

This Former Firefighter's 'Hidden' Side Hustle Turned Full-Time Business Helps Keep Homes Safe – and Saw 'Explosive Growth' to \$22 Million Revenue

This Side Hustle Spotlight Q&A features Jeremy Barker, 50, of Ogden, Utah. Barker was working as a firefighter and paramedic when he started his company, Murphy Door, which sells “hidden” home furnishings, including bookcase doors and Murphy beds. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.



Image Credit: Courtesy of Murphy Door. Jeremy Barker.

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

I started Murphy Door in December 2012 while I was still working as a firefighter. The inspiration came from wanting to build a home theater for my kids, which sparked the idea for hidden storage solutions. I believed I could change how the

biggest hardware stores approached storage solutions and create a new category in the market.

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What did those early side-hustling days look like?

I kept Murphy Door as a side hustle while working in fire services. In 2012, our first year in business, we only made \$30,000, but I kept pushing forward. The real breakthrough came when I took the business online in 2013 and got advice from *Architectural Digest* to think beyond just hidden doors and focus on multifunctional storage solutions, turning wall space into functional storage rather than just secret compartments.



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

I have some amazing mentors that I've worked with: Don Blohm (operations), John Porter (human capital coach), Brandon Dawson (business systems) and Grant Cardone (sales training). But honestly, the best mentor we could have is our customers. I also believe young entrepreneurs should actively seek out mentors – most successful business people want to help.

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?

I wish I had better banking support early on. Utah needs a better banking system – banks are quick to say no, but don't tell you how to get to yes. I faced bankruptcy twice, once in my early 20s, then the next time in my 30s; better financial guidance could have saved me a lot of headaches.

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?

Manufacturing equipment lead times can really slow you down. Our German equipment has 6-12 month lead times, which makes the ability to forecast demand with manufacturing capacity accurately a must; it is also why it makes expansion challenging. Balancing creativity with practicality [is also challenging] – you need to ensure innovations are feasible, cost-effective and meet genuine needs.

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

In the early days of Murphy Door, my team showcased our hidden doors for panic rooms at a major trade show. We soon realized that although the product was intriguing, it catered to a limited market. This realization led to the broader concept of

hidden storage doors, which had mass appeal. The lesson? Embrace feedback, no matter how unexpected, and be prepared to adapt.

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**How long did it take you to see consistent monthly revenue?
How much did the side hustle earn?**

It took about four years to see consistent revenue that I could rely on. I started Murphy Door in 2012 while still working as a firefighter, and in our first year, we only made \$30,000. I kept it as a side hustle, reinvesting everything back into the business.

The real turning point came in 2016 when we hit a \$5 million revenue trend: That's when I finally felt confident enough to leave firefighting and take my first paycheck from the company. So it was a four-year journey of building it nights and weekends while maintaining my day job for financial stability.



Image Credit: Courtesy of Murphy Door

What does growth and revenue look like now?

The growth has been incredible, especially since Covid. We entered Covid with \$7 million in revenue and then saw

explosive growth: \$7 million to \$14 million to \$22 million. We're currently maintaining 70% year-over-year growth, which makes us the fastest-growing mill department in the U.S.

We now have 102 employees across multiple manufacturing facilities: our headquarters in Ogden, Utah, a plant in Kentucky, and we're opening a third plant in Plano, Texas, at the end of the year.

Our reach has been massive – we've had over one billion organic views on social media and have completed 200,000 unique installations. We've worked on high-profile projects, including for Lionsgate and *Only Murders in the Building*, done unique build-outs for celebrities and athletes, and collaborated with a Grammy-winning artist.

What do you enjoy most about running this business?

I love the innovation rush of creating something new and watching it succeed. It's about proving you can build something significant, creating jobs in America and competing with anyone in the world while solving real problems for people. The combination of innovation, impact and building something lasting – that's what gets me up every morning.

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

Build fast, break faster, then refine. Too many entrepreneurs wait until something is perfect. That's a death sentence. I believe in rapid prototyping and getting a version out, then fixing it based on real feedback. With Murphy Ladder, we didn't wait for perfection – we built a working prototype, then tested it in the real world. What we learned in the field made the final product strong enough to win awards.

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