

HOW CREATIVE ARE YOU? TAKE THE QUIZ

Entrepreneur®

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Reinvention

Jason Goldberg and
Bradford Shellhammer

turned their failing
lifestyle website,
Fabulis.com, into
flash deals
site **Fab.com**
and made
a profit in the
first month.

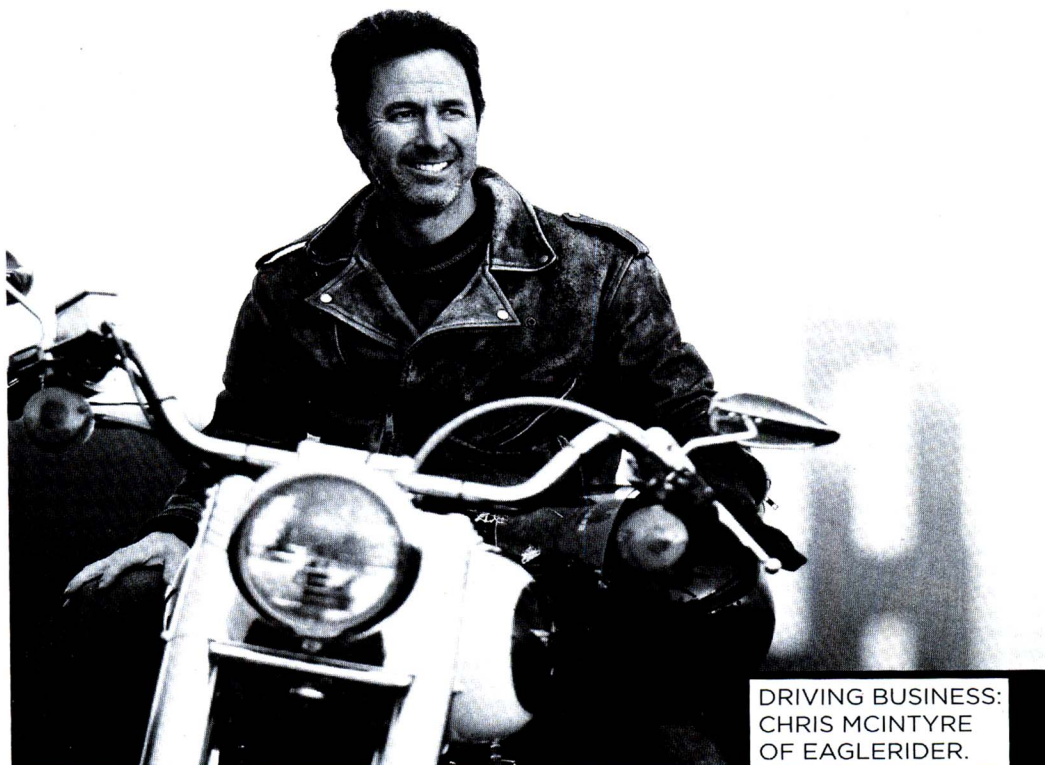
**HOW THEY
DID IT.**

Plus

**INVEST IN
PEOPLE,**
reap the
rewards

A LOOK
at the impact
of the creative
community
on the economy

franchise ink



DRIVING BUSINESS:
CHRIS MCINTYRE
OF EAGLERIDER.

Wheels of fortune

EagleRider Motorcycle Rental helps tourists hit the road

Chris McIntyre and some friends were planning the trip of a lifetime: a motorcycle epic through Germany, Austria and the Italian Alps. But in early-'90s Los Angeles, finding a motorcycle rental company in the old country meant dialing up Munich, requesting snail-mail brochures and querying clueless travel agents. After months of heavily accented cold calls, the friends couldn't find a single motorcycle rental agency, so they began questioning Europeans they encountered in L.A.

"We'd ask them where we could rent motorcycles, and they'd say, 'Well, I know where you can rent a scooter,'" McIntyre says. "Then they'd think a minute and say, 'That's a great idea! Is there a place I can rent a Harley here in L.A.? I want to ride the Pacific Coast Highway to San Francisco!'"

Though plans for their own bike trip crumbled, the enthusiasm of their

Euro-friends gave McIntyre and his buddy Jeff Brown the idea to start a business. In 1992, they founded EagleRider Motorcycle Rental, which loans Harley-Davidson, BMW and Honda touring bikes to licensed easy riders. The company, which has helped nearly 500,000 customers hit the open road, is now in 115 tourist destinations in the U.S. and abroad. McIntyre idled his Fat Boy long enough to tell us how he did it. —JASON DALEY

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO FRANCHISE THE CONCEPT?

We ran into a franchise attorney a few years after we launched the business, and she said it was perfect for franchising, since we had central reservations, central purchasing and central insurance. We opened our first franchise in 1998 in Las Vegas. It bloomed and was doing \$1 million very quickly.

We really have three business mod-

els. The most common is similar to an Avis, with a rental desk at a Harley or BMW dealership. Then we have stand-alone locations. And the third is in resorts, like the JW Marriott in Palm Desert, Calif.

ISN'T IT RISKY TO RENT MOTORCYCLES TO STRANGERS?

Since 1994, our insurance ratios have out-performed the auto industry far and away for damage, theft and losses. We don't rent superbikes that go from 0 to 60 in one second; it's mainly big touring bikes. In the U.S. only about 5 percent of the driving population have motorcycle licenses. In Italy, nearly 30 percent have a motorcycle or scooter license. In Europe you see scooters and motorcycles everywhere. So for a person used to riding in the French Alps or on the Autobahn, coming to the U.S., where the roads are flat and straight and open, is not a problem.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW THE BUSINESS WOULD BE A SUCCESS?

When we started, we had four bikes in a garage in L.A. We rented to four Austrians who booked through Lufthansa, our first travel partner (but not our last—we are partnered with Expedia, Orbitz, AAA and dozens of others). When they came to pick up the bikes, they were these very stiff guys. They went off for 16 days, and when they came back, they were so loose. One of the guys told us, with tears in his eyes, that since he was a little boy, after seeing a picture of Elvis, he dreamt of riding a Harley through Monument Valley. We helped him fulfill that dream. And that was just our first customer.

WILL YOU EXPAND INTO GERMANY?

German laws, rules and regulations are a bit more stringent than in other places, but we're in conversations with them and will have our first German offices within two years. But there are still so many areas in the U.S. we haven't developed. Niagara Falls is a home-run market. Then there's Galveston and Austin, Texas. We're still picking the lowest-hanging fruit.