

You're a real company when...

by Jason Cohen on April 20, 2007

What marks the moment when you become a “real” company?



Ever since I started Smart Bear in 2002, there's been a running question:

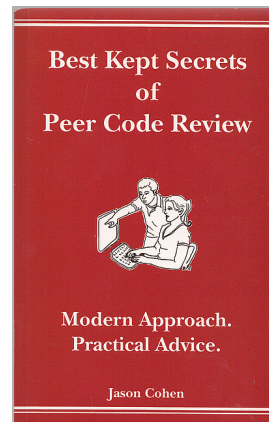
“When do you know you're a real company?”

Which of these are true: You're a real company when...

- You have a domain name that isn't weird.
- Your business cards don't say “VistaPrint” on the back.
- You take PO's in addition to credit cards, and you've gotten over the fact that, yes, you have to actually ship the product before they give you money.
- You switch from Quicken to Quickbooks.
- You hire the first real, full-time employee.
- You pay someone else to print pay stubs and pay your monthly employment taxes because you're just tired of doing it yourself.
- **You have a sign on the building.**
- A real artist does your website and handouts.
- You have a 256-page color glossy hard-backed book chronicling your ascent in the world (Saw this at Adobe. Gorgeous. I asked everyone I met there about

it and no one but the receptionist had ever seen it. It's sitting in the lobby. The receptionist, by the way, knew exactly what their branch of Adobe (Ottawa) did and could articulate why people bought their products in about 15 seconds. Her elevator pitch was better than the 10 minute diatribe I got from a senior manager later that day.)

I made one of those bold because that's the one that's always stuck with me. We got the sign about a year ago, and it really was a proud moment.



Currently Smart Bear has everything but the glossy book (but we do have a book with a glossy cover with over 7000 copies in circulation). The 8000'th user of our various software products just came on-line. That makes me feel like a real company. *[2009 Update: now 45,000 books and 30,000 paying users]*

That was written 16 years ago. Now in 2023, I have a new story.

I needed a new one... it's not hard to pay employees anymore, and you've probably never heard of VistaPrint, nor used Quicken. Well, it used to be funny:

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Ben Radler says:
January 19, 2010 at 03:09 Edit

Your business cards don't say "VistaPrint" on the back.

This made me laugh out loud, for serious.



David Cruz says:
April 10, 2010 at 10:37 Edit

"You have to switch from Quicken to Quickbooks."

That made me smile :)

.-= David Cruz's latest blog post: [Soon, a PC will not have files, folders, or documents](#) ← =-.

When I was a little boy growing up in Austin Texas, "Downtown" was this frightening place we never went to. Downtown had full of things like government buildings and law firms and things that families didn't go to, and there was crime¹.

¹ Austin was 1/10th its current size, and probably didn't have that much crime, but to a little-boy brain, it was scary.

But often we would come to the outskirts of Downtown to get bagels. My parents grew up in and around New York City, and they insisted there was only one place to get "real" bagels. So sometimes, on the weekend, we'd get in the station wagon, I would hop in my car seat, and we'd go down to the bagel store on the edge of Downtown. Looking out window, I knew we were at the bagel store when I could see a long, sloping ramp that led a parking garage. I would wait in the car, staring at that scary office building across the street, they'd get the bagels, and then we'd immediately U-turn and get out of there.



Fast forward 40 years, and I'm standing in a public park with our amazing CEO Heather Brunner and a few dozen of the many hundreds of people who worked at WP Engine, watching as our sign goes up on the building. We kept checking a picture of the company logo on our cell phones, ensuring that each little piece was correctly oriented. (We couldn't remember ourselves!)



That building, is the building with the sloping ramp, imprinted on my memory like a duckling on its mother, one of those inexplicable snatches of childhood memories.

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