

This 8-Year-Old Is the Next Elon Musk

Follow His Footsteps to Smash the System in 2023

The holidays are coming up, which means you've probably either seen a version of "A Christmas Carol" already or you're about to watch one. That's a classic Christmas story we pull out every year, but honestly, it's getting stale. Let's shake things up with a new Christmas story: the true story of Dillon Helbig and his book, "The Adventures of Dillon Helbig's Crismis."

I first read about Dillon in the news last year. At 8 years old, he got it into his head that he was going to be an author. So, he sat down and wrote a book! It's a crazy story that stretches for 81 pages. Dillon imagined himself teleporting to the North Pole, running for his life from a giant moose, and time-traveling back to 1621 to hang out with the Pilgrims for Thanksgiving. He even wrote about his own demise: A giant turkey showed up and ate *him* for dinner!

You have to love this kid, right? Well, what he did next is even better. Dillon grabbed the notebook he'd used to write his story, stuck a few stickers on the spine to make it look legitimate, and snuck it onto the shelf at the Lake Hazel Library here in Boise.

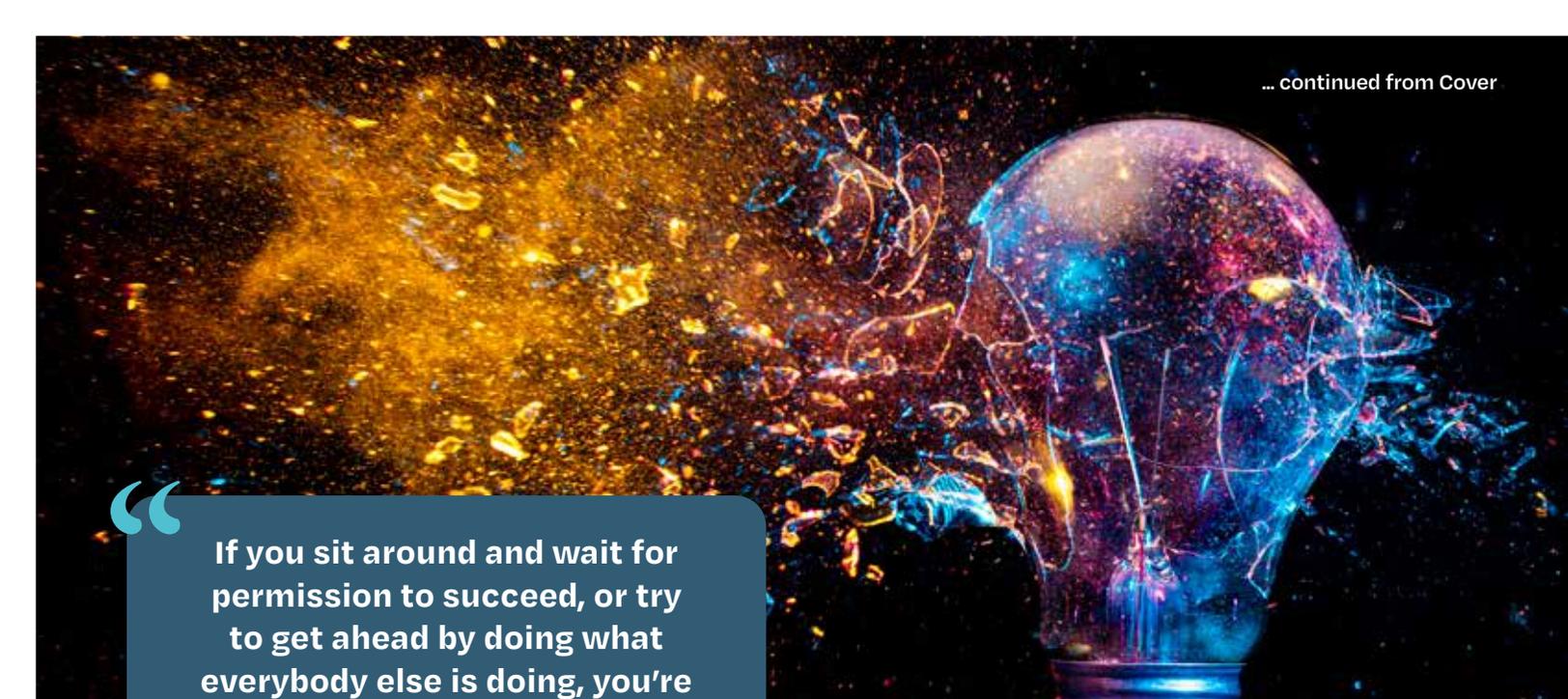
When Dillon admitted to his mom what he'd done, she called the library to apologize and ask for the book back — only to learn the librarians loved it. They wanted to add it to their collection for real! A few months later, "The Adventures of Dillon Helbig's Crismis" was officially library property and hundreds of people had signed up to read it. The library even gave Dillon the Whoodini Award for Best Young Novelist.

Dillon should be a role model for all of us. As adults, when we want to achieve something, we tend to get stuck in our heads about it. We think, "This is how it has to be done. I have to follow the rules and stick with the system." To become an author, for example, you have to write your book, get it illustrated, find an agent, land a publisher, have copies printed, and ONLY THEN will it show up in the library. That's just how it's done. But Dillon said, "To heck with all that!" He wanted to be an author, and he wasn't going to sit there and let the adults tell him he couldn't do it, or that he had to do it a certain way. Instead, he asked, "Why is this the way we do it? Why does it have to be this way? Whose rules are these, and who gave them the authority to make the rules, anyway?" Then, he did it his own way — and it worked.

Dillon realized nobody was going to come by and crown him Best Young Novelist just for sitting at home, just like no one is going to show up and proclaim you king or queen of your industry. If you sit around and wait for permission to succeed, or try to get ahead by doing what everybody else is doing, you're going to be waiting a long time. You have to take matters into your own hands.

A great entrepreneur is someone who asks for forgiveness instead of permission. That's why I think Dillon is so awesome. He didn't say, "Mom, can I take my book to the library?" and wait for her to say no. He just got the book, put it on the shelf, and proclaimed himself a published author.

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“If you sit around and wait for permission to succeed, or try to get ahead by doing what everybody else is doing, you’re going to be waiting a long time. You have to take matters into your own hands.””

I’m not saying you should do anything unethical, but you also shouldn’t wait around hoping your company gets the approval of a bureaucratic institution like the Better Business Bureau (BBB). Do you know who gave the BBB the power to separate good businesses from bad ones? *They did.* They sell franchises and profit off people begging for their approval. You don’t have to line up with the rest of them. In fact, I’ve discovered that to really succeed as an entrepreneur, you should look at what everyone else is doing and do the exact opposite.

The system isn’t designed to help you get ahead. It’s designed to keep the people who are in power in power. To succeed, you have to break out of the system! I know I’ve used him as an example before, but just look at Elon Musk. Remember back in 2018 when he got a wild hair and decided to create a flamethrower? It sounded like a horrible idea. I can see all of the lawyers reading this right now shaking their heads and saying, “Just imagine the liability!” But he did it anyway, and you know what? He got a metric ton of free publicity. Then he broke out of the system again when he decided not to advertise for Tesla. I promise you, people told Elon Musk, “You can’t sell cars this way!” and he said, “Watch me.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
-John 3:16 NIV

Like Elon Musk, Dillon dared to think outside the system, and his daring paid off. That’s the mindset we all need going into 2023. Sure, everyone is talking about rampant inflation, how bad the economy is, and how much worse things will get. But what I’ve realized is that even if the economy does struggle, guess what? I can’t control that! So, I should probably stop worrying about that and start focusing on the things I CAN control. If I bet on myself and work on growing and prospering despite whatever the economy is doing, that will be significantly more productive and beneficial for my clients, my team members, my family, and myself.

You should do the same thing. Get up every day and work on the top 1-3 things that will push your company forward. If you sit around expecting bad things to happen, they will. There’s nothing you can do to change that. What you CAN change is how prepared you are for those things. Ignore the sky and whether or not it’s falling, stop worrying about getting anyone’s permission, and focus on your business. If you do that, you will guarantee that if the economy is bad, you make it, and if the economy is good, you crush it.

-Shaun

P.S. The chaos happening in the economy right now isn’t just hitting businesses — it’s also hurting kids in the foster care system. This year, a lot of the companies that usually provide Christmas presents for kids in foster care have backed out, and Newsletter Pro’s nonprofit, Fostering Christmas, is stepping up to fill the gaps. We’re shopping for more kids than ever. If you can pitch in to help us save Christmas, visit FosteringChristmas.org.



Want Your Team to Be Happier and More Productive?

Add Some No-Meeting Days to Your Weekly Schedule

It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the global economy — specifically the labor market. Many employees are rethinking what matters most to them in a job and prioritizing their well-being and happiness when selecting a company. Fortunately, many employers are willing to accommodate this need primarily because it is the right thing to do. Beyond that, many business owners also have the intuitive sense that happy employees are more productive. After all, how does the old saying go? “Do what you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life.”

But how valid is the claim that satisfied employees are more productive? Furthermore, are productive employees happy because they are successful, or does happiness drive employees to succeed? One study from MIT published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* gives us some insight into the answer.

In this study, researchers followed nearly 1 million U.S. Army service members for five years. Every year, the soldiers were required to answer 25 relevant research questions as part of a more extensive survey every Army soldier takes annually. These questions were used to determine the participants' well-being quotient (or “happiness score”)

year over year. This quotient was then considered when measuring the number of participating soldiers who received an award over four years.

The results were very stark. Even when controlling for factors like socioeconomic status, sex, and education level — among other things — the participant's outlook was still considered to be a key predictor of whether or not a soldier would receive an award. When the most positive and happy soldiers were compared to the most negative and unhappy soldiers, the happy soldiers were nearly four times more likely to receive recognition through an award.

This is even more amazing when you consider that receiving a military award is relatively rare. Throughout the study, only 12% of participants won any awards, and nearly all top performers were ranked as “very happy.”

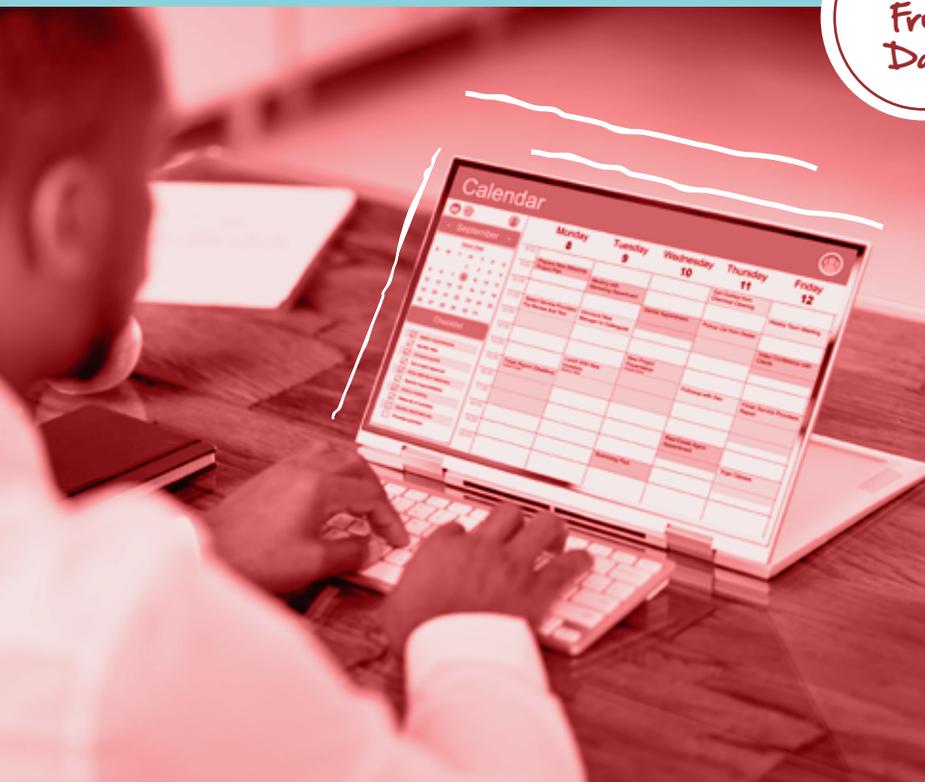
So, what does this mean for your business?

Well, it means a few things. First, if you're interested in identifying your company's top performers, look for the people with the most positive outlook.

Second, if you want to boost the performance of your workers overall, look for ways you can improve the overall well-being of your staff members. By rewarding people who elevate your company culture by maintaining a positive attitude while addressing challenges, you demonstrate you value that behavior. Likewise, when you create systems within your company that allow employees to focus on their well-being, you're setting your staff up for happiness.

In today's workforce, prioritizing your staff's happiness isn't just a luxury — it's a necessity. To attract and retain highly motivated and qualified candidates, you must demonstrate that your company values their well-being. So, when you make workplace happiness a priority, you begin a cycle that feeds off itself and compounds over time, resulting in happier, more productive, more fulfilled employees. That translates to better outcomes for you, your staff, and your company. What could be better than that?

Meeting
Free
Day!



Is Your Company Culture Going Through a 'Blah' Era?



Give It a Holiday Boost!

December is a special month full of fun celebrations, time with friends and family, and cozy memories. It can also be a “dry season” for your business, leaving your employees feeling unenthusiased about coming to the office.

But why is that — and what can you do about it?

For many businesses, the “busy season” occurs after summer and before the holidays (usually from August–mid-November), meaning there’s a lull after Thanksgiving. That lull is often accompanied by a “dead office,” as many employees choose to utilize PTO during the holiday season. That can translate to your remaining employees feeling demoralized, bored, or generally “blah.”

So, what can you do about it?

The holidays provide an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate your employees and boost morale while building up your overall company culture. It starts with getting people excited to spend time together.

Here are some easy ways to build that enthusiasm.

- **Throw an “office Thanksgiving” celebration the Thursday before Thanksgiving and have everyone bring a dish to share.**
- **Host an office holiday party.**
- **Start a “secret Santa” or “White Elephant” giveaway.**
- **Get your employees involved in decorating the office for the holidays.**
- **Bring in some fun holiday treats to share (like Christmas cookies).**
- **Play some holiday music around the office.**

You can also ask your employees to share ideas for what they would like to use as team-bonding opportunities during the holidays. Encouraging your employees to be involved in the decision process will help to get everyone excited about the upcoming celebrations.

When you decide what festive events or activities you would like to do with your staff, the next step is making sure participation is as easy as possible. This would be an excellent opportunity to use the lull in your business cycle to celebrate with some afternoon activities during the work day. While that may seem like a poor use of work hours, it’s a great way to invest in your teams. When they are given the opportunity to build relationships with one another in a low-pressure environment, they can collaborate more effectively for the rest of the year.

So, don’t be a Grinch! Start planning some festive activities and events for your office today!

Get an Edge on Your Competition

Include Chatbots in Your Marketing Strategy

Over the past few years, many technological developments have changed the business landscape. Businesses can dive deeper into their analytics than ever before, providing them with new key performance indicators they can track that help them boost their sales, marketing, and customer service. Cloud computing, remote collaboration programs, and the internet as a whole have completely revolutionized many businesses. Still, another tech development continues to grow in popularity: artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots.

Chatbots are computer programs designed to mimic human interaction using AI. Most people are probably familiar with chatbots and have seen them when visiting various businesses’ websites. Many small-business owners utilize AI chatbots to instantaneously assist with their customers’ immediate needs. AI chatbots aren’t just for B2C businesses, though. They’re also growing in popularity for B2B businesses. Actually, they’re more popular in B2B than in B2C. According to Boomtown, 58% of websites that use chatbot software are for B2B companies. And the chatbot market isn’t slowing down any time soon. According to Statista, the market will grow to \$454.8 million in revenue by 2027, up from \$40.9 million in 2018.

If you’re interested in utilizing an AI chatbot in your business, there’s much to be gained. Here are four reasons to incorporate chatbots into your marketing strategy.

Chatbots can automate tasks to save your business money.

When someone calls your business with questions, concerns, or requests, who handles that call? Do they have to take their attention away from other tasks to take each call? Wouldn’t it be easier if your employees could focus on other tasks while an automated program assisted your customers? That’s exactly what you get when you use an AI chatbot in your business.

Chatbots can answer an unlimited number of questions and assist multiple customers at once. They can be programmed to answer specific questions about your business and its services. Your business and your customers will both greatly benefit from chatbots.



Building a Business Isn't Easy

Ben Horowitz Shares Real-World Experiences

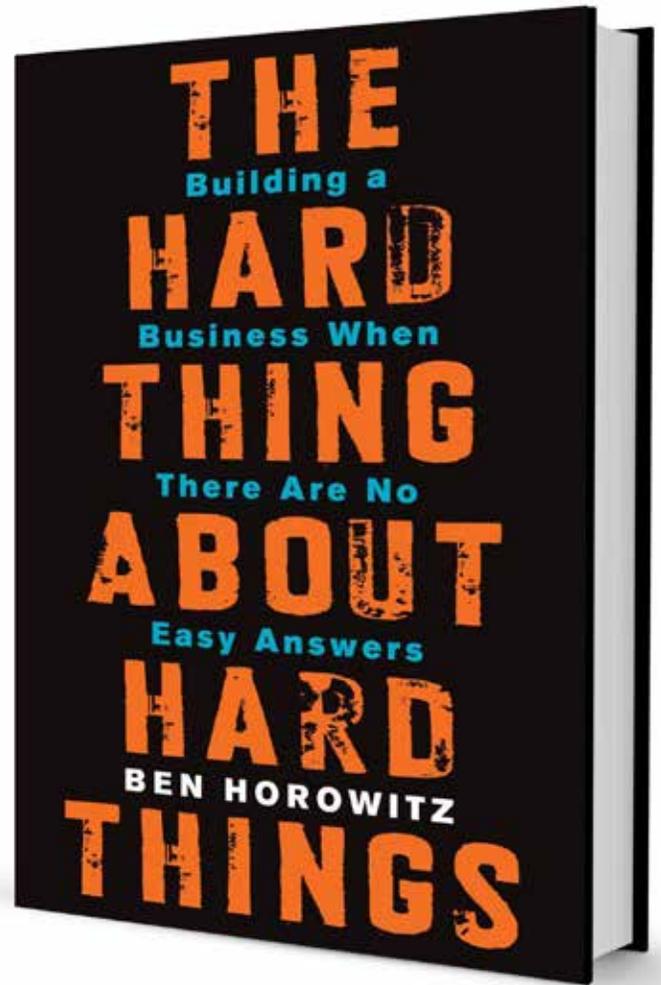
Successful entrepreneurs often focus on how fulfilling and enjoyable it is to run their businesses. However, very few are honest about the challenges they face every day and how difficult it was to get started. Sometimes, this attitude makes it difficult for new or aspiring entrepreneurs to find the information they desperately need to push through necessary discomforts to reach their goals.

In “The Hard Thing About Hard Things: Building a Business When There Are No Easy Answers,” Ben Horowitz dissects the many challenges that stand in the way for leaders and entrepreneurs. As one of Silicon Valley’s top entrepreneurs and co-founder of Andreessen Horowitz, Ben Horowitz offers a unique perspective born from his valuable experiences. His book is full of practical information that can aid the reader in navigating the everyday challenges of getting a startup off the ground, running the business, or growing the company.

The book’s content is drawn from both Horowitz’s successes and failures. Discussions about many of the humbling later experiences gives the book the bulk of its information about the process of correcting tough mistakes. One of the key quotes from his book reads, “Almost all management books focus on how to do things correctly so you don’t screw up. These lessons provide insight into what you must do after you have screwed up.”

This willingness to discuss the realities of failure gives this book credibility. As one Amazon reviewer puts it, “This book is written from the perspective of a CEO who’s been to hell and back. You may not always agree with his ideas, but they are always grounded in reality, as opposed to the abstract theory of most other management books.” Another writes, “It is unusual to find such an honest account of the struggle that is always part of a great business.”

Horowitz also shares some of the invaluable insights he’s gained while running some of the world’s premier technology companies. Drawing inspiration from his favorite genre of music, rap, he adds intrigue to his business lessons by integrating them with lyrics from his



favorite songs. He doesn't mince words when dealing with some of the most challenging aspects of running a successful business, like firing friends, poaching competitors, developing the right CEO mentality, and knowing when to cash in.

With over 5,000 reviews on Amazon alone, Horowitz's book resonates with a variety of different readers, and it's no wonder why. Humorous, valuable, and direct in its messaging, “The Hard Thing About Hard Things” is an excellent read for current and aspiring entrepreneurs looking for reputable advice on tackling some of the most daunting challenges in business.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

—Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Chatbots can improve the customer service experience.

Customers who call your business with questions or complaints want to be helped immediately. According to LiveChat, the average customer waits over five minutes to be assisted by a live customer service representative. With chatbots, there's no wait — all customers can be helped at once. Tidio, a company that designs chatbots, claims that 62% of consumers would prefer to use a customer service bot rather than wait for human agents to answer their requests. A study conducted by PFSK found that 74% of internet users prefer using chatbots when looking for answers to simple questions.

Most consumers do not mind talking with chatbots and prefer receiving direct answers to their questions from the AI. When the chatbot is unable to assist a certain customer, your team can step in and help out, as they'll now have more time to fix more serious customer issues.

Chatbots will enhance your lead generation.

Generating leads and converting them into sales can be a difficult task for any business, but AI chatbots make it easier for everyone. Customers like when they receive personalized interaction, and when you invest in a smart chatbot, you can provide them with a great experience. They're available around the clock and can give on-brand answers to any questions.

Chatbots answer questions and carry on conversations with potential customers. These interactions will help your chatbot learn, and they'll be able to provide customers with additional information that may persuade your customers to do business with you.



Chatbots will give you valuable insight for marketing campaigns.

Knowing your analytics is a necessary part of running a successful business. You need to understand what your customers want and what they're having problems with so you can adjust to meet and exceed their expectations. Chatbots supply

businesses with data they can then use to learn what's trending with their customers, understand the most frequently asked questions about their business, and even enhance nearly all aspects of their business. Chatbots give companies an advantage over their competitors.

AI chatbots have the potential to completely revolutionize your business. Whether you're looking for a chatbot to answer basic, simple questions or you want something smart and able to learn from its interactions, there's an AI chatbot to fit your business's needs. There are many chatbots to choose from, including Alexa for Business, Drift, Salesforce Einstein, LivePerson, and more. Don't get left behind by your competition. Find a chatbot with your desired features and incorporate it into your business. You'll soon realize how beneficial they can be!

Does Your Social Media Content Need to Focus on Sales to Be Effective?

Creating social media content for a business can be tricky. Sometimes, it can feel like you're balancing between promoting your services and creating shareable content that can appeal to a broader audience. But which one is truly better for business?

To answer that question, let's look at a key success story.

Duolingo is a free app that helps users learn a foreign language by providing practical learning exercises and encouraging consistent practice. You might anticipate that such a company might flood its social media pages with language-related videos and content. What you would not anticipate is a page dedicated almost entirely to the romantic plight of a green owl, but that is precisely what you would get.

Duolingo decided to take a different approach to building its social media presence. Instead of providing educational content, they centered their strategy

Resource of the Month

It's not easy to find invoicing software with accounting capabilities. It's even harder to find great invoicing software and accounting functionality at an affordable price. That's what makes FreshBooks such an ideal option for small businesses!

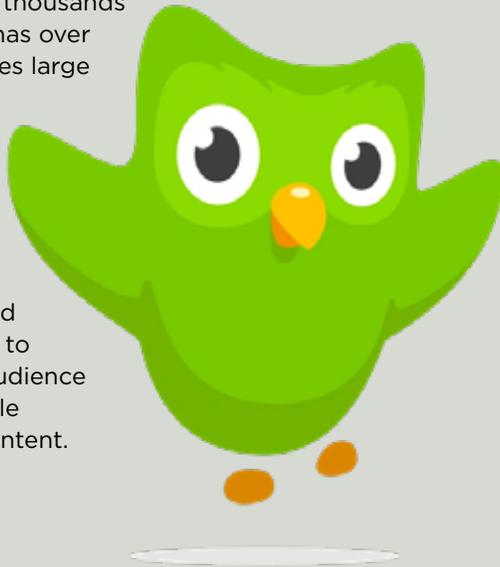
This solid small-business accounting software product is ideal for freelancers and independent contractors. This software product stands out above all others with good customer service and customizable invoicing features. Initially, it was just a way to manage invoices, but it has grown over the years into an accounting product that has helped over 30 million people and their small businesses!

FreshBooks offers a free 30-day trial, and you can pick one of four plans! With a support page on

around the hijinks of their mascot, Duo. Duo is an adorable green owl with an attitude and a romantic obsession with the musical artist Dua Lipa. Many of the company's TikTok videos show Duo pursuing Dua Lipa, dancing, harassing people for not practicing their chosen language enough, and joking about how he's in trouble with the CEO for his antics.

This strategy worked. Between September 2021 and February 2022, Duolingo went from having 50,000 followers on TikTok to 2.9 million followers. While unconventional, the edgy humor put forward by the marketing and social media team resonated with audiences and resulted in thousands of shares. The page now has over 55 million likes and receives large amounts of engagement for every video.

So, the next time you plan for your social media pages, throw in some humorous content. While it may seem silly and irrelevant, it's a great way to connect with a broader audience and encourage broad-scale engagement with your content.



Holiday Trivia!

1. When was the term "Xmas" invented?
2. Do more Americans get real or artificial trees?
3. What is the highest-grossing Christmas movie?
4. Who was the first U.S. president to recognize Hanukkah in the White House?
5. Which department store was featured in the film "Miracle on 34th Street"?

Answers!

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1. The mid-1500s by the Greeks
(Fun fact: "Christos" in Greek begins with the letter X.) | 2. Artificial |
| | 3. "Home Alone" |
| | 4. Jimmy Carter in 1979 |
| | 5. Macy's |

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standby to help set up an account and video webinars for explanations of the software and its bookkeeping features, you're sure to become a pro in no time!

The Lite plan is \$15 per month, which allows you to bill up to five clients. You can connect with your bank account, accept invoice payments, track your time, and access the mobile app. There's no cap on the number of estimates and invoices you can create.

The Plus plan is \$30 per month, which lets you bill up to 50 clients and is the most popular plan. You can send recurring invoices, automate payment reminders, and charge late fees. Collaboration with your accountant on FreshBooks is free with this plan.

The Premium plan is \$55 per month, and you can bill up to 500 clients. This plan includes everything in the Plus plan and has enhanced tracking and reporting features.

The Select plan is a custom plan (call FreshBooks for a price quote) intended for businesses that need dedicated support. It includes all premium features and covers unlimited billable clients, access for two team members, and customized training.

With so many options and plans available, this accounting software may be the one product that can help your business grow and reach its full potential.



The Return of Brandless

How a Company With No Brand Overcame Closure

Brandless — the brand without, well, a brand — is back!

The company known as Amazon's millennial alternative was started in 2017 and attained meteoric success with its minimalist packaging and low pricing. However, in February 2020, Brandless suddenly shut down the business, unable to handle its rapid direct-to-consumer stardom.

In an exciting twist, Brandless fans saw some movement from the company around June 2020. Brandless was bought by two Utah-based companies: SEO marketing firm Ikonifi and VC firm Clarke Capital Partners. With Ryan Treft, Ikonifi's founder, as the new CEO, Brandless was back and better than ever.

The acquisition of Brandless was a chance encounter for Treft. While scrolling through a job site, he saw a former Brandless employee post a eulogy to the company contemplating its unfortunate demise. Treft was familiar with Brandless and thought the idea was unique, so he contacted the employee, who eventually introduced him to a Brandless trustee. He offered to buy the company, and the rest is business history.

Brandless aims to be known for its high-quality products and value in its

rebirth. While they may not be able to sell products for \$3 any longer, the brand maintains that prices will stay affordable. Brandless isn't trying to be the cheapest in the online retail game, Treft says, because he's not willing to compromise quality. Consumers who loved the company in 2017 flocked to the brand because they're careful about what they put in or on their bodies.

The new Brandless will continue this initiative, avoiding harmful ingredients like synthetic dyes and parabens. Additionally, Treft promises the brand will remain committed to everyday wellness, providing products everyone needs in the safest way possible.

To do this, Treft intends to start and stay small. He plans to rehire some of Brandless' former employees while integrating new hires. This new Brandless team is focusing on its own website to start, focusing on sales from Brandless.com. This new site offers five browsing categories, from beauty to home products. But the most significant savings are found on the "bundles" page. With simple images and straightforward descriptions, Brandless offers affordable products at a single price point. For instance, in the "personal care bundle," you can buy 14 products for \$52, which is a little over \$3 for each item. Looking for dishware? You can find an 18-piece set for \$34 on their site.

While their main focus is their site, Brandless can be found on Amazon, too. Treft also says the company is in talks with a few unnamed brick-and-mortar stores in hopes of making their affordable products more accessible to the average buyer, not just technology-hip millennials.

The Brandless comeback is a win for health-conscious consumers on a budget across the country. Their return shows that a company with a high-quality and low-price model can succeed in a direct-to-consumer world, even when faced with immense hardships.

We can take a page out of the Brandless playbook this year by taking a step back and ensuring we provide our customers with the highest quality products possible. As we learned from Brandless, doing this will ensure your customers will stick by you, no matter the hurdles your business must overcome.

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