

# How 5 hobbyists turned passions into million-dollar businesses

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During their annual road trip from northern Italy to Sicily, cousins Joseph and Giuseppe Ferlito developed a ritual: acquiring trinkets from the Mediterranean cities and villages they visited, which they gifted to fellow travelers they met along the way and friends and relatives back home. One novelty from their 2008 trip stood out: a bracelet featuring a simple turtle bead, which a girl they'd met in Sicily had given each of them.

Upon returning home -- Joseph to Lindenhurst, N. Y., and Giuseppe to his in Italy -- the cousins received countless compliments on their turtle bracelets. During their road trip the following year, they tracked down the turtle bracelet vendor and bought dozens more baubles as souvenirs for friends and family. More oohs and ahhs. After repeating this for a couple more years, the lightbulb went on: Perhaps they could monetize this bracelet-sharing concept.

To find out, in summer 2013 the cousins put up \$5,000 to design a beaded animal bracelet of their own. The 20,000 bracelets they placed in 100 New York City boutiques and 7-Elevens, priced at \$1 to \$2 each, sold out in a week. Joseph and his father then invested \$150,000 to create 750,000 more bracelets. Within two months, those sold out, too. Trtlz, as they branded the jewelry, turned into a phenomenon.

That first year, the company amassed \$3 million in sales. Today Trtlz boasts more than 175 bracelet designs and more than \$65 million in sales, says Joseph, CEO. Other major retailers carrying the bracelets include Walmart, Target, Michaels and QVC. Last year the company struck up licensing deals with Disney, Sanrio, DC Comics, Marvel Comics, Nickelodeon, Universal and

multiple National Football League and Major League Baseball teams. Joseph estimates that this year the company will sell upward of 20 million sports team bracelets.

“ It’s kind of unbelievable,” he says. “ I’m in awe sometimes when I look at these numbers.”

The Ferlitos’ incredible success proves that creating a multi-million-dollar business in 12 months’ time isn’t limited to Silicon Valley or other well-funded startups. Their success is about passion, luck and hard work meeting opportunity, the DNA behind every successful entrepreneur. That isn’t to say it’s easy, though. We talked to a handful of business owners who made the leap from exuberant hobbyist to million-dollar ’trep in one year. Here’s how they did it -- and how they’ve stayed in business since.

**Read about their experiences here:**