Get a Lifetime of Increased Productivity and Security for Just $10

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Small businesses spend an average of $1,200 per employee annually on software subscriptions, according to a report by Gartner. If you're managing the tight budgets most entrepreneurs work with, you can now increase your productivity and security for a lifetime with a low one-time payment. A Microsoft Windows 11 Pro lifetime license is now available for just $9.97.

Save big while enjoying increased productivity and security

Windows 11 Pro transforms how you manage daily business tasks. Snap layouts organize multiple applications across your screen in pre-configured arrangements, eliminating time spent manually resizing windows. Seamless redocking remembers your exact window placement when reconnecting external monitors.

The integrated Copilot AI assistant functions as your on-demand productivity partner. It summarizes web pages, changes system settings, opens applications, and generates code suggestions as you type. For entrepreneurs juggling multiple roles, this AI-powered support reduces the mental load of searching for information.

Improved voice typing lets you draft emails and documents hands-free with greater precision. Virtual desktops create separate workspaces for different projects or clients, keeping your tasks organized and your focus sharp.

Small businesses face the same cyber threats as large corporations, but often lack dedicated IT departments. You'll sleep easier knowing that Windows 11 Pro delivers advanced security features that protect sensitive business data without requiring technical expertise. Biometric login ensures only authorized users have access to your system, while TPM 2.0 provides hardware-based encryption.

Smart App Control blocks potentially malicious applications before they execute. BitLocker device encryption secures your entire drive, protecting confidential client information, financial records, and proprietary business data if your device is lost or stolen.

Most professional software requires ongoing subscription payments that can strain business budgets. Windows 11 Pro breaks this cycle by giving you enterprise-level features such as Azure AD for identity management, Hyper-V for running virtual machines and Windows Sandbox for testing applications safely without the matching price tag for licensing or recurring fees.

Get a lifetime license to Windows 11 Pro for just $9.97.

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7 AI Tools Solopreneurs Need for 2026 to Hit 7 Figures (No

Team, No Stress)

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If you go into 2026 still trying to run everything yourself, you're putting a hard cap on how big your business can get. In this video, I break down the seven AI tools I treat like "mini-employees" and show you how wiring just four of them together now handles what used to take a small team: traffic, follow-up and day-to-day operations.

In this breakdown, you'll discover:

- **How I built my traffic engine** that constantly surfaces topics, keywords and hooks your audience is already searching for, so you're never guessing what to publish next.
- **The always-on sales layer** that manages segmentation, follow-up and personalization after someone opts in, so leads are nurtured and closed without you babysitting every step.
- **The operations safety net** that turns random to-dos, scattered notes and calendar chaos into clean, repeatable workflows you can actually stick to.
- **The content hub** I use to go from idea to headline, script and publishing schedule in a single sitting, then use performance data to decide what to double down on.

I'll walk you through:

- The exact four-tool setup I'm using right now to run traffic, sales and ops with no staff.

- How the other three tools plug in to make everything smoother instead of more complicated.
- The specific checkpoints where I still step in as the decision-maker while AI handles the heavy lifting.
- The common automation traps solopreneurs fall into, and how to avoid turning your systems into a mess that creates more work instead of less.

If you're a solo entrepreneur who wants seven-figure output without building a seven-person team, this gives you a practical blueprint for 2026: Set up the stack once, let it take over the repetitive grind, and keep your energy focused on the decisions and projects that actually move the needle.

The **AI Success Kit** is available to download for free, along with a chapter from my **new book**, *The Wolf is at The Door.*

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How Smart Founders Know When to Pivot or Shut Down Their Startup

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This article is part of the America's Favorite Mom & Pop Shops series. Read more stories

Key Takeaways

- Discover a simple framework that keeps your startup on track without letting ego take over.

- Learn how top founders turn uncertainty into clear, actionable decisions.

Have you ever wanted to launch a successful startup? Maybe you've thought about an idea that can solve a problem or make a small difference in the world. The truth is, ideas are everywhere, and starting a business today is easier than you think.

Today's startups look very different from the ones in the 90s, when even a basic phone system could cost tens of thousands of dollars. AI and outsourcing make it faster and cheaper to launch a business than ever before.

When I first decided to start a small business right out of college, my classmates thought I was crazy. "Become a lawyer," they said. "You'll make a lot more money." I worried that if I launched and failed, it would be humiliating. But I told myself, "What do I have to lose anyway?" My first business lasted 14 months before I had to shut it down, but it generated enough money to launch my second company.

Since then, I have started dozens of companies, some successful and others spectacular failures. One flop was Shareholder Blockchain. I invested $50,000 to build an MVP in 120 days, hired a lawyer and two programmers, and went to work. When I returned for a demo, the team had gone in a completely different direction and was floundering. Within 24 hours, I shut it down. That failure taught me the power of defining checkpoints before emotion takes over.

Related: The Art of Navigating 'No' — When to Persist, Pivot or Give Up and Pack it In

In my book *Start. Scale. Exit. Repeat.* I introduce the concept of "Stage Gates," a S.M.A.R.T. checkpoint in time. Why use this framework? Because it is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound. If we don't measure progress, we can't succeed. At a college incubator in South

Florida, I ask students to define a stage gate. I am very specific: “By Jan. 31 at noon, deliver an MVP that you can pitch to customers and investors.”

Stage gates work because you define success in advance. If you don’t hit it, you either pivot or kill it. Success could be the number of customers signed up by a certain date, distributors secured, revenue generated, or profit achieved. Think of it like arcade driving games in the ’80s. If you were skilled, you could complete the track and earn extra time. If you were exceptional, you might hit two or three gates before inserting another quarter. Stage gates work the same way: hit your checkpoint or the game ends.

For Shareholder Blockchain, I chose to shut it down. In other cases, a postmortem can help you pivot and reset a new stage gate. Ego is a dangerous trap for entrepreneurs. Too many founders hold on too long to failing ideas. Stage gates give you the clarity to make honest decisions if you miss them.

Related: Should I Stay or Should I Go? 8 Key Points to Navigate the Founder’s Dilemma

Stage gates offer several advantages. They give you room to make mistakes and show others that you won’t panic unless a gate is missed. You can also set mini goals that may fail without beating yourself up. They make success visible. Investors, employees, and stakeholders know exactly what success looks like. At one company, we even tied CEO compensation to milestones: break even, clear debt, hit $1 million in profit. When you meet your target, you prove both your concept and your ability to execute.

Once you hit a stage gate, set the next one. You now have something tangible for investors, whether a product demo or paying customers. Early-stage fundraising is difficult, but as you demonstrate consistent progress and show the lifetime value of customers versus acquisition costs, raising money

becomes easier. KPIs are crucial. Understand the metrics that drive your company, hit them, and present them to investors.

Dust off that old idea and create a S.M.A.R.T. stage gate. Define your checkpoints, commit to them, and measure relentlessly. Either way, you win, because clarity beats hope every time.

Key Takeaways

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4 Essential Tips to Help Gen Z Grads Navigate Today's Tough Job Market

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Gen Z college grads face a tough job market marked by fewer entry-level openings, economic slowdown and AI replacing traditional junior roles.
- To stand out, you need to build your network, be referral-ready, adapt to AI, explore freelance or project-based roles and be proactive, not passive.

It's no secret: Gen Z college grads are stepping into one of the most uncertain job markets in recent memory. Hiring freezes, economic downturns and an unsettling rise in AI replacing entry-level roles have created an environment that feels like an obstacle course instead of a career launchpad.

According to recent studies, unemployment rates for new grads (age 22-27) are consistently higher compared to other workers. Additionally, automation and generative AI tools are quietly taking over tasks once assigned to interns and entry-level staff. Combine this with economic uncertainty, and it's no wonder so many Gen Z graduates are asking: *Where do I even start?*

Related: AI Is Dramatically Decreasing Entry-Level Hiring at Big Tech Companies, According to a New Analysis

The harsh truth about today's entry-level market

- **Companies are cautious:** Economic volatility has pushed many employers to pause or reduce hiring.
- **AI is shifting hiring practices:** Basic research, content creation and customer service jobs are increasingly automated.
- **Experience paradox:** Even "entry-level" roles may require one to two years of experience.
- **Ghost jobs are real:** Applicants often never hear back after applying, making the process even more distressing.

However, despite such a challenging situation, there is still opportunity, especially for those willing to think differently about the job search.

Tip #1: Build, don't just apply

Instead of spending hours on mass applications, invest that time in building relationships.

- Create a targeted approach by reaching out to your alumni network on LinkedIn who are in your field of interest.
- Attend industry-specific webinars, job fairs and networking mixers, which are often free of charge.
- Start or join communities around your professional interest (coding, writing, design, etc.).

Why it works: Referrals are still one of the most effective

ways to land interviews. In fact, referred candidates are four times more likely to be hired.

Tip #2: Be referral-ready

Getting a referral doesn’t mean asking someone to “hook you up” just because you know them.

- Keep your LinkedIn profile and resume updated.
- Prepare a brief pitch of your skills and goals.
- Show your value early on by sharing a project or insight relevant to the company.

Bonus tip: Explore new resources like referral platforms, which provide access to a structured, rewarding solution.

Tip #3: AI-proof your skill set

AI isn’t going anywhere. The best thing you can do is learn to work with it, not against it.

- Upskill in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and emotional intelligence with skills machines can’t replicate.
- Learn to use AI tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney or Notion AI to augment your workflow.
- Develop your personal brand through blogs, side projects or online portfolios.

Tip #4: Think gig, not just job

In a shifting economy, freelance and contract work can be your best entry point.

- Try project-based gigs to gain real-world experience.
- Explore startups, nonprofits and small businesses as they often value hustle over a resume.
- Keep an eye on referral-based platforms where you can build a reputation and be recommended for new roles.

Related: ‘Really Hard to Find a Job’: 1.7 Million Job Seekers Have Been Looking for Work for at Least 6 Months

Be proactive, not passive

The old formula — get a degree, apply online and wait for the right opportunity no longer guarantees success. A better way? Be visible. Be valuable. Be referred.

As Gen Z continues to enter and reshape the workforce, those who embrace a new approach to navigating the networked, AI-augmented economy will be the ones who stand out and not just survive.

Let relationships, referrals and reinvention be your competitive edge.

Key Takeaways

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According to recent studies, unemployment rates for new grads (age 22-27) are consistently higher compared to other workers. Additionally, automation and generative AI tools are quietly taking over tasks once assigned to interns and entry-level staff. Combine this with economic uncertainty, and it’s no wonder so many Gen Z graduates are asking: *Where do I even start?*

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We Could’ve Franchised Our Business. Here’s Why We Didn’t — and How It Paid Off.

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Key Takeaways

- With franchising, a lot of the money you make doesn’t come from the success of your product. It comes from selling territory and the fees you charge your

franchisees, which can lead to complacency.

- Franchising is ideal for fast food chains but can create challenges in industries where operators have more complex responsibilities.
- With a dealership model, the money you make comes directly from the success of your dealers. This creates motivation to empower dealers with support and training.
- It’s good for your dealers because they get to build a brand in their local market. Customers also benefit because they can trust that the service they receive is backed by a company with skin in the game

Congratulations, founder. You’ve just successfully achieved product-market fit, and things are going well for the business you started. Now it’s time to expand. How are you going to do it?

Opening new locations is often beyond startups because it requires resources that might not be available. Franchising often seems like an easier way to scale. But while franchising can help you grow a burger chain, it’s not always appropriate for other types of businesses.

That’s why I chose a different model for Roof Maxx, the company I started with my brother Todd to bring cost-effective roof restoration to North American homes and businesses. Below, I explain why creating a dealership network across North America allowed us to grow without taking on more risk than we could handle, and why it also let us sidestep the problems that come with franchising. Read on and learn what to consider when making this decision for yourself.

Related: 3 Reasons Why You Shouldn’t Start a Franchise

Why franchising might not be right

for your industry — unless you work in fast food

Here's the truth about franchising: A lot of the money you make doesn't come from the success of your product. It actually comes from selling territory and the fees you charge your franchisees. In fact, under a franchise model, they pay you regardless of how well they're doing.

That might sound like an added layer of security at first, and it can certainly be lucrative, especially in the early stages of expanding your business when people are excited about your brand and want to associate themselves with it. But it can also make you dangerously complacent.

Yes, you can afford to be relatively hands-off when you're franchising a fast food chain, as long as you've got a few surefire recipes your franchisees can follow. But you can't take that approach in home services, because your franchisees have significantly more complex responsibilities: prospecting, sales, site visits, applying the product, issuing warranties and so on. And if you don't provide them with standardized training and ongoing oversight, they'll struggle to deliver consistent results to customers.

That's not all, though. If your franchisees don't feel that you're supporting them to succeed, they can come to view your franchise as a predatory operation that's only interested in its bottom line. Once that happens, selling new franchise territories becomes exponentially more difficult. After all, word travels fast.

Related: Franchising Is Not For Everyone. Explore These Lucrative Alternatives to Expand Your Business.

What makes a dealer model different — and what people get wrong about it

Establishing a dealer network can seem a bit like franchising at first glance, but there is one key difference: The money you make comes directly from the success of your dealers.

With a dealership model, you don't sell territory or charge flat fees to use your branding. Instead, you sell an exclusive, tested and proven product to them. The more they sell, the more you distribute.

This is good for your individual dealers because they get to build a brand in their local market. That's especially useful in home services, where customers are more inclined to trust local contractors for things like roofing work than they are to trust giant companies. It's also good for you, because it provides strong motivation to empower the dealers in your network via training resources, incentive programs and other kinds of support.

In the end, though, your customers are the ones who benefit most. They get the satisfaction of knowing that the dealers who apply your product have the backing of a company with skin in the game.

Related: **The Pros and Cons of Franchising Your Business**

Why I rejected the franchising model for Roof Maxx — and why you might want to do the same

Frankly, franchising was never on the table for Todd and me when we were talking about how to grow Roof Maxx. It's not that we couldn't have done it. After all, the roofing market

in the U.S. was valued at nearly $16 billion in 2023 and is projected to keep growing at a CAGR of about 4.5% until 2030.

The reason we chose a dealer network instead of franchising was simple: We refused to profit before our operators did.

That might make it sound like we really went out on a limb for the business, but it didn't feel that way at the time. We sincerely believed in our product, and we knew that making it successful required the kind of hands-on approach that isn't naturally compatible with the franchise model, for the reasons I've explained above. That made building a dealer network the easy choice.

From there, we focused on creating resources that would make our dealers maximally successful. You can read more about that in my other article about leveraging AI and other forward-thinking technology to create innovative training systems, plus a dealer management platform that helps us provide powerful tools and stay in touch with every dealer in our network.

How did it all work out? Today, we're America's number one rated roofing company and one of the largest virtual home services businesses in the world. So, if you're stuck between choosing between a franchise or a dealer network for your business, ask yourself this: Would you rather grow by selling opportunity, or by sharing it?

Key Takeaways

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How AI Is Making Founders Think Like Marketers (and Why That’s Good News)

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Key Takeaways

- AI isn’t replacing marketers — it’s teaching everyone to think like one. Smart tools are helping founders and teams approach creativity, storytelling and audience empathy the way great marketers do.
- The new advantage is clarity, not complexity. AI simplifies the process, freeing people to focus on message, meaning and connection rather than mechanics.
- Empathy stays human. AI can accelerate ideas, but only people can understand and connect with customers on an emotional level.

A funny thing about marketing right now is that founders are starting to think like marketers. Not because they suddenly have more time to dive into campaign strategy or study audience analytics — but because AI is making them.

For years, the gap between entrepreneurs and marketers has been defined by specialization. Founders focused on building; marketers focused on promoting. But as AI-powered tools blur those lines, the new competitive edge isn’t who has the biggest team or budget but those who can think creatively, communicate clearly and use innovative tools to amplify that thinking.

And that shift is good news — for both sides.

Related: Founders Must Harness Their Inner Marketer to Succeed — and AI Can Help

From “What should I say?” to “Who am I saying it to?”

AI has made the blank page a lot less intimidating. Whether you’re writing an email campaign, generating an ad headline or designing a product mockup, there’s now a tool that can help you get started in seconds. But the real power isn’t in what these tools write — it’s in the questions they force us to ask.

Founders who use AI effectively don’t just prompt for “a catchy headline.” They define the audience, the value and the feeling they want to create. In other words, they start to think like marketers.

That’s the quiet revolution happening right now. AI doesn’t eliminate creativity; it democratizes it. It gives non-marketers a taste of what it means to communicate with purpose. And once they get a taste, they start asking the right questions: Who is this for? Why should they care? What’s the simplest way to make that clear?

Those are the same questions every great marketer lives by.

The rise of the “AI marketer mindset”

What used to take hours of brainstorming and design reviews can now happen in minutes. AI helps busy teams build and refine campaigns faster, drafting ad copy, adjusting tone and suggesting visuals.

But here’s the secret: AI doesn’t replace the marketer’s job. It just gives everyone else a crash course in what that job really is.

When a founder sits down to create an email using AI-assisted

tools, they're not delegating strategy. They're engaging with it. They're thinking about segmentation, tone and timing — concepts that used to live exclusively in the marketing department.

It's not about *less* marketing. It's about *more people thinking like marketers.*

The result? Sharper messaging, faster testing and a stronger sense of what resonates with customers. And when the founder, marketer and product team start speaking the same language, innovation moves faster.

Creativity at the speed of clarity

For too long, marketing has been treated like magic — something that "just happens" once the product is ready. But now, founders can't afford to wait. They have to communicate value instantly, across channels, with less time and fewer people.

That's where AI becomes a creative equalizer.

Design tools can now turn a rough sketch into polished assets. Copy tools can translate a founder's vision into clear, compelling language. Analytics dashboards can reveal exactly which messages drive engagement — all without a dedicated data team.

The best founders use these capabilities not to cut corners but to *remove friction.* AI helps them focus on clarity: What message matters most? How can we say it in the simplest, most human way possible?

That's marketing, distilled.

Related: How to Harness AI for a Competitive Edge in Marketing

Why “working smarter” is finally real

For years, marketers have preached the value of working smarter, not harder. But let’s be honest – most software made that promise and buried it under layers of dashboards and dropdowns. AI has changed that.

Tools built around simplicity and intelligence – like smart text, tone adjusters or auto-generated designs – are finally delivering on that mantra. They make great marketing accessible without automating it in a soulless way.

Instead of replacing creativity, AI tools enhance it. They remove the busywork so entrepreneurs and marketers can focus on what matters: the message.

That’s a shift I see every day. At Benchmark Email, our platform is designed around the idea that AI shouldn’t do the work *for* you – it should help you do it *faster and better.* It’s there to clean up your drafts, sharpen your visuals and keep your audience front and center. It’s not replacing marketers; it’s allowing everyone else to think like one.

The empathy advantage

What makes great marketing isn’t just creativity – it’s empathy. You must know how your audience feels, their struggles and how your message can genuinely help them. AI can suggest phrases and images, but it can’t feel what your customers feel. That’s still human territory.

And that’s where marketers have an edge.

As AI levels the playing field in production, human empathy becomes the differentiator. Founders who approach marketing with empathy – thinking like their customers instead of just

selling to them — will build stronger, more enduring brands.

In a sense, AI is re-centering marketing around what it was always meant to be: connection.

Founders as storytellers

We often think of storytelling as a marketing skill, but it's really a leadership skill. Every founder tells a story — about why their company exists, what problem they're solving and why it matters. AI can help sharpen that story, but it can't invent authenticity.

That's why founders who use AI most effectively don't hand over the creative reins. They use the technology to express their story more clearly, not to outsource it.

A founder who can articulate a clear, compelling message has an enormous advantage — not just in marketing, hiring, fundraising and product design. When you think like a marketer, you think about meaning, not just metrics.

Related: All Every-stage Founders Should Act Like Marketers

The marketer's moment — redefined

If you're a marketer reading this, you might wonder: Where does this leave us?

Right where we belong — at the center of strategy.

As AI gives non-marketers more creative power, marketers have the opportunity to guide that power, help teams use these tools effectively and teach what makes a message resonate, not just what makes it read well.

The best marketers won't lose relevance; they'll become the teachers, editors and strategists behind a new generation of creative entrepreneurs.

And the best founders? They'll stop seeing marketing as something to delegate and start seeing it as something to master.

Related: Stop Worrying About AI Taking Your Marketing Job — and Start Doing This Instead

The next era of marketing isn't automation. It's alignment.

AI is rewriting the rules of how we work, but the goal hasn't changed. Whether you're a marketer, a founder or both, your job is still to connect ideas to people in meaningful ways.

AI tools can't replace that connection, but they can make it easier to build.

They remind us that great marketing isn't about scale but clarity. It's about showing up with empathy, communicating with confidence and keeping the message simple.

That's the mindset innovative founders — and savvy marketers — now share. And that's what's making the future of business more human than ever.

Key Takeaways

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Franchise Ownership Is Rising Among Women — Here's Why It Matters

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Women now own roughly 30% of U.S. franchises, up from 20.5% in 2013–2014.
- Mentorship, core skills and real-world experience are critical for rising in franchising leadership.
- Women-owned franchises often excel in creativity, organization, employee satisfaction and work-life balance.

When you're a customer at a franchise restaurant, coworking space or retail store, you'll usually find at least one woman working with customers on the front line. Today, it's increasingly likely that there's also a woman at the top, either as the owner or in a powerful executive position.

We celebrate women working as owners and leaders in the franchise industry every October 14th on Women in Franchising National Appreciation Day, which I'm proud to say my company founded in 2021.

It's a day to acknowledge women working in franchising and highlight the spike we're seeing in those entering the industry. We're seeing it across all our brands, even those that were previously predominantly male.

Women continue to show growing numbers when it comes to franchise ownership across the country. About 30% of U.S. franchise businesses are owned by women, compared to 20.5% in 2013-2014.

I think more women are turning to franchising because they view it as a smarter and more secure path to business ownership; it offers (or should offer) training, setup, support, vendors, brand awareness, mass purchasing power and other critical backup. They recognize that because of these invaluable assets, franchises have a greater chance of success.

It’s had a ripple effect on the businesses themselves. I find that women are usually more creative and very organized than men. They tend to demonstrate greater empathy and stronger listening skills. Small Business Trends reports that women-owned franchises excel in employee satisfaction and work-life balance, often investing in opportunities that align with their values and passions.

Related: Understanding the Basics of Franchising Your Business

Success stories

Each of our brands has great success stories of women owners. Two in particular come to mind:

In 2018, Michelle Bottino took a leap and purchased her local EmbroidMe in St. Charles, Illinois, which later became Fully Promoted. She quickly turned the business into more than just a store, building a brand that put community and smart marketing at its heart.

Her efforts didn’t go unnoticed: her location earned the MarTech Award for Promotional Products & Apparel Company of the Year, she was inducted into Fully Promoted’s Hall of Fame in 2023, and in 2025, she was named Mentor of the Year. These honors reflect not just her business achievements, but the impact she’s made as a leader in her community.

In 2021, Michelle Monhollen and her business partner, Robert Steffek, reopened a former EmbroidMe and turned it into Fully Promoted of Centerville, Ohio. Bringing years of industry experience to the table, they quickly built a fast-growing, community-focused business.

By combining hands-on marketing with local outreach, they supported small businesses, schools, and nonprofits throughout the Dayton area. Their strategy paid off: by 2024–2025, the location had joined Fully Promoted’s Millionaires Club,

hitting $1 million in sales in less than four years.

Related: The Time Has Never Been Better for Women to Get Into Franchising

Rising from bottom to top

Franchising also offers leadership opportunities for those who want to take their career to the next level, from regional management positions all the way up to the C-suite. There are no shortcuts; career growth in this industry starts from the ground up, so you can truly understand the business model.

Here are essential steps to take when building a career in franchising:

- **Find a Mentor:** Look for people, both inside and outside your organization, who've walked the path you're on. They can help you avoid mistakes they've already learned from. In franchising, you'll often find experienced franchisees are happy to share advice with newcomers.
- **Develop Core Skills:** Get a solid handle on the main management areas — operations, finance, sales, territory growth, and legal/compliance. Even if you don't become an expert in everything, understanding the basics will help you lead effectively and spot opportunities in your team.
- **Gain Real-World Experience:** Take on roles with growing responsibility. Move from managing a single unit to overseeing multiple ones. Explore positions in franchise development, operations support or training. Don't be afraid to try cross-functional projects — they're great for broadening your perspective.
- **Build Your Network:** Inside your organization, get to know your fellow franchisees and engage with franchisors. Outside, connect with franchise consultants, brokers and others in the industry. Relationships can open doors and provide support when

you need it most.

- **Show Leadership:** Be the person people can rely on. Take on high-profile projects, but don't ignore the smaller, "boring" tasks — they're noticed by the right people. Leadership isn't always flashy; it's about dependability and results.
- **Keep Learning:** Stay curious and keep expanding your skills. Attend industry events, join local franchise groups and participate in women's leadership networks. The people you meet along the way can teach you a lot — and you'll have chances to give back too.

Key Takeaways

- Women now own roughly 30% of U.S. franchises, up from 20.5% in 2013–2014.
- Mentorship, core skills and real-world experience are critical for rising in franchising leadership.
- Women-owned franchises often excel in creativity, organization, employee satisfaction and work-life balance.

When you're a customer at a franchise restaurant, coworking space or retail store, you'll usually find at least one woman working with customers on the front line. Today, it's increasingly likely that there's also a woman at the top, either as the owner or in a powerful executive position.

We celebrate women working as owners and leaders in the franchise industry every October 14th on Women in Franchising National Appreciation Day, which I'm proud to say my company founded in 2021.

The rest of this article is locked.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/franchises/franchise-ownership-is

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Trying to Generate Leads From Social Media? Here's What Actually Works.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Social media can drive leads, but only when it's used strategically rather than chasing virality or posting aimlessly.
- The real results come from consistent, clear messaging that builds trust, tracks data and moves followers into owned channels over time.

If you've ever been told that you "just need to post more" to get leads from social media, you're not alone. There's a lot of noise out there about how to turn followers into clients, and while social media *can* be a powerful source of leads, it's not magic.

And if you're feeling overwhelmed by social media for your business, you're not alone — 73% of small business owners say they feel lost with marketing on social media.

The truth is, social media isn't a replacement for a marketing strategy. It's a visibility tool, and how you use it

determines whether your audience stays passive or actually converts into paying clients.

Here's what actually works (and what doesn't) when it comes to turning followers into leads, without buying bots, dancing on Reels or just posting and hoping.

Related: 4 Strategies for Generating High-Quality Leads Through Social Media

What doesn't work: Chasing virality over connection

It's easy to get caught up in metrics that *look* like success, including likes, views or follower count. I see way too many business owners trying to "go viral" or hire someone to "find them leads" on social media.

This is the wrong approach for several reasons. First, viral content often reaches the wrong audience, made up of people who'll never buy from you. The algorithm rewards entertainment, not necessarily fit, which means viral reach doesn't always equal real leads.

Second, social media has simply changed in how the algorithm works and in how users engage with it. For businesses, social media has become more of a storefront where people can learn about you and see that you're active, versus the single touchpoint where a prospect will find you and convert all in one fell swoop.

In this world, the one-time hit of virality will only get you so far. Instead, focus on building up your feed with content that deepens trust and shares about what you offer, so when aligned clients come across you, they will see information that makes them want to follow along.

What works is consistency and clarity

Social media lead generation is about showing up consistently with a clear message that speaks directly to your target client's pain points and goals, rather than going for the quick wins of brief engagement.

Think of every post as a mini sales conversation. You're showing what you do and how it helps. Instead of "Here's my new product," try "Here's what this product helps you stop wasting time on." Speaking to the problem you solve helps to connect with potential followers and prospects.

A simple way to check your clarity is to scroll through your own feed and ask, "Would someone who doesn't know me understand what I offer, who it's for and why it matters?" If not, start crafting some posts that explain that and work on getting them up on your feed.

Related: What It Really Takes to Stand Out on Social Media as a Business Today

What doesn't work is relying too heavily on socials

If you want consistent leads, treat social media as the top of your funnel, not the whole funnel. Building your business on a single social platform concentrates your risk, so with just one change, your reach could disappear overnight. Many businesses experienced this firsthand when Instagram engagement plummeted or when TikTok got temporarily banned in the U.S.

You also need a way to move people from social into owned channels like your email list, website or private community. An easy way to do this is to include a call-to-action every

few posts that brings followers one step closer to your company, whether that's joining your newsletter, downloading a free resource or booking a consult.

And remember — people don't follow you to be sold to. They follow because they see value in what you share, which over time builds the trust that could lead to a sale later. This is why the brands that convert best on social media focus on educating and inspiring. The key is that you're earning attention first, then converting it over time. This is just another reason why virality shouldn't be your goal in 2025.

Keep data in mind

While you're investing time and money in your business's social media, your analytics are a critical source of information for you.

To effectively track your social media's impact, set up a cadence at which you check on your conversion metrics. Look at which posts lead to link clicks, inquiries or email signups, and use that to guide future content.

If you notice that your educational posts get more saves and your storytelling posts get more DMs, that's your roadmap. Use that data to guide your next month of content rather than starting from scratch every time.

Related: 5 Foolproof Ways to Generate Leads Through Social Media

Most importantly, give it time to work

Social media lead generation takes time. The average follower might need to see your name five to seven times before they take action. If you're posting for a few weeks and not seeing

results, don’t assume it’s not working.

Stay consistent for at least 90 days before making major changes, and resist the temptation to measure your success on social media simply from leads converted or metrics of conversions. That’s how long it typically takes to see traction from refined messaging and regular posting, and your social media is just one data point in that funnel. It’s something that will lose you leads if you don’t have it, but you may not be able to track its direct positive impact on your business — and it’s important to remember that as you’re posting, so you don’t get discouraged.

Really, there is no secret to getting leads from social media. It’s doing the unglamorous work of showing up consistently, sharing real value, tracking what’s working and bringing followers into the fold over time.

The platforms may change, but the fundamentals of marketing don’t. People want to feel seen, understood and confident that you can help them. If your social media strategy does that, it will help you convert.

Key Takeaways

- Social media can drive leads, but only when it’s used strategically rather than chasing virality or posting aimlessly.
- The real results come from consistent, clear messaging that builds trust, tracks data and moves followers into owned channels over time.

If you’ve ever been told that you “just need to post more” to get leads from social media, you’re not alone. There’s a lot of noise out there about how to turn followers into clients, and while social media *can* be a powerful source of leads, it’s not magic.

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Everyone Blindly Chases Success. This Is What Really Keeps You Steady.

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This article is part of the America’s Favorite Mom & Pop Shops series. Read more stories

Key Takeaways

- What grounds you will evolve, but prioritizing it must stay intentional.
- Motivation fades, but purpose, discipline and a protected foundation keep you steady.

What is your foundation? Mine stays simple: Family. Faith. Friends.

I watch the best leaders in my life build foundations that actually bring the best out of them. Not the loudest resume. Not the biggest bank account. The strongest base.

Family. Faith. Friends. That is mine. Simple. Steady. Non-negotiable.

I meet a lot of leaders. Big thinkers. Builders. Risk takers. The ones who last never stand on talent alone. They stand on a foundation that brings out the best in them. A foundation they protect. A foundation they actually build on purpose.

I spent years trying to build a big life before I built a strong foundation. It never worked. You can chase success all day. You can collect titles and trophies and business cards. You can fill every hour with something productive. If the foundation underneath you cracks, none of it matters. The whole thing falls apart.

A strong foundation outside of work is everything.

I spent most of my life chasing the next mountain. New companies. Bold ideas. High-risk deals. I always felt like the next win would fill the tank. That drive still pushes me forward, but it does not keep me going.

My foundation is not my career. It is my purpose. Husband. Dad. Friend. Son. Leader.

People like to say success comes from doing more. More hours. More grinding. More plates spinning. I believed that for a long time. Then I learned the truth that no one teaches. The real power comes from the parts of your life that never show up on a resumé. The quiet stuff. The steady stuff. The people and routines, and beliefs that keep you sane.

The foundation you build outside your career is the thing that holds everything else together.

Related: 10 Habits That Will Completely Transform Your Life

and Business in 2026

Foundations change with you

When you are young, your foundation looks different. It is late-night conversations with your parents. It is friendships that feel like family. It is workouts after school that clear your head. It is music in your headphones while you try to figure out who you are.

It is not glamorous. It is not strategic. It is just the stuff that brings you home to yourself.

Life continues to change. You grow up. You get married. You become a parent. You find faith or reconnect to it. You find community. You discover what actually matters versus what you only thought mattered.

My foundation keeps shifting as I get older. I met my hero and forever wife, Abby, later in life. I became a dad later, too. Now my foundation looks like a family of five. Loud mornings. Toys everywhere. Organized chaos as a lifestyle. We just welcomed our youngest, Winwood. That makes three kids. Three personalities. Three different schedules. Three different versions of beautiful chaos.

We are officially out of hands. I love every second of it.

The house is full. That is what a strong foundation gives you. Something worth coming home to.

What keeps you grounded?

Life gets noisy. Work ramps up. Expectations stack. People want things from you. You want things from yourself. The days run fast. The nights run faster. It is easy to forget the simple things that matter.

I LOVE working. Always have. Always will. I have never been great at unplugging. My brain likes the rush. The pace. The challenge. So I've had to build REAL structure around myself. Not to be more productive, but to be more present.

I start my days early. It gives me margin later. It lets me end my days as a dad instead of a CEO.

My foundation keeps me steady. Abby keeps me grounded. The kids keep me humble. Church on Sundays keeps me centered. Family dinners that end in laughter (or tears) keep me grateful. Friends who tell me the truth keep me accountable. Even bedtime chaos resets me in a way that nothing else does. Music with the kids. Dancing in the kitchen. Those are the moments that make everything else make sense.

Your foundation does not have to look like mine. Maybe it is your faith. Maybe it is time outside. Maybe it is quiet mornings. Maybe it is mentors. Maybe it is your kids. Maybe it is the gym. The point is to find what keeps you grounded and protect it like your life depends on it.

Because it does.

What motivates you?

Everyone wants to talk about motivation. The hacks. The mindset. The quotes. The morning routine. Motivation means nothing if the foundation underneath it is weak.

What is your why? What gets you out of bed? What pulls you forward when life feels heavy? What steadies you when things get loud?

If your motivation comes only from success, you will burn out. I learned that the hard way.

Motivation is also nothing without discipline. Motivation comes and goes, but commitment and discipline can keep you

steady.

Faith gives me perspective. Abby and the kids give me purpose. My community gives me connection. Those three things are the base that everything else rests on. When life gets chaotic, I do not need to have all the answers. I just turn to what matters most.

Related: I Make Time for Lunch With Someone New Every Day — And It's Changed My Career

Keep building

Foundations need maintenance. Just like a house. You repair it. You reinforce it. You rebuild pieces when life cracks them. What mattered to me in my twenties looks nothing like what matters to me now. That is growth. That is maturity. That is life doing what it is supposed to do.

We are not meant to stay the same. We are meant to grow. To improve. To rebuild when things break. Life throws curveballs. Life WILL busy. Life WILL messy. Life gets VERY messy with three kids.

The point is not to hold everything together perfectly. The point is to stay connected to what holds you.

Build your foundation. Strengthen it. Protect it. Keep an eye on it. Keep checking the cracks. Keep tightening the bolts. Keep adding support beams when you need them. A strong foundation gives you the freedom to take risks. It gives you the confidence to grow. It gives you the courage to be bold.

Because when everything else moves, your foundation reminds you who you are. It keeps you grounded. It keeps you whole.

The stronger the foundation, the further you can grow.

Food for thought

Take a second today to think about your foundation. What is it built on? Does it need repairs? Does it need a new structure? Does it need a reset?

What matters is that we keep growing and learning. Keep paying attention. Keep rebuilding when you need to. Every time you strengthen your foundation, you become harder to shake. No matter what life throws at you. That is how you grow. That is how you stay steady. That is how you build a life that lasts.

Key Takeaways

- What grounds you will evolve, but prioritizing it must stay intentional.
- Motivation fades, but purpose, discipline and a protected foundation keep you steady.

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Learn How to Master Technical Trading Analysis for Forex, Futures, and the Stock Market

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Build a foundation in Market Analysis

The flagship course teaches step-by-step methods for analyzing candlestick charts across stocks, Forex, and futures markets. You'll learn to trade doji candlesticks, continuation patterns, reversal patterns, and apply a proven day trading strategy.

Stock Market Chart Patterns for Day Trading & Investing covers powerful chart patterns across all time frames. The course

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