

More entrepreneurs are older

By Lynn Hicks, Des Moines Register

Quick, picture a startup sensation.

Did you see 27-year-old Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg? Or maybe Ben Milne, who created two successful companies in his 20s, including the mobile payment darling Dwolla? Or Ben Silbermann, who 10 years after graduating from Des Moines' Roosevelt High School helped launch one of the fastest growing websites ever with Pinterest?

But if you look beyond those headline-grabbing names, you're more likely to find a baby boomer launching a new business.

Over the past decade, the highest rate of entrepreneurial activity belongs to the 55 to 64 age group, according to a study by the Kauffman Foundation, a Kansas City, Mo.-based entrepreneurship institute. The 20 to 34 age bracket has the lowest rate.

Kauffman's latest study shows that about 23% of new entrepreneurs in 2010 were in the 55 to 64 age group, compared with 15% in 1996.

"When people think startups, they think kids," said Christian Gurney of Torsion Mobile, a year-old Des Moines tech firm. He and co-founder Richard Kirsner's combined ages are 114, and they say it's no liability.

"We tell clients, 'We've made lot of mistakes and we're not likely to repeat them.' That gets chuckles, but also wry smiles," Gurney said. "They've worked with the new startup sensation, a 20-something, and 50% of the time it flamed out."

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