

Hi, my name is Drew Davis, and I am the proud owner of Crippling Hot Sauce. It all started as a school project back in my junior year of high school, but little did I know it would become much more than that.

When I received an 82% grade on my business plan, I was disappointed but didn't let it discourage me. Instead, I spent the next seven months and 1,200 hours conducting extensive research and testing countless recipes until I finally launched Crippling Hot Sauce.

My mission with this hot sauce is to break the stigma against people with disabilities and inspire others that no matter what your circumstances are, you can achieve your dreams. And I'm happy to say that within seven months, I have sold over 12,000 bottles of hot sauce in over 60 retailers across Missouri, with three distributors.

Starting and growing a small business is challenging, and as a young entrepreneur, I faced some unique obstacles. One of my main challenges was opening a business account as many bank policies require you to be 18 years old to do so. Despite having an LLC and recurring revenue every month, I had to call dozens of banks in my area to find one that would let me open a business account with one of my parents as a writer on the account.

Another challenge I faced was finding a manufacturer with a low minimum order quantity. Since I had only saved up \$3,000 from birthdays and Christmas gifts over the years to start my business, I couldn't afford much capital to spend on manufacturing my hot sauce. Thankfully, my family and I started making it in my mom's kitchen, but we soon outgrew it. Now, we have a manufacturer that produces two of our flavors, and we use a commercial kitchen for the third. I reached out to my cousin for assistance with the complicated contracts.

Lastly, the increase in inflation has affected my business in just a short time. Since I don't have much capital, I have to absorb the cost of price fluctuations, such as when my glass bottles went up 13% between my first and second bottle orders. This can affect my profit margin and potentially hinder my business's growth.

As a small business owner, I understand the struggles that come with it, which is why I believe there are two key things that could help American small business owners all over the country: first, lower shipping costs. Shipping costs are incredibly high, and it can cost me an average of \$9 to ship a three-pack in the continental United States, which may deter customers from buying my product. Second, streamline the permitting and licensing process in the food industry, which can be confusing and unclear, especially for young entrepreneurs like me.

Lastly, for small business owners with disabilities, there are even more unique challenges to overcome, and I believe that the government should provide grants or tax subsidies to enable more people with disabilities to start and run successful businesses. This would open up opportunities for entrepreneurs who may not have had them otherwise.