

# Sometimes only a clown shoe fits...

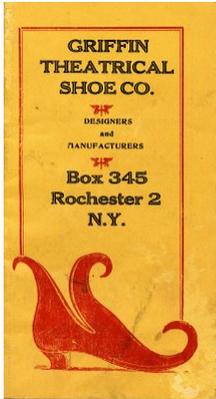


When I was about 13 years old I had a neighbor named John Buckholtz. Mr. Buckholtz made clown shoes for a living, a family business that dated back to 1873. His grandfather was [Raymond Griffin](#), the son of [James R. Griffin](#), who originally founded [Griffin Theatrical Shoe Co.](#) By the time the business was handed down to Mr. Buckholtz, he was one of less than a handful of clown shoemakers in the world, and arguably the only one who still custom made them by hand.



Occasionally I would do yard work for Mr. Buckholtz for extra money. Over time he recognized my work ethic and desire to learn, so one day he offered to teach me how to make clown shoes. With my mother's permission and a nervous enthusiasm, I accepted, unaware of what was in store for me.

Mr. Buckholtz showed me the ropes, and helped me learn the process from start to finish. We cut the leather for the soles, ran the wax down the string to create the stitching, and with the colorful tops, stitched them together. It was amazing watching it all come together, and left me in awe learning how you could create something from nothing.



I walked away from this experience with two things that are with me to this day. One is the scar on my forehead that I would have been happy to leave behind. I got it from pressing so hard to get the awl through the leather to stitch them together that the strap you place on your foot came off and the nail flew up and hit me in the head. The second is the power and beauty of watching something manifest from nothing. It's more than making clown shoes...it's like a song that began as nothing more than a pen and paper, or a painting that started as an empty canvas. Piece by piece we built something of value, something that would mean something to someone.



Nowadays I see this same beauty in entrepreneurship. It starts as a vision, or an idea, but we craft our decisions and actions to create something that fills

a need for others. Mr. Buckholtz's family business lasted over 100 years, and did so out of the quality and customization they provided their clients. It's interesting how we have come full circle from back when most all retailers were small and specialty to progressing in the industrial age to mass manufacturing and now back again to the specialty shops thriving by customizing to their clients respective needs. Can some form of customization help distinguish your product or service ([the purple cow](#)) and keep the competition at bay?