**[“I’ve got a great idea for a business. But I don’t have any money to start it up.”](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1rXE5qR&text=%E2%80%9CI%E2%80%99ve%20got%20a%20great%20idea%20for%20a%20business.%20But%20I%20don%E2%80%99t%20have%20any%20money%20to%20start%20it%20up.%E2%80%9D" \t "_blank)**

This phrase is something I’ve heard again and again . . . and again—from students, friends, and sometimes even colleagues. While it’s true that a generous credit line, a team of investors, or an uncle with deep pockets can make starting a company easier*, not having money is no excuse.* If you are confident that you have a product or service people want, don’t allow the lack of capital to deter you from your business goals. By pivoting, grinding it out, getting creative, and differentiating yourself, you can bootstrap your way to a successful business.

1. **Pivot. Use services to generate cash flow and fund a product-based business.**

Starting a service-oriented business is easy: First, you provide services, and then you collect funds. But a product-based business often requires significant up-front capital to get it up and running. If you’re in this situation, consider selling services to generate cash flow and to build up funds for a product-based business.

My current company, Outbox Systems, began this way. We wanted to connect two software applications, but we didn’t have the capital to build the integration. Knowing we needed to generate money to fund our product development, I approached the partner channel at AtTask and asked if I could build a software integration for them. Fortuitously, an enterprise AtTask customer needed to integrate AtTask and Salesforce and was willing to pay us $125 per hour to build the integration. Then we turned around and resold the product to others. A typical tech entrepreneur thinks, “Raise money, build software.” But we turned the model on its head and essentially got the company to help us develop intellectual property for our business.

**2.       Grind it out. There’s no substitute for sweat equity.**

[Sometimes you have to get into the trenches and make it happen.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1rXE5qR&text=Sometimes%20you%20have%20to%20get%20into%20the%20trenches%20and%20make%20it%20happen.)  During the first two years of business at my prior company, PC Care Support, I knocked on doors, worked my own booth, and closed my own deals. I set up a table at the local college’s business school, hired five college students to work solely on commission, and knocked on people’s doors 7-8 hours per day looking for business. For those two years I didn’t receive a paycheck.  But I believed in my service, and I believed we could be successful. I was, as billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said, “hell bent on making it work.” The hard work eventually paid off.

**3.       Get creative. Funding sources are everywhere.**

Traditional entrepreneurship philosophy dictates that, to be successful, you should stick with one thing and not deviate from it. But desperate times call for desperate measures. If you are having trouble finding access to funds, there are a number of creative things you can do, such as the following:

**Use current resources in new ways.** Like most young companies, we encountered a cash flow crunch at PC Care Support. We had about 50 employees, and we wanted to protect everyone’s jobs. We looked at all of our departments and all of our employees’ skill sets to see where we could generate revenue. A few employees in the tech support department stepped up and offered to develop software for other customers. Then a few in the marketing department offered to develop websites. We added website and software development to our suite of services and landed a contract with Nationwide Insurance, taking the company from negative cash flow to 15% net profit per month in three months. This got investors interested in our company, and it enabled us to have the cash we needed to get back to our core services.

**Get a credit line**. [It is not uncommon for most startup businesses to rely on a line of credit.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1rXE5qR&text=It%20is%20not%20uncommon%20for%20most%20startup%20businesses%20to%20rely%20on%20a%20line%20of%20credit.)   The American Express Plum Card, for example, offers a 60-day term for payment rather than a typical 30-day term. Some banks or credit institutions offer credit designed to allow growth in the early stages of business. A word of caution: to keep from getting bogged down in debt when you are trying to expand a business, keep purchases to a minimum.

**Use an Incubator**. If you believe you have a solid idea and a workable business plan, you may want to consider a business incubator. Upon acceptance, these programs provide funding designed specifically to financially assist a startup company. Sometimes they offer office space or shared administrative services.  Most incubation programs are sponsored by local or regional economic development organizations, and some are sponsored by colleges and universities.

**Find an Accelerator**.  These are much like incubators in that they are designed to provide funding. However, an accelerator expects a rapid response to its investment.  If you are prepared and ready to hit the market quickly, this is a great option.

**Crowdfund**. Crowdfunding platforms are changing the face of capital, whether you’re growing a tech business, filming a movie, or selling jewelry.  Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms allow the public to invest a small percentage of money in return for a future buy-in.

**4.       Differentiate yourself. Small things make a big difference.**

Once you get to a million dollars in revenue, your odds of funding increase exponentially. Banks, for example, look at funding strictly from this perspective. [Banks don’t care what kind of company you are—they simply look at your profit/loss statement and make a decision.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1rXE5qR&text=Banks%20don%E2%80%99t%20care%20what%20kind%20of%20company%20you%20are%E2%80%94they%20simply%20look%20at%20your%20profit%2Floss%20statement%20and%20make%20a%20decision.) If you’re a profitable company with a million in revenue and good personal credit score, there’s a good chance that a bank will lend you up to $200,000.

If you have some revenue coming in but need an extra boost to get to the million-dollar mark, make sure to consider every possible way that your company can differentiate itself. Do you have a letter of commitment from a notable investor? Do you have some revenue or a contract to get some revenue? Do you have valuable intellectual property with the potential to generate revenue? Differentiators like these can make the difference between getting funded and being overlooked by investors and lenders.

The only real way to start generating revenue for your business is to roll up your sleeves and get to work. [Despite what others may tell you, there is no easy shortcut to profit.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fonforb.es%2F1rXE5qR&text=Despite%20what%20others%20may%20tell%20you%2C%20there%20is%20no%20easy%20shortcut%20to%20profit.) But if you are confident you have a product or service that people want, you can propel your way to the top by pivoting, grinding it out, getting creative, and differentiating yourself.