



SBDC Success Story

Wodbottom

Popular Online Company Sells Shorts for CrossFit and Weight Training

Than and Emily Ruyle started working out at a CrossFit gym in late 2014 and got hooked on the program's camaraderie and results. At the time, Than was a respiratory therapist at UW Hospital, on the waitlist for a Physician's Assistant training program, and Emily had her own internet marketing business.

Than found himself dreaming of a career that would allow him the same freedom and flexibility Emily had. He decided to try starting his own internet business, and launched with silicone wedding bands as his first product.

The product was so successful that the couple decided to work together to grow the company, and Emily came on board full-time. They sold CrossFit related products like jump ropes and wrist straps and worked to define their target market, women 25-44. As a two-person com-

pany, they were small enough to pivot quickly, which they did a few times, before settling on shorts as a main product.

"With just two of us, it was easier to build and expand the business and work on what products would encourage repeat purchases," Emily says. "We wanted customers to be excited to come back often to buy something, and we identified booty shorts as that thing."

How did they figure out that shorts would sell well?

"I was in Facebook groups for women weight lifters, to listen to chatter," laughs Emily. "It was mainly about food and booty shorts."

WodBottom keeps customers coming back by creating shorts with clever, creative patterns to which their customers feel a

connection, whether they feature their spirit animal or their favorite food.

"When thinking about new designs, we like to think about how we can make them 'extra'," Emily says. "For example, how do we make flamingo shorts extra? Flamingos weight lifting in booty shorts, with the same pattern on the flamingos. We created conversation pieces that got people excited and raving about us, like a T-Rex unicorn with rainbow hair lifting weights."





As WodBottom took off Emily and Than began looking for small-business resources in Madison. That was how she connected with SBDC director Michelle Somes-Booher.

Somes-Booher gave the Ruyles actionable projects to bolster their business operations, like creating a manual detailing their customers, customer service process, and fulfillment process. She also encouraged the Ruyles to create a cash flow worksheet they could use to explore different scenarios and outcomes of how to best allocate cash flow. It provided visibility into how financial decisions could impact the business six months out.

“She really helped us have a bigger picture of WodBottom,” says Emily. “It helped us step back, analyze, and make the

best decisions for the business.

“She put us in touch with gBeta Madison, a seven-week accelerator for early stage companies,” says Than. “Emily applied, and we were one of five companies accepted to the Fall cohort. The exceptional training and opportunity to pitch to real investors really helped us. We began to raise money early this spring and were able to secure \$250,000 in angel investments.”

Somes-Booher also helped the couple define their roles: Emily handles marketing and design, and Than handles finances, budgeting, management, and HR. Emily also oversees email marketing, text marketing, push notification marketing, and Facebook ads. “It’s night and day between



how we started and where we are now, even,” Emily says. “We’ll be even better and more well-oiled five years from now, with Michelle’s guidance. She’s already made a huge impact on operations, systems, hiring, and termination.”

Long-term, the Ruyles would like to continue to scale and expand their product lines, continuing to raise awareness and funds for victims of domestic abuse.

To learn more about this success story, visit sbd.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/

The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center supports businesses in Dane, Sauk, and Columbia Counties.

