

ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS GET STARTED IN SCHOOL

Summary: Learn what educational path you should take if you want to become a lifelong entrepreneur.



Question: I plan to attend college next year and would like to pursue the right course of study so that I can start my own business when I graduate: possibly a car dealership that I can expand into different branches. I have been leaning toward pursuing a liberal-arts degree in communications, followed by an M.B.A. What do you think of this approach? Also, since I probably won't have the money to go out on my own immediately, how do I get started on the right track and make the right contacts?

Answer: While there is no one right track to your stated career goal, the liberal-arts curriculum, followed by an M.B.A., is an excellent combination to provide a strong foundation for your eventual business launch. Starting with liberal arts also offers flexibility, should your career goals change in your undergraduate years. To make your intended combination work for you, build in two complementary pieces.

First, gain experience. Starting as soon as this summer, dive into an ongoing research project of car dealerships: read about them, study them, interview their owners and hang out in showrooms. Find two or three that impress you, and see if you can pick up a part-time job. You may even decide to apprentice for a time before applying for your M.B.A. This first-hand knowledge, combined with your studies, will put you ahead of the game when you are ready to start your own business. The serious pursuit of your goal and your experience will also make you a stronger M.B.A. candidate.

Second, target an M.B.A. program that has an entrepreneurial bent. Endless case studies of huge corporations aren't as relevant as delving into the small-business issues you will face as a fledgling entrepreneur.

As for contacts, you will find them at the car dealerships and through chamber of commerce meetings and listings, including bankers and venture capitalists. For wider coverage, tap into the alumni network of your undergraduate and grad schools. Basically, everyone you know and come in contact with is a potential source of information and leads, so start building those relationships now.

- See [Learn How to Make a Successful Leap into Entrepreneurship](#) for more information.