

12 Businesses You Can Start in Your College Dorm & How To Do It Right

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Why wait until you graduate from college to start your own business? Thanks to the Internet, there's never been a better time to launch a company from your college dorm room. But you don't need Mark Zuckerberg-level coding skills to become a college entrepreneur. There are plenty of businesses you can start without tech knowhow—and without a lot of time, capital or office space. Here are a dozen of the best ideas.

Enjoy your startup journey!

12 Businesses You Can Start in Your College Dorm

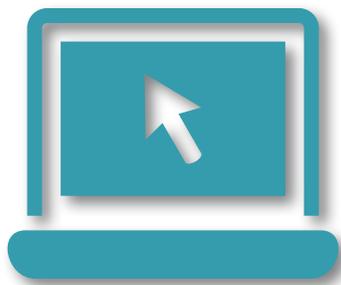
- 1. Tutoring Service.** It's a no-brainer: You're on a college campus, surrounded by literally thousands of kids who need to get better at something you already know. Pick your specialty and offer to tutor fellow students in everything from math to languages to writing essays. You can tutor students in your dorm room or theirs, or meet up on campus. If your area has a market for it and you've got transportation, you can also offer your services tutoring elementary, middle or high school students. Tutors can charge from \$10 to \$75 per hour depending on the subject matter and grade level. Marketing your services is simple—spread the word among friends and fellow students on social media, let professors know you're offering tutoring so they can recommend you to their students and post flyers around dorms, sorority and frat houses and near classrooms and other places (the Student Union) students hang out. At some universities, targeting student athletes can be quite lucrative. Once you get a few regular students as clients, word-of-mouth will help you gain new clients.
- 2. T-Shirt Company.** T-shirt companies are popular among college students for good reason: You've got a ready market on campus. From fraternities and clubs to social events and football games, there are literally hundreds of events a year on college campuses that need T-shirts. That's not even accounting for trendy sayings or memes that lend themselves to T-shirt crazes. You don't need to buy inventory or screen-printing equipment these days: Use websites like [Zazzle](#) or [CafePress](#) to create and upload T-shirt designs you can print as customers order them. This industry is competitive, and bulk purchases will obviously be most profitable, so it helps if you have a built-in customer base to start with, like your sorority or other on-campus organization you belong to, that will buy a lot of shirts at once. From there you can expand into offering shirts to other groups as well as individuals. Market your services to organization leaders as well as on social media.

- 3. Etsy Store.** Do you love relieving your finals-related stress by crocheting, knitting or making jewelry? Make money from your hobby by setting up an Etsy store to sell your handmade products online. There's great demand for handcrafted products these days, and with an Etsy website, you can sell as much or as little as you like. You're limited only by your free time—which can be hard to come by in college, so it's smart to line up some assistants who can help you fill orders in a pinch. As for marketing, Etsy offers lots of advice and tools to help you succeed. Clear, detailed product photos; outstanding customer service; memorable packaging and use of search engine optimization (SEO) will help your store get noticed. Target bloggers and other tastemakers with free samples of your products for review. Word-of-mouth matters too, so ask buyers to review your store online and share it with friends who might like what you make.
- 4. Mobile Apps.** Love to code? Consider developing mobile apps. All you need is a computer and your brain. You can code the apps yourself or, if you don't have the skills, enlist friends who do or hire freelance programmers to develop apps based on your ideas. [Elance](#), [oDesk](#) and [Guru](#) are great sources for hiring affordable programmers. With so many apps in the marketplace, appealing design and ease of use are key to success. Marketing is another big hurdle for mobile apps; you'll have to work hard to stand out. You'll need to register to sell your app on Apple's iTunes store, through Google Play or on Amazon, but you can't expect to attract attention there on your own. Instead, boost your chances of success by focusing on an app that's relevant to college students, then spreading the word on a local level, through social media, websites frequented by college students and word-of-mouth, to get them to buy it.



- 5. Ecommerce Website.** An ecommerce business is easy to start part-time with a low investment, and unlike some of the businesses on this list, your market doesn't have to be limited to college students. Start by finding a niche (the smaller, the better) to focus on, whether that's selling hair accessories for girls' sports leagues or clothes for bulldogs. The more specifically you can target what you sell, the better your chances of success. The big hurdle for ecommerce businesses is storage space—as a dorm-based business, you don't have any. Get around this hurdle by using [drop shipping](#), in which you buy and pay for product only when a customer places an order. You don't have to build your own website, either; check out one-stop ecommerce options from [Shopify](#), [Volusion](#) and [Web.com](#). Market your website using SEO and online advertising, including pay-per-click ads and buying display ads on related websites.
- 6. Graphic Design Firm.** Are you an art or design student? Make money off your major by starting a graphic design firm. Thanks to the Internet, you can work with clients across the country without ever leaving your dorm. Start with a cool business name, logo and business cards—they'll literally be your calling cards for your design skills. Also crucial: a well-designed website that shows off your work. Select a niche to target, whether it's local small businesses or on-campus organizations; then reach out to their decision-makers. You'll most likely have to start by doing some design work for free until you build your portfolio. Market your website using SEO, social media sites your target market frequents and in-person networking at local business events.

- 7. Content Creation Service.** Is writing second nature to you? There's more to write than just term papers. Start a content creation business and start profiting from your words. With blogging and online marketing so prevalent today, busy businesses are hiring content creators to craft everything from blog posts to whitepapers, ebooks and marketing copy for their websites. For best results, choose a niche you want to focus on—such as writing about food, business or fitness—and reach out to businesses that have content needs. You can find them by touching base with bloggers and businesses in your niche, or by reaching out to local businesses at networking events. You can also list your services on sites like [Elance](#) and [Freelancer.com](#).
- 8. Website Design and Maintenance Firm.** Creating and maintaining a website may come as second nature to you, but for busy business owners, it's often a struggle (especially if they're older). Even organizations that have the know-how to start a website (like a campus organization) may not have the time to create and maintain one. Start a business to handle all the details, from finding and registering domain names to filling in website templates and updating the site. You can market your services by reaching out to local businesses or on-campus organizations. While online advertising and SEO can help, there's a lot of competition from bigger names online, so your best marketing bet is often in-person introductions or referrals from satisfied clients. Start by offering reduced-rate work until you get some customers under your belt.



9. Photography/Videography Business. Sure, everyone has a camera on their smartphones these days—but as millions of blurry selfies attest, not everyone has the skills to take memorable photos, much less edit them to frame-worthy status. If you have a passion for photography, you can parlay it into a business memorializing everything from on-campus events to weddings to local Little League teams. You will need a good digital camera and video recorder—don't try to get by with your iPhone's recording features. Choose a niche that's not oversaturated in your area, then figure out the best way to target it, whether by contacting organizations' decision-makers or placing online pay-per-click ads. Create a website highlighting your best work, then list it on local search directories such as Local.com using keywords relevant to your market.



10. Online Marketplaces. Building a website that matches someone who has something with someone who wants that thing can be hugely successful if you're willing to wait a while for your idea to gain enough users to be profitable. The bonus for you as a dorm business is that both sides of the marketplace transact directly with each other; even if they're selling or trading a product, you don't have to store or ship anything. For example, check out this [college business](#) that matches students seeking apartments with local realtors. Consider what students might want to exchange with each other (used textbooks? Dorm furniture?) or get matched with (tutors?), then research carefully to make sure there's not too much competition. Spread the word by letting campus influencers know about your site and getting them on board.

- 11. Pet-Sitting/House-Sitting Service.** Looking for a business that requires absolutely no office space? Look no further than a house-sitting and/or pet-sitting service. If your college is in an upscale area with lots of residents who travel frequently, this can be a lucrative (and fun) business. You provide the service at customers' homes, charging varying rates depending on the services you provide them (such as visiting homes and walking dogs, or staying in homes and handling everything from watering plants to bringing in mail). Good references are a must to get residents to trust you to watch their homes and pets (and not throw wild parties). While this business isn't a huge moneymaker, it's a good side business that also gives you a break from any annoying roommates. Promote your services by setting up a website and getting listed on local search directories, putting business cards or flyers in related businesses like vet offices or travel agencies, and encouraging satisfied clients to refer others to you.
- 12. Franchise.** Franchise businesses put all the systems and processes in place to help you start a business in the franchise system. The franchisor owns the business name and way of doing business, licenses it to you in return for a one-time fee and ongoing royalties, and trains you in how to run the business. In return, you get a startup that's pretty turnkey. There are lots of franchise businesses that can be started for \$10,000 or less, so if you've got that much capital to invest (or can convince your parents to lay down the cash), and would rather run a business than spend a ton of time developing a business plan and idea, consider the franchise option. Look for a franchise business you can run part-time—ideally, one that can ramp up or down depending on your schedule. Note: Depending on your age, you may need a parent to come on board with you as co-franchise owner in order to buy a franchise.

8 Success Tips for Starting Your Own Business

Success Tip #1:

Be resourceful. There are tons of resources on campus to help you start a business, from professors who will offer you advice for free to classmates who'll work on your business for a class project. Take advantage of them while you can. There might be a [Small Business Development Center](#) on your campus; many are located at colleges and universities.

Success Tip #2:

Learn and earn. Want to be an entrepreneur in college and beyond? There are hundreds of entrepreneurship education courses nationwide. Check out [Mashable's](#) listing of the 15 top college entrepreneurship programs to get an idea of what's out there.

Success Tip #3:

Bootstrap it. Try to avoid taking on debt for your college startup. Instead, bootstrap your business (i.e., start on a low budget and put all your earnings back into the company). This way, if your business doesn't work out, you haven't lost anything—and if it does, you get all the profits instead of sharing it with lenders or investors.

Success Tip #4:

Find financing on campus. If you do need a cash infusion to expand your business, look into competitions on campus. Many colleges have business plan competitions where students present business plans to panels of experts for a chance to win startup capital.

Success Tip #5:

Mark your territory. You spend a lot of time coming up with a business name and logo, so be sure to [trademark](#) them. Otherwise, a competitor could steal your name and logo and undo all your hard work.

Success Tip #6:

Take care of the proper paperwork. Understand the different legal [forms of business](#) (sole proprietorship, corporation, LLC) and how they affect your business. Choosing the right form of business can save you on taxes, protect your family's assets and keep your business thriving after college.

Success Tip #7:

Play it safe with partners. Remember the ownership battle at the center of “The Social Network”? Don't get shafted out of your business. Put partnership agreements in writing, even if you're working with your best frat brother.

Success Tip #8:

Get your license to sell. Make sure you've got any [business licenses](#) you may need, such as a license to resell goods or a license to operate in your state.

Whatever type of business you start, The Company Corporation can help you start off on the right foot. Learn more about The Company Corporation's services.

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