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ALABAMA A&M UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL LIFE AND NATURAL SCIENCES

Small Farms Research Center Factsheet

Easy Startup = Hard Success



Running a successful business isn't rocket science. If it were, we wouldn't have a thriving corporate world. But it's not as easy as falling off a log, either. If that were true, we'd all be swimming in dough and having the time of our lives, which we're not. If your work feels too easy, you're going to have a really hard time making it.

What about all those twenty-something millionaires you read about? You know, the self-proclaimed gurus and experts with all the nifty articles about 5 habits, 7 hacks, or 10 quotes that will take you straight to the land of unicorns? I'll let you in on a little secret: They're all full of it. No kidding.

Somewhere between Elon Musk working 100-hour weeks running two companies and laying on a couch with a MacBook on your lap is the sweet spot for entrepreneurial success. And the closer you come to the former, the better your chances of actually making it.

The tradeoff for business success goes something like this: *The easier it is to get started, the harder it is to be successful, and vice versa.* There are all sorts of variables in that equation, including education, experience, competency, network, passion, perseverance, and smarts. It's a long list but they all contribute to your competitive position in the market.

And I have a simple analogy that explains how best to prioritize all those factors and become a successful entrepreneur. Ready? OK, here it is: Small engine repair. Now, don't freak out on me – I promise it'll be a good read with a huge payoff at the end. Promise.

I may work in Silicon Valley but, in my spare time, I'm a lumberjack. No kidding. I live in the mountains where I drop trees, cut them into rounds, and use a gas-powered splitter to chop them into firewood. It's a fun hobby. Last weekend, I tried to get the splitter going and -- wouldn't you know it -- the damn engine wouldn't start.

I tried all the easy stuff but nothing worked. I checked online and found tons of information and troubleshooting tips but they were all over the map. That's great if you've got all the time in the world and nothing else to do, but that's so not the case.

Then I talked to my father-in-law, who has decades of experience with this sort of thing. He helped me figure out that the carburetor was gunked up so now I at least know which direction to head in. It won't be easy, but it's not rocket science, either. I'm sure I'll get it done one way or another.

Now imagine that, after doing it once, I decide to make a living repairing small engines. The problem is there are literally dozens of nearby mechanics and shops that can do it better and a lot of folks, like me, who go the DIY route.

In other words, competition will be tough. Really tough. Even if I get better in time, what's my differentiator? Whatever I come up with, I'm still going to be slugging it out with everyone else. My market share will be small and profit margins thin. Revenue growth will be challenging.

So I ask you, is that a smart way to go, career-wise? No way. And yet, that's exactly what many of you are doing right now with an easy online business, a blog, some direct marketing, and a bunch of social media accounts.

Here's another option. What if I have a real passion for this sort of thing? Then I might pursue a degree – maybe even an advanced degree – in applied physics or mechanical engineering. Then I'll get out and work for a company that designs and builds engines. I'll learn the ropes, build a network, and gain exposure to lots of customers.

And you know what? I bet that someday I'll come across a big customer problem that's not being solved or well served by the industry, come up with an innovative solution, and start my own company. I'll start with a niche product and grow it from there. And since I'll be so experienced and savvy by then, I'm sure I'll kick butt.

Now that would be the smart way to go.

I promised you a big payoff at the end and here it is, five takeaways on becoming a successful entrepreneur:

1. Easy Problem + Easy Solution = Big Competition + No Differentiation = Lousy Business. Said another way, Easy Startup = Hard Success. Unfortunately, most solopreneurs and small businesses fit this equation.
2. Online content is all over the map, there's too much information, and since everyone has access to it, there's no competitive differentiation. That's not good.
3. Mentors can help point you in the right direction, but only if they have real-world experience doing what you want to do.
4. Schooling is great so you understand the underlying fundamentals of your field, but even then, book smart can only get you so far.
5. Real-world work experience fills in all the practical learning, network, and opportunity gaps. That's where you'll make great connections, find big customer problems, and come up with innovative solutions.

Bottom line: Starting a service business based on readily available information may be easy, but success will be hard, really hard. Schooling, mentoring, and experience may be hard, but they make success that much easier.

http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/253444?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+entrepreneur%2Flatest+%28Entrepreneur%29

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Small Farms Research Center Background. The Small Farms Research Center was developed to assist small farmers with limited resources in Alabama's underserved communities. The center was first developed in 2000 to assist minorities, especially women, African Americans and underserved individuals improve their farm management practices, given ones condition and resources. The mission of the Center and the Small Farmers Outreach program is to assist all small and limited resources farms effectively deal with risk management and food safety issues and provide them with informational sessions. The Center has also expanded its outreach efforts to meet the needs of entrepreneurs and businessman. The center is located at Alabama A&M University in the Dawson Building. The center specializes in following areas

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| Marketing and Business Plans | -Record keeping and Loan Application |
| -Identify alternative enterprises | -Personal Management |
| -Legal Issues | -Finances |
| -International Business and Procurement | -Accounting Issues |
| -Taxes | -Business Development |
| -Conducting seminars on Government programs and other issues | |

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Website: www.aamu.edu/smallfarmers



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