



HITCH HIKERS

1) Business Overview

Hitch Hikers is an innovative vehicle safety and personalization brand creating animated, LED-lit accessories that mount to standard hitch receivers. Our flagship product is a patent-protected signaling device designed to increase the visibility of braking and turning signals—particularly for taller vehicles like pickup trucks, SUVs, and RVs—while adding fun, character, and self-expression to the driving experience.

Hitch Hikers blends motion + high-visibility lighting to capture the attention of distracted drivers, helping reduce missed signals and the risk of rear-end collisions. We aim to become a recognized leader in the vehicle accessories market by building a product line of memorable characters that customers collect, customize, and share.

2) The Problem

Rear-end collisions remain one of the most common types of roadway accidents. A major contributor is missed or late recognition of brake and turn signals—often worsened by:

- Height differences between vehicles (truck/SUV vs. sedan)
- Night driving and poor visibility conditions
- Distracted driving driven by phones, infotainment systems, and navigation screens

Existing hitch and rear-visibility accessories are typically static reflectors or simple add-ons that don't materially improve signaling clarity or driver attention.

3) The Solution

Hitch Hikers introduces a new category: animated hitch-mounted signaling accessories that amplify driver intent through motion and bright modern LEDs.

Flagship prototype concept: the American Bald Eagle

- **Turn signals:** animated wing motion synchronized with the vehicle's turn signals with amber LED illumination
- **Braking:** wings lift/animate with red LED illumination
- Designed for future expansion (new characters, programming options, customization)

This approach improves visibility and recognition while also creating a unique emotional hook—customers don't just “need” it, they want it.



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4) Founder Story

Founder Joseph Schaufele has had an inventor mindset since childhood—constantly noticing everyday design problems and imagining better solutions. Around 2017–2018, Joseph committed to bringing one of his inventions to market by researching ten ideas and selecting the most feasible and impactful: **a trailer hitch signaling device**.

The mission became personal after Joseph was rear-ended at a red light when a driver behind him failed to see his brake lights clearly due in part to vehicle height differences. He pursued and secured a U.S. utility patent for the signaling device. After early partnership lessons and a strategic pause during COVID, Joseph resumed development in 2024 with renewed focus and the support of his wife, Sherry. He partnered with Michael and Hope Khoury and Go Vertical to bring the prototype into a manufacturable, market-ready design.

Joseph's motivation is straightforward: if Hitch Hikers prevents even one serious accident or saves one life, the effort is worth it.

5) Target Market & Customers

Primary customers:

- Pickup truck owners
- SUV drivers
- RV owners and road-tripping families
- Towing and hitch-equipped vehicle owners
- Gift buyers looking for unique automotive accessories

Secondary customers:

- Automotive enthusiasts and customization fans
- Outdoor lifestyle audiences (camping, tailgating, motorsports)

6) Competitive Advantage

Hitch Hikers is well-positioned because of:

- Patent-protected innovation and differentiated product category (motion + signaling visibility)
- Founder-led mission with authentic story (strong for PR, crowdfunding, and grants)
- Development partners focused on manufacturability and quality
- **Built-in virality:** the product is inherently “shareable” in video, especially on TikTok/Instagram



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7) Go-To-Market Strategy

Phase 1: Prototype → content engine → waitlist

- Finalize prototype and capture real-world demo footage (day/night, braking, turns)
- Build an email waitlist and early community

Phase 2: Crowdfunding presales launch

- Kickstarter-style campaign to validate demand, convert community, and fund the first run
- **Launch hook:** “250th Anniversary Edition” American Bald Eagle themed around U.S. pride and celebration

Phase 3: E-commerce + marketplace expansion

- Direct-to-consumer sales via HitchHikers.store
- Expand to marketplaces (Amazon) once manufacturing and fulfillment are stable
- Develop retail and licensing conversations after early traction

8) Milestones & Timeline

2026 roadmap:

- **Q1:** Prototype finalization and demos to potential users
- **Q2:** Crowdfunding launch + e-commerce store setup + marketing push
- **Q3:** Pilot manufacturing run + early deliveries + outreach to retail/licensing
- **Q4:** Full product launch + national partnerships + holiday marketing campaigns

Near-term operational timeline:

- **Late April:** send finalized design package to manufacturer in China
 - **Next 30–60 days:** receive build and shipped prototype (timing subject to global shipping conditions)
 - **Immediately after:** filming, ads, influencer outreach, and crowdfunding production
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9) Funding Needs & Use of Funds

Hitch Hikers is seeking approximately **\$250,000** to finalize the safety-tested prototype, fund the first production run, and support brand launch across online and retail channels.

Funds will be used for:

- Final prototype engineering, compliance, and testing
- Tooling, manufacturing setup, and initial inventory
- Packaging, fulfillment, and supply chain operations
- Content creation and paid digital marketing
- Crowdfunding execution and customer support setup
- Key hires/contractors for product development and launch operations

10) Metrics for Success

Key success metrics include:

- **Crowdfunding performance:** total preorders and conversion rate
- Units sold (monthly) and repeat purchase rate
- Website traffic and e-commerce conversion rate
- CAC vs. gross margin (unit economics)
- **Social engagement:** video views, shares, saves, and inbound inquiries
- Retail/licensing deal pipeline and signed partnerships
- **Customer satisfaction:** reviews, NPS-style feedback, and user-generated content volume