

Meet Howard Bornstein, Founder & CEO of 2020 Onsite



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Founder & CEO, 2020 On-site

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2020 Onsite Brings Eye Care to Your Office

In 2014, Howard Bornstein found himself tired of the time consuming hassle of going to the optometrist, so he set out to change the experience by creating 2020 Onsite. The Boston-based startup eschews the traditional brick and mortar storefront for a fully stocked and staffed optometrist-mobile that brings the doctor to patients.

As the idea evolved, Bornstein discovered that the company's key customers weren't consumers themselves, but employers who offer 2020 Onsite's services as part of a benefits package. Since its founding, the company has expanded its fleet of optometry trucks from one to three and is now in three cities: Boston, Atlanta, and Chicago. In addition to their client base of over 300 companies, they provide eye-care services to low income students at public schools in Boston and Atlanta.

Q. Where did the idea for 2020 Onsite come from?

My first optometrist appointment as an adult was an awful experience. It took me 10 to 15 hours of time when you include figuring out insurance, finding an eye doctor, going to the eye doctor, the prescription process, pick up, etc. This was a massive problem, a time suck.

I didn't set out to solve this problem, I just asked the question: "What would this look like?" I started to talk to other people about it. Everybody I talked to who wore glasses had the same frustrations I did. I interviewed strangers to make sure this wasn't a friend bias; it was everyone.

I started pulling on this thread: what would it be like if one were to improve the patient experience ten-fold? Would it be possible to start a practice without losing money the first four years? What would really be an experience that felt like a "complete customer" experience?

What we've come up with manages to get the entire 10 to 15 hour process I mentioned down to under 30 minutes.

Q. Why Massachusetts?

The big things we need are already here: customers, highly skilled team members, etc. Making life easier for their team is a big thing for these companies. Offering on site healthcare services seemed to be something a lot of companies were open to doing. When we started doing this there wasn't much being offered to employers in terms of onsite medical services.

Q. What has been your biggest challenge?

Starting the business was definitely a challenge. My initial pitch was to ten different HR professionals in the Boston area. It was simple: "We are going to save your employees X number of hours." What I learned while making these pitches is that HR managers care about doing amazing things for their employees, but they don't have a lot of budget to spend. Because we are so affordable, often free for companies, we are a "no-brainer" to add as a benefits offering.

Those initial calls were really tough. We pitched cost savings and productivity benefits that interested some people, but what really resonated with the majority was providing something amazing for employees that is highly preventative in nature and can make lives better without incurring a significant cost to the organization since budgets were already stretched. Once we figured that out, it made things really easy. These are things employers care about. Once we made it simple, it enabled us to sign up over 200 corporations in the Boston area.

Q. What helped you find funding support?

We've been really fortunate to draw on numerous local investors as the largest sources of capital for the business. Our two largest investors are Boston-based, which has been hugely helpful. For early stage companies, it's really important to have access to local funding. It's hard to attract early stage investment that isn't locally sourced.

Q. What has been the biggest challenge to scaling?

Automating our processes. What we're doing is very complicated and operationally intensive. It's never been done before and that's why companies are so excited to bring us on. Automating our process is the biggest element that has slowed us down internally. Every day we go to a company is like throwing a party for that company. As a business, we throw 20 to 25 parties a week. Getting the coordination of hosting that many parties and making sure everybody is invited and all the right people are in place is pretty difficult.

Q. Would you call yourselves a digital health company?

We're a tech enabled health care services company. We bridge the online and offline while many other companies in the digital health space are purely digital. We're a hybrid of sorts. If you think about it we're the Lyft or Uber for vision care.

Q. Based on your experience, why is it important that we bring health care into the digital age?

It really is a national imperative because that's the only way we can get our health care costs under control without reducing access to quality care. We're trying to improve access and improve quality at the same time. The only way we can do that is through delivery models that take the cost out of the system without sacrificing access or quality.

Q. What are some of the workforce needs for digital health companies like yours?

The top three things any entrepreneur needs: great people, more customers, and access to financing. I think Massachusetts has all three of those. The next set of highly helpful resources are: physical space, access to other entrepreneurs, and a community of mentors around to learn how to efficiently build great companies. I think we have those, but could use more.

Q. Who is someone in the space who has helped you?

Three different people come to mind. Brian Halligan, founder of HubSpot, provided some great input guidance early on with things like building the initial team, staying focused, and raising money. Tony Morris, a successful entrepreneur and investor, provided a lot of great guidance locally, particularly with making difficult personnel decisions, and Kate Gulliver, the global head of talent at Wayfair, gave us a significant amount of guidance on our product and insight into the psyche of our primary buyer, she is also on our board of advisors.

Q. What advice would you give to a student graduating into the workforce in Massachusetts?

Getting a job at an established company will give you more structure, more formal training, and a greater appreciation for what work in the corporate world is like.

When you then bring your structure, experience, and training to a startup you're passionate about, you'll be able to add value quickly and the structure will better prepare you for the independence that will be expected of you. Also, your larger corporate experience will allow you to appreciate the additional flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility that you'll receive at a startup that you otherwise might take for granted.

Q. What could we do to further grow and nurture the ecosystem here?

At the top of my list is find a way to create space, actual office space that would bring companies together that would create a highly integrated community, accelerator, growth engine of people mentorship, capital,...all of those resources.

It's sometimes hard to see, because while there's a lot of cool stuff happening in Massachusetts, there's just not a single central place to go see it all. I think people who are outside of the ecosystem don't really see it because it isn't as clear and defined. There's so much more going on than people realize.

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