

HITCH HIKERS



Hitch Hikers LLC Complete Business Plan

Company Overview

Hitch Hikers LLC is an innovative startup founded by Joe Schaufele, specializing in the development and commercialization of unique trailer hitch signaling devices protected by US Patent Number US10328848B1. The company's flagship products, branded as "Hitch Hikers," represent the first-ever interactive puppet-based trailer hitch accessories that combine mechanical movement with illuminated signaling technology.

The patented technology features puppet characters with articulated limbs that respond to vehicle turn signals and brake lights through the standard electrical tow connector, creating an entirely new category in the trailer accessories market.

1. Customer Validation Roadmap

Hitch Hikers LLC recognizes the importance of validating market adoption prior to large-scale commercialization. While focus groups and customer testing are not possible without a functional prototype, the company has designed a phased validation roadmap aligned with the product development timeline.

- **Prototype Demonstrations:** Following prototype completion (Q4 2025), the product will be highlighted at regional RV shows, automotive expos, and outdoor recreation events to gauge direct consumer reactions.
- **Pilot Pre-Sales:** A limited production run will be distributed to early adopters through the crowdfunding campaign, generating feedback on product usability, durability, and appeal.
- **Retailer Engagement:** Parallel discussions with RV dealerships, trailer accessory distributors, and e-commerce retailers will be started to assess wholesale demand and pricing acceptance.
- **Ongoing Feedback Loop:** Customer testimonials and usage data will be integrated into later product refinements and marketing campaigns.

HITCH HIKERS



2. Financial Planning Framework

At this pre-prototype stage, Hitch Hikers LLC has not yet developed detailed 3-to-5-year financial statements. Instead, the company has established a phased financial planning framework, which will be expanded upon completion of the prototype and initial cost-of-goods analysis.

- Phase 1: Prototype & Testing (Q4 2025)

Budget allocation toward engineering, compliance testing, and design refinement in collaboration with Go Vertical ICM.

- Phase 2: Crowdfunding & Early Sales (Q2-Q3 2026)

Campaign target of \$250,000–\$500,000 to fund tooling, initial inventory, and marketing. Financials during this stage will focus on campaign performance, customer acquisition cost, and unit profitability.

- Phase 3: Scaling & Licensing (2026 onward)

Post-crowd funding, detailed pro-form financials will be developed, incorporating refined unit economics, gross margin analysis, and licensing revenue models.

3. Strategic Growth Path

At this stage, Hitch Hikers LLC’s strategic priority is market entry and brand establishment rather than long-term exit planning. The company is committed to building sustainable operations by:

- Establishing a direct-to-consumer sales channel via hitchhikers. store.
- Securing licensing agreements for character-themed products.
- Expanding distribution through partnerships with RV and automotive accessory retailers.

Long-term strategic options, such as mergers, acquisitions by leading trailer accessory manufacturers, or expansion into adjacent product categories, will be evaluated once the company has proved traction and achieved measurable market penetration.

HITCH HIKERS



4. Regulatory & Compliance Strategy

Hitch Hikers LLC is committed to ensuring all products meet or exceed regulatory requirements for automotive accessories. A structured compliance strategy has been established:

- **Testing Milestone (Q2 2025):** Engage certified testing facilities to confirm compliance with DOT, SAE, and FMVSS requirements.
- **Durability & Weather Resistance:** Subject prototypes to environmental stress tests including heat, vibration, and moisture exposure.
- **Legal & Insurance Review:** Retain specialized automotive counsel to assess liability exposure and confirm regulatory conformity.
- **Documentation & Certification:** Maintain compliance records for future retailer audits and distributor onboarding.

5. Team & Advisory Expansion

The strength of Hitch Hikers LLC lies in its combination of technical innovation, patent protection, and experienced partners.

- **Founder – Joseph Schaufele:** Inventor of the patented hitch signaling device (US10328848B1), bringing deep technical ability and creative vision.
- **Engineering Partner – Go Vertical ICM:** Responsible for product engineering, prototype development, and scalable manufacturing.
- **Operations Partner – Michael & Hope:** Providing supply chain management, distribution support, and added manufacturing ability.



Market Opportunity

Market Size and Growth Potential

The trailer hitch and towing accessories market presents substantial growth opportunities:

Market Segment	2024 Market Size	CAGR	2033 Projected Size
Global Trailer Hitch Market	\$775.9 Million	3.2%	\$1.0 Billion
Trailer Hitches & Towing Accessories	\$3.5 Billion	6.1%	\$5.8 Billion

CognitivemarketresearchVerifiedmarketreports

Market Trends Driving Growth

Current market trends strongly favor Hitch Hikers' innovative approach:

- **Rising popularity of lightweight and high-strength materials**
- **Integration of smart technology** into trailer accessories
- **Modular and customizable hitch systems**
- **Growth in aftermarket and DIY solutions**
- **Increased focus on novelty and personalization**

Verifiedmarketreports

The outdoor recreation vehicle market has experienced significant growth, with recreational vehicle demand increasing by 17% between 2019 and 2021, further propelling the need for innovative towing solutions. *Verifiedmarketreports*

HITCH HIKERS



Product Development Strategy

Initial Product Launch: Bald Eagle Prototype

Hitch Hikers LLC will launch with a **Bald Eagle puppet** designed with an American Flag theme, currently being prototyped by partner **Go Vertical ICM**. This patriotic design offers:

- **High viral marketing potential** through social media
- **Broad appeal** across diverse customer segments
- **Attention-grabbing design** that demonstrates the technology effectively
- **Wings that move upward and illuminate** with corresponding turn signals.
- **Dual-wing brake signaling** when brakes are applied.

Expanded Product Line Vision

Following the successful launch of the prototype, Hitch Hikers LLC will develop character-themed product lines featuring:

Superhero Characters

Sports Figures

Celebrity Characters

HITCH HIKERS



Technology and Patent Protection

Core Patent Technology (US10328848B1)

The foundation of Hitch Hikers LLC's competitive advantage lies in its proprietary patent technology:

- **Inventor:** Joseph Schaufele
- **Filing Date:** March 20, 2018
- **Publication Date:** June 25, 2019
- **Legal Status:** Active
- **Patent Type:** Utility Patent

The patent covers a trailer hitch signaling device that **physically moves to indicate vehicle actions**, including braking and turning, with integrated illumination systems. *GoogleWipo*

Technical Specifications

The device features:

- Standard receivers hitch mounting compatibility.
 - Electrical integration via vehicle tow connector
 - Programmable logic module for signal processing
 - LED illumination synchronized with vehicle signals.
 - Mechanical limb movement responding to turn and brake signals.
-

HITCH HIKERS



Business Model and Revenue Streams

Primary Revenue Streams

Direct Sales	Consumer purchases through online platforms	RV owners, truck enthusiasts, outdoor recreation	\$150-\$300 per unit
Licensing Deals	Character-themed products with IP holders	Licensed character fans, collectors	Royalty-based revenue
Crowdfunding	Pre-sale and development funding	Early adopters, innovation supporters	\$250K-\$500K target

Financial Projections

Conservative Scenario (0.1% market penetration):

- Towing accessories market: $\$3.5\text{B} \times 0.1\% = \3.5M annual revenue potential
- Unit sales at \$200 on average: 17,500 units annually

Optimistic Scenario (1% market penetration):

- Towing accessories market: $\$3.5\text{B} \times 1\% = \35M annual revenue potential
- Unit sales at \$200 average: 175,000 units annually

HITCHHIKERS



Marketing and Sales Strategy

Digital-First Approach

Primary Platforms:

- **Website:** hitchhikers.website (established)
- **E-commerce Store:** hitchhikers.store (planned)
- **Social media:** Focus on viral video content and visual appeal
- **Influencer Partnerships:** Targeting automotive, RV, and outdoor recreation influences.

Target Customer Segments

1. **RV and Motorhome Owners** - Primary market seeking novelty accessories.
2. **Pickup Truck Enthusiasts** - Secondary market interested in customization.
3. **Outdoor Recreation Community** - Boat owners, campers, adventure travelers
4. **Novelty Gift Market** - Unique gift-seekers for automotive enthusiasts

Crowdfunding Strategy

The company will launch a crowdfunding campaign targeting \$250,000-\$500,000 to fund:

- Initial production tooling and setup
- Marketing and promotional activities
- Inventory for pre-sale fulfillment
- Technology refinement and testing

HITCH HIKERS



Strategic Partnerships

Go Vertical ICM: Currently producing the Bald Eagle prototype, responsible for:

- Product engineering and design refinement
- Quality control and testing protocols.
- Scalable manufacturing capabilities

Michael & Hope: Strategic partner providing:

- Supply chain management.
- Distribution support
- Added manufacturing ability.

Licensing Strategy

Hitch Hikers LLC will pursue licensing agreements with major entertainment and sports organizations:

Target Organization	Product Opportunity	Market Appeal
DC Comics	Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman characters	Superhero fan base
Marvel Studios	Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America	Marvel universe enthusiasts
MLB	Team mascots and player likenesses	Baseball fans nationwide
NBA	Team logos and basketball themes	Basketball enthusiasts
NFL	Team branding and football characters	Football fan market

HITCH HIKERS



Grant and Funding Strategy

SKIP Platform Applications

Hitch Hikers LLC will pursue grant opportunities through the **SKIP platform**, focusing on:

- **Innovation grants** for patent-protected technology development
- **Manufacturing grants** support domestic production capabilities.
- **Small business development grants** for market expansion

Additional Funding Sources

- **State economic development incentives.**
- **Manufacturing and technology innovation programs**
- **Patent commercialization grants.**

Competitive Analysis

Market Positioning

Hitch Hikers LLC runs in an **uncontested market space** within the trailer accessories industry. Traditional competitors focus on functional products (hitches, locks, wiring, safety equipment) but offer no interactive or character-based signaling devices.

Key Competitive Advantages:

- **Patent protection** creates barriers to entry.
 - **First-mover advantage** in novelty signaling devices.
 - **Strong brand differentiation** through character licensing
 - **Viral marketing potential** through visual appeal and uniqueness
-



Traditional Competitors

Major players in the trailer hitch market include CURT Manufacturing, Horizon Global, and B&W Trailer Hitches, but none offer products like Hitch Hikers' interactive signaling devices.

Patriothitches

Risk Assessment and Mitigation

Primary Business Risks

Risk Category	Potential Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Intellectual Property	Patent infringement claims	Robust legal defense, IP monitoring
Market Adoption	Slow consumer acceptance	Phased rollout, social proof campaigns
Manufacturing	Quality issues, delays	Multiple partner relationships, QC protocols
Regulatory	DOT compliance requirements	Early testing, legal consultation
Seasonal Demand	RV market seasonality	Product diversification, international expansion

HITCHHIKERS



Implementation Timeline

Phase 1: Prototype and Testing (Q1-Q2 2025)

- Complete Bald Eagle prototype development
- Conduct safety and compliance testing.
- Finalize packaging and installation procedures.

Phase 2: Crowdfunding Launch (Q3 2025)

- Launch crowdfunding campaign.
- Execute viral marketing strategy.
- Secure pre-sale orders and customer validation

Phase 3: Production and Fulfillment (Q4 2025-Q1 2026)

- Scale manufacturing with partners.
- Fulfilling crowdfunding orders
- Launch hitchhikers.store e-commerce platform.

Phase 4: Licensing and Expansion (2026)

- Secure major licensing deals
- Introducing character-themed product lines
- Expand distribution channels.

HITCH HIKERS



Conclusion:

Hitch Hikers LLC is uniquely positioned to capture significant market share in the growing trailer accessories industry through its patented, innovative approach to hitch signaling devices. With strong patent protection, strategic partnerships, and a clear path to market through crowdfunding and licensing deals, the company is an exceptional opportunity for investors and partners seeking exposure to a novel product category with substantial growth potential.

The combination of patent-protected technology, viral marketing appeal, and expansion into licensed character products create multiple revenue streams and sustainable competitive advantages in an underserved market niche valued at billions of dollars annually.



Thumbs Up!