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Start-ups that started up from nothing

Successful businesses look calm from the outside.

Behind the scenes, it's often a different story. Their creation can be protracted and plagued with turmoil, and involving irregular meals, office spaces in bad neighborhoods and a pervasive fear that it could all fall apart at any moment.

CNBC.com spoke with entrepreneurs who lived this reality and started businesses from threadbare beginnings. Today you would never know how much they struggled to bring their companies to life, but as they'll tell you themselves, it was a lot harder than it looks.

Read ahead to find out just how hard it was.

—By CNBC's Daniel Bukszpan
Posted 4 Feb. 2014

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CampusBookRentals.com

In 2007, Alan Martin was a married college student with one child and another on the way. After suffering extreme sticker shock when buying his textbooks, he took out \$250,000 in credit card debt, bought an arsenal of books and rented them out to other students.

With that, CampusBookRentals.com was born. Now, the company projects \$50 million in revenue for 2014. Martin credits his early challenges with helping the company get this far.

"We fought so hard in the early days, that it taught us discipline," he said. "We had to be scrappy, thoughtful, and become profitable to survive."

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Image Source: CampusBookRentals.com

