's His '$12 Amazon Shirt' That Has the Internet in Stitches

The festival first began offering the buy-now-pay-later option in 2009, and at the time, only 18% of attendees tapped into it, per *People*.

Coachella music festival 2025. Credit: Getty Images

Coachella partnered with ticketing company AXS to offer the buy now, pay later payment plan, which enables the festival goer to pay off their ticket over three months. Coachella does not charge interest for the ticket purchase, but does require that those who opt for the payment plan pay a $41 fee for using the service, which amounts to about 8% of the ticket price. The average credit card interest rate, in comparison, is about 20%.

Most fans bought tickets to Coachella after the festival announced its musician lineup in November, revealing that Lady Gaga, Travis Scott, Green Day, Post Malone, and Benson Boone were headliners. Anyone who bought tickets before Jan. 25 and opted for the payment plan had the price of their ticket

divided into three equal payments, with the final payment deducted from the attendee's account in March, per *Billboard*.

If payments were more than 10 days late, the order was automatically cancelled and the fan given a credit for future festivals. The credit expires one year after being issued.

Related: Google's Founders Once Interviewed Their CEO at Burning Man. Now the Desert Festival Is Struggling to Sell Tickets.

Coachella makes more than $115 million in ticket sales on average per year. Artists who perform at the festival can earn up to $5 million per weekend.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/most-coachella-attendees-buy-tickets-with-buy-now-pay-later/490596

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5 'Boring' Processes That Make Tech Companies Wildly Successful (and Will Work For Your Small Business, Too)

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Big tech companies and small businesses face the same basic problems. They both need to understand their customers, manage costs and watch competitors. However, tech companies tackle these challenges with processes that most small businesses

never implement.

I’ve spent years understanding both worlds, and I promise you: These five tech practices are worth stealing. They don’t require fancy software or a huge team. Just consistency.

Related: **How Inefficient Processes Are Hurting Your Company**

Understanding your customer persona and “jobs-to-be-done”

Tech companies and successful large corporations strive to understand their customers well. It’s much more nuanced than “we serve young professionals” or “the people in this neighborhood.”

Let’s take Starbucks as an example. They don’t just sell coffee to “coffee drinkers.” They have distinct customer personas: the rushed morning commuter who values speed above all, the remote worker camping out for hours (who probably should be paying rent, honestly) and the social meetup crowd treating the café as a gathering spot. Each persona drives different decisions on how their stores are set up and operated.

The key is understanding what job your customers are “hiring” you to do. Nobody buys a quarter-inch drill because they want a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole. Maybe they are first-time home-owners who are hanging shelves. Maybe they are woodworking hobbyists building a birdhouse. These are both different jobs to be done, an industry standard framework by Clayton M. Christensen.

It’s why Apple doesn’t sell “smartphones with good cameras.” They sell the ability to capture your child’s first steps in stunning clarity. The job to be done isn’t “own technology.” It’s “preserve memories.”

What job is your customer hiring you to do? Figure that out, and you'll see opportunities your competitors miss entirely.

You're leaking customers and don't even know it

Product managers and tech companies obsess over retention. If your customers don't come back, they probably don't find your product valuable, and the company does not have product-market fit. Even if you acquire a lot of customers now, you will eventually lose them and churn through the market to oblivion.

You don't need fancy systems for this. Just make a spreadsheet and start tracking. How many customers from last year still buy from you today? If that number makes you wince, you have a churn problem.

Your spreadsheet can track the purchase history of all customers. When do customers typically vanish? Three months in? After five purchases? Now, try to understand the reason behind it. Did they stop liking the product or service, find a cheaper alternative or just forget? If you email or call a couple of people to ask, you will have the answer.

Your existing customers believed in you enough to give you a shot. Understand their problems and make them loyal fans.

Related: 3 Pillars of Client Retention Every Brand Needs to Implement

Know your costs

Unit economics is the magic math that lets corporations grow large and become profitable. What does it cost the business for each thing sold? Small businesses often track overall expenses but forget to attribute them to individual products and services.

Let’s think about your neighborhood sandwich shop. If the supplying bakery raised its prices by 10%, what does it mean for each sandwich’s margins on the menu? Are they still profitable, and by how much?

Tracking costs in detail can be hard and tedious. It’s not just materials but also the labor costs, transaction fees, packaging and so on. However, not knowing detailed costs is a missed opportunity at best and dangerous at worst. You could be losing money on some items while others subsidize them. Or worse, your apparent “best seller” might be bleeding you dry while a humble side offering quietly delivers all your actual profits.

Create a spreadsheet today. List every product and service. Assign all costs and make sure to include everything. Update it when your costs change. I guarantee you’ll find surprises that will change what you sell or how much you sell it for.

Learn from your competition

Go down the street and try your competition. In a new city? Go to the store in the same business as you. Yes, actually pay for something. What works? What’s frustrating? How’s the service? How does it compare?

This introduces you to brand-new approaches to doing things. You can learn from what others are doing well and avoid their mistakes.

Maintain a shared document where your team can add insights regularly. Make this part of your culture, not an occasional panic response if sales dip.

Your personal board of directors

Silicon Valley startups assemble advisory boards featuring industry veterans, subject-matter experts and been-there-done-

that entrepreneurs. Small business owners often try to figure out everything themselves, occasionally consulting with an accountant who’s juggling 200 other clients.

Your advisors shouldn’t just be friends who validate your ideas. You need people who will challenge your thinking, identify blind spots and connect you to opportunities. You need expertise you don’t have.

You don’t need to offer equity like tech companies. A lot of professionals will advise you for reasonable fees. Sometimes, retired or later-in-career veterans in the business will guide you just for the intellectual challenge of a new problem. Remember to formalize the relationship and talk to them regularly.

Related: How to Build an Advisory Board That Drives Startup Success

These practices all share one quality: They complement gut feelings with systematic processes. Your instincts still matter because you know your business intimately — but these systems catch what instincts miss.

As a small business owner, you’re already more nimble than large corporations. Add their systematic processes to your operation, and you’ll become truly dangerous.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/5-boring-processes-that-can-transform-your-small-business/489652