



# Sunspot

by Timothy Snyder



**M**y name is Timothy and I am the founder of Sunspot Industries. We are a board sport company dealing with snowboards, skateboards, and wakeboards in Clovis, CA. The overall concept was created over a decade ago and involved making and selling boards. It quickly turned into me fixing and selling snowboard equipment on E-bay to people all over the world. With the creation of Craigslist my enterprise grew rapidly and I was selling boards all over Fresno County. My income paid for most of my bills throughout high school and college.

After several years, five colleges, and a number of declared majors, I found myself in the Entrepreneur program at California State University, Fresno. Up until this program many of the classes I took were pointless and it wasn't until my senior year that I truly formed my company and found a way to make it profitable. After taking a business plan writing class, I took on the professor, Josh Long, as my business advisor. Through his help, we came up with a low cost, low risk way of building Sunspot Industries as a brand. Rather than opening a skatepark and full service board shop, we decided to partner with local communities and open up a mobile skate shop. This was a unique model and no one had done it to my knowledge. Foolproof...for about an hour.

There are no amount of college courses that can educate you on all of the obstacles that will come between you and your business. Within the first year of operating you will have to face and overcome everything imaginable; and that's if you're lucky. For every successful development I had trying to reach my primary launch, I had a number of setbacks. I found out that most communities don't let you partner up with them for one reason or another; whether it's a lack of experience or too many meetings and committees to go through. I found a way around this and partnered with the City of Clovis, but then ran into several more problems. There is a reason I had never heard of a mobile skate shop. It took me until I tried to order inventory that I realized why. Apparently, vendors don't supply to mobile shops. I never received a reason for this, but I did find a way around it. I decided to have my own boards printed and only sell my own gear. It's a risk. A cheap risk, but still a risk. Trends are everything and kids only want the big brands, but this was the only way I figured I could build my own brand and not spend hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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Sunspot's official launch was at the beginning of 2010 in Clovis, CA. We will be selling skateboards and clothing out of a mobile trailer in the Fresno area before expanding our mobile fleet throughout California and the rest of the country. After a few years of brand recognition, our goal is to open indoor skateparks in the most responsive markets along with full retail board shops. This is also when we plan on selling our own line of all different board types such as snowboards and surfboards and placing our line in larger board shops.

In order to be a successful entrepreneur there are several key factors. I have found that the most valuable part to opening a business is having a mentor or group of people that you can trust with every part of your business. Just like having a coach perfect your game, you need to have an experienced business person who can give you tasks that will help you successfully launch a company. A business plan will seem weak until it is critiqued by several outside people. It is also important to have someone who can tell you when something isn't working because you are too stubborn to realize it yourself.



Apply and compete for anything that will get you money or publicity. I competed in two elevator pitches and a business plan competition while at California State University, Fresno. I took first in two of them and won enough money to pay for most of my startup. However, the exposure was extremely important as well. People who can help move a business forward take interest in those who put themselves out there and take chances.

The next piece of advice is a very much worn out cliché, but it's worn out for a reason. Don't give up on your dream, but also keep in mind that killing a dream is sometimes inevitable. There will be times when nothing is going right and failure seems like the only out. Find a way around these obstacles and go right through them, or quit before you are so far behind there is no way out. Embrace failure. A successful entrepreneur is one who can get up after a failure when anyone else would give up and never return. The most important thing I can try to convey is how amazing it feels to actually open a business. There is no way to know if it will succeed or fail from the beginning, but all of the headaches, the sleepless nights, and road blocks are worth it in the end. □

