

Entrepreneur Profile

PETER LANGENSTEIN

FOUNDER, BRIX26 WINE

What it does: Personalized online wine retailer focusing on higher-end California wines.

HQ: San Francisco.

2008 revenue: \$2.6 million.

Number of employees: Four.

Year founded: 2005.

Source of startup capital: \$10,000 from two family members and his best friend.

Background: Earned M.B.A. from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, which included study in France at E.S.C.-Reims management school. Worked in the tech realm and e-commerce before launching Brix26, named for the sugar measurement indicating the perfect time to harvest many fine wine grapes.

Age: 40.

Residence: San Francisco.

Web site: www.brix26.com



SPENCER BROWN

Big picture

Reason for starting business: I started visiting great small wineries making awesome wines, and wanted to link people to smaller, unheard-of California wineries.

Most difficult part of decision: Worrying about making it was a going concern, and leaving corporate America. Taking on everything myself, including things I'd never done, like insurance, getting licenses.

Biggest plus of ownership: Having creative control over the look and feel of everything.

Biggest drawback: It's a 24/7 lifestyle. It can be all-consuming.

Biggest misconception: Being the owner, I thought I'd hire people to do various things for me. But if you're a small business owner, you've got to do everything. You've got to get your hands dirty.

Biggest business strength: Our small size allows us to provide a very personalized service to our customers.

Biggest business weakness: We focus on California wines, pretty exclusively. So when we get requests for European or South American wines, we don't carry them, or it's not our forte.

Biggest risk: Other companies in the space didn't succeed. Some jumped up and flamed out pretty quickly in the dot-com period.

Biggest mistake: Thinking I could do it all myself.

Smartest move: Not taking on outside investors. Starting small, growing incrementally. My mantra is, "small is beautiful."

Biggest worry: That the economy's going to affect high-end wine buying.

Top source of inspiration: The small winery owners that I deal with. They keep the business fun and interesting.

Daily routine

Most challenging task: Getting back to customers on a timely basis. And tasting all the wines that are out there.

Favorite task: Talking to customers all around the country.

Least favorite task: Looking up Fed Ex tracking numbers.

Biggest frustration: Figuring out all the different interstate shipping laws.

Source of support in a business crisis: My dad. He has really good instincts that I consistently think are wrong, and turn out to be right.

Dreams

Key goal yet to achieve: Growing our wine club membership. I'd like to triple it; I'd like it to be in the thousands.

First move with capital windfall: Get a new warehouse.

Five-year plan: It's slow, steady growth. It's not going to be something crazy.

Inducement to sell: It's not even on my radar.

First choice for new career or venture: I'd like to eventually start my own wine label.

Personals

Most-admired entrepreneur: Fred Franzia of Bronco Winery, the guy who developed Two Buck Chuck.

Stress reducers: Mountain biking.

Favorite pastimes: Training for triathlons.

Favorite book: "Les Misérables" by Victor Hugo.

Favorite film: "A Fish Called Wanda."

Favorite restaurant: A16.

Favorite destination: Paris.

What's on iPod: The Ting Tings.

Automobile: Space gray BMW X5, and it fits 20 cases of wine.

— Chris Rauber ■