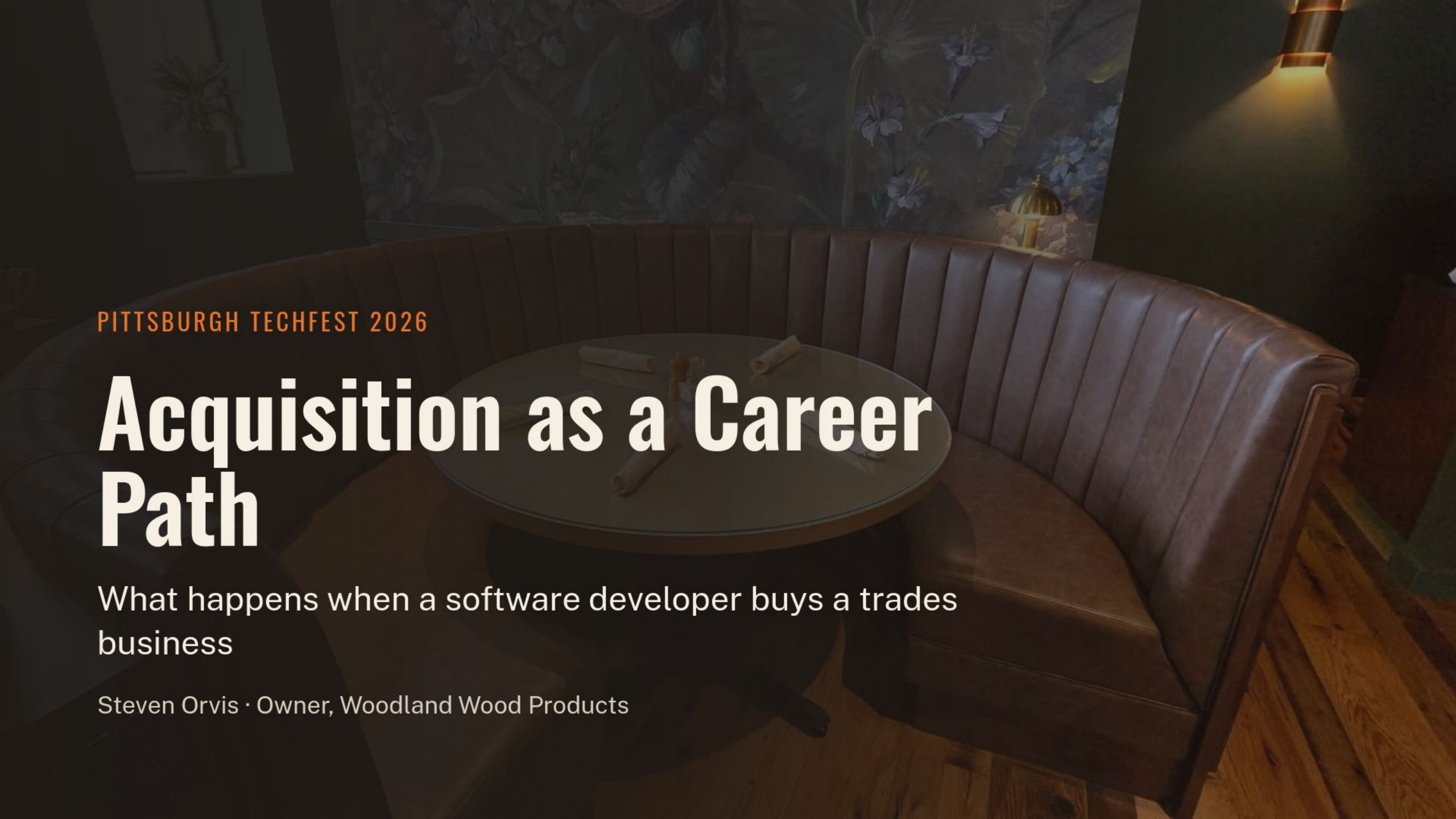




PITTSBURGH TECHFEST 2026

Acquisition as a Career Path

What happens when a software developer buys a trades business

Steven Orvis · Owner, Woodland Wood Products

I was always starting businesses. I just didn't know it.



THINGS I TRIED

A website

A hunting blog

Two YouTube channels

Trapping and selling fur

Building muzzleloaders

Flint knapping

A Windows 95 emulator

IN MY IDEAS DOC

ThatIsMine.com

Turkey call factory

Puzzle sorting machine

Online farmers market

Equipment bartering

Aluminum truck campers

A 3D print shop

Politician Q&A site

THE PROBLEM

I was doing it backwards.

I started with the fun idea. Not the customer, not the problem, and not the money.

THEN MY WIFE AND I STARTED A BEEF FARM

Real businesses are supposed to make money.

We finally had a product and a customer, and we were still losing money. That's when I started learning the money side.





Steven Orvis

13 years as a software developer

Now my wife and I own Woodland Wood Products: 14 people, in Etna, north of Pittsburgh

“Anything in the front of a restaurant that’s made of wood, or looks like wood, we make it.”

How does a software developer end up owning a woodshop?

We bought it.

Most people think they have to start from scratch

Have you ever run payroll?

Paid quarterly taxes?

Found your first customer?

Built a lead pipeline?

THE OTHER DOOR

Buy an ecosystem that already works

Customers, referrals, a crew that knows the work, equipment, and 35 years of know-how, on day one.

Kind of like a mini franchise, except it's one of a kind.



THE BUY BOX

Work backwards from the income you need



My cushion: 1.5× debt service coverage. For every \$1 of loan payment, the business makes \$1.50. That extra 50¢ is your safety net.

The 3-hour drive got me my buy box. **It didn't get me a business.**

3 hrs

A gun shop in eastern PA. Too far.

1.5 hrs

Still too far.

1 hr

My limit. The owner has to show up.

INDUSTRY: OPEN ON PURPOSE

Screen for attributes, not industries

Behind on technology

A 2000s-era website is a tell

Owner ready to retire

Not the flashy, showy one

5+ years in business

Every year survived makes the next more likely

Margin for the debt

Covers the loan, my salary, and surprises

No platform risk

Google can turn off a blog. It can't turn off a booth.

Where my skills stack

Tech that creates new value on top of what works

Acquisition Target

Butler

Is our preferred location

New Castle, Cranberry, Clarion, or Kittanning

Are other example areas within our range



MY ACTUAL 2024 DEAL BOX

I emailed it to brokers and kept a printout where I'd see it

A daily reminder of what I was looking for. And sellers choose buyers too, so it's also your pitch.

**Interested
in but not
limited to**

Landscaping	Pack and ship	Truck repair garage
Butcher	Lumber mill	Lumber harvesting
Car wash	Laundromat	Online businesses
Legacy Media Access and Retrieval	Well drilling	Bus company

Not these

Restaurants	Unprofitable / declining revenue	Open < 5 years
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Not these: Restaurants.

**So naturally, we bought a
restaurant millwork
shop.**

VOLUME AND SPEED

I ran the search like a sales pipeline

1,000s

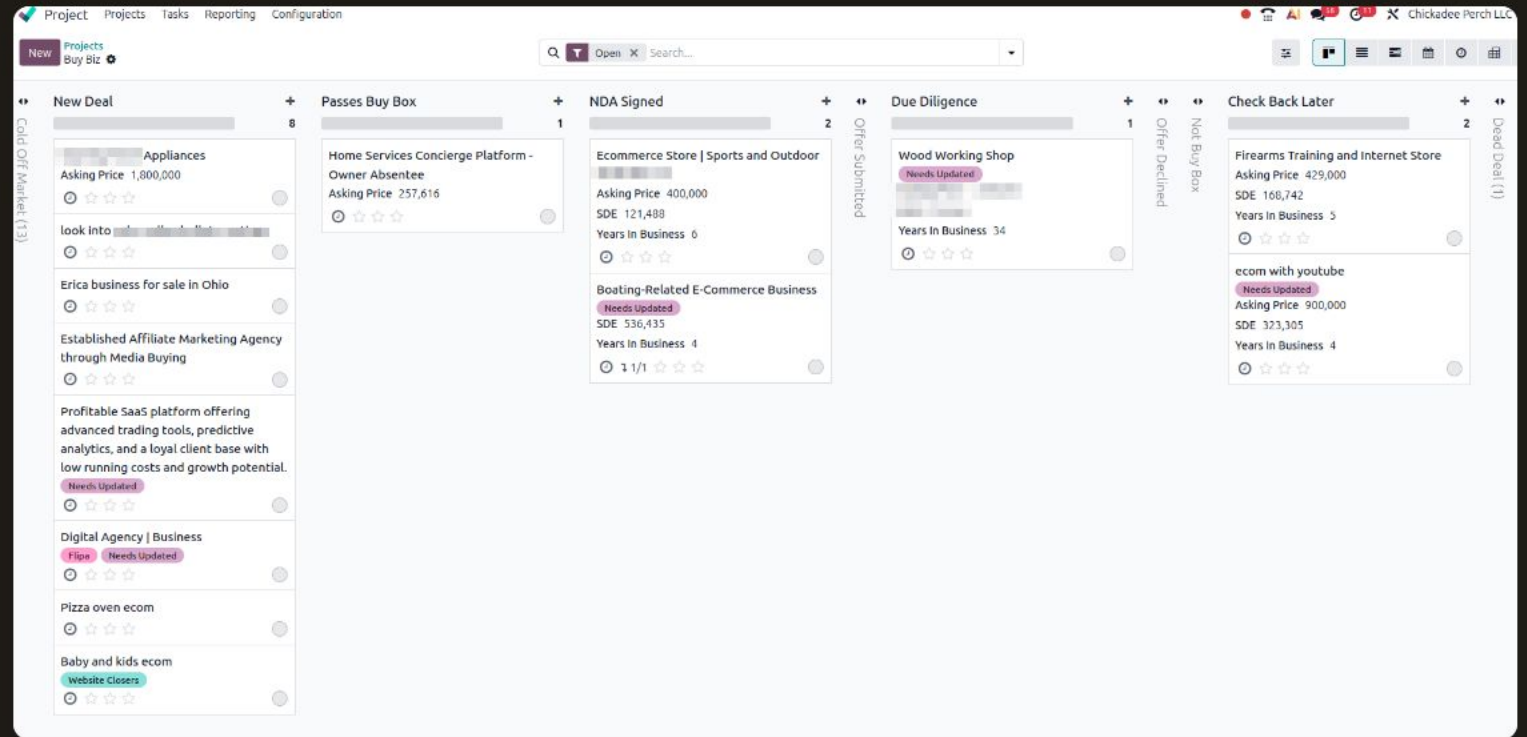
skimmed and screened, most never tracked

80+

tracked in my Odoo pipeline

1

bought



THE SHINY ONE: A FIREARMS TRAINING BUSINESS

**The seller wanted potential value. I
needed actual value.**

I loved it. The numbers didn't work. I should have walked away sooner.

The numbers worked on their own. The potential was a bonus.

A CNC machine

G-code and 3D modeling, like my 3D printer

Designs on graph paper

A tech upgrade waiting to happen

No ERP, all paper

And I'd been running Odoo for two years



OWNERSHIP LESSON 1 · KEY-PERSON RISK

Bus factor = 1

Keeping the seller worked

He's honest and ethical. But everything ran through him, and when he was off, the shop could only run so long.

Now I'm becoming the key person

So I'm abstracting it away: sharing information so I can delegate. And plan the seller's exit from day one.

OWNERSHIP LESSON 2 · HIRING

Turn each hiring mistake into an SOP



No driver's license

Entry-level hires are who you send on runs. So it goes on the hiring checklist.



No attendance policy

So we write one down, with clear next steps, and fix it as we learn.

OWNERSHIP LESSON 3 · CASH FLOW

\$100k feels rich. **It's already spoken for.**

Profit First: separate bank accounts, so you feel the squeeze early

Taxes

Profit

Owner's pay

Operating

Rule #1 in business: never run out of cash.

From carbon paper to a scan

Before

Carbon-paper POs

Match by hand

Dig through the bills folder

After

PO in Odoo

Scan to receive

Look it up and pay

In tech, AI is changing how we work.

In a labor business, AI multiplies your people.

First estimates: so-so



Summarizing emails



A takeoff tool that
feeds Odoo



Next: design tools for
the team

WHERE MY DEVELOPER BACKGROUND GOT IN THE WAY

I used to have a PM shielding me.
Now I am the PM.

Meet customers. Send the scary emails. Be a presence. I'm still not a small-talk guy. I'm learning.

WHAT A DEVELOPER IS WORTH HERE

Tech skills go a long way in an old-economy business

Systems thinking

Automation

ERP

CAD and CNC

AI tooling



What to do Monday

Dream and research

Write your buy box now, even as a student

Read

The books on the next slide

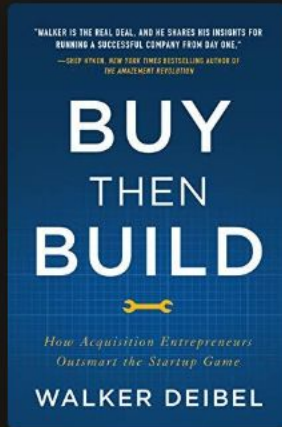
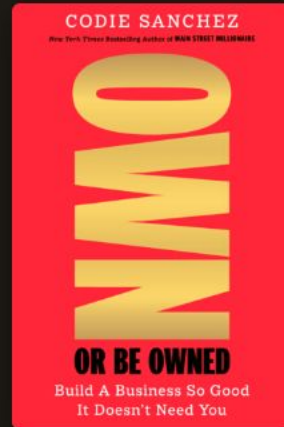
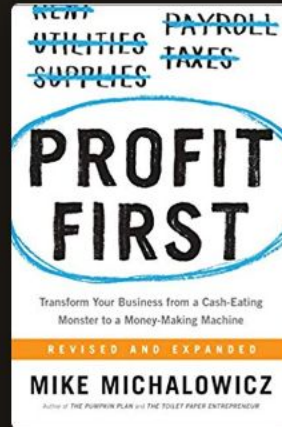
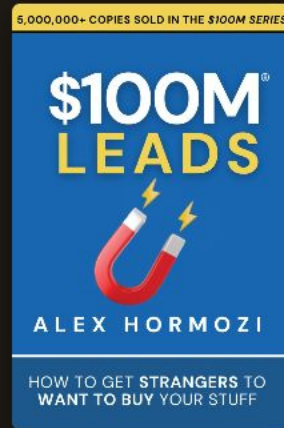
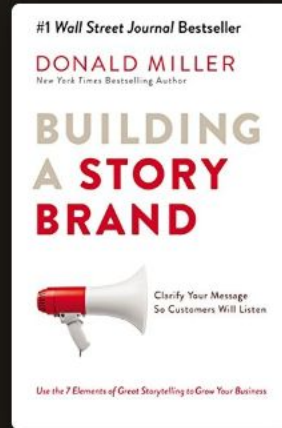
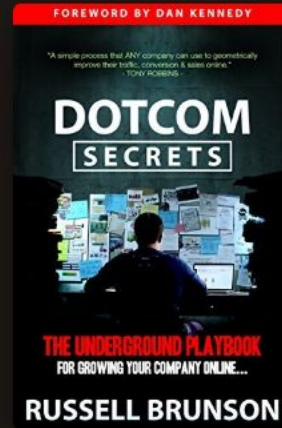
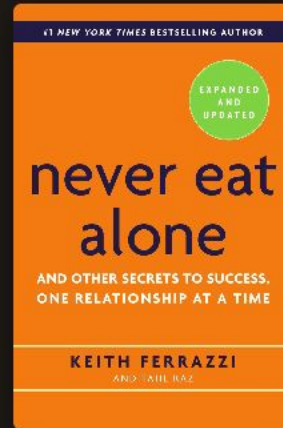
Meet business people

Chamber of commerce, Rotary, conferences. Build connections and help where you can.

Start with the end in mind

Then work backwards

Books that helped me along the way





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