

How to Start a Business CHECKLIST

Brainstorm business ideas

The best business ideas solve a problem that impacts you or people you know. So start by thinking about ways you can help yourself or others. [Learn more.](#)

Conduct market research to test your business ideas

Not all business ideas will make money. Research your target markets to see if your ideas can work. [Learn more.](#)

Brainstorm and define your brand

(values, traits, differentiating factors, brand voice)

Your brand is the essence of “who” your business is, the values that define it, and the unique way you meet your customers’ needs. A strong brand is essential for building strong customer relationships and differentiating your business from the competition. [Read our free, complete guide on building a strong brand identity.](#)

Choose a place to work

(state, city, and home office vs office/retail space)

Where you base your business matters. Different locations have different laws, taxes, and fees that will affect your business. Read more about the [factors to consider when choosing your business location.](#)

Develop a business plan

Create a concise document outlining your business goals and how you plan to accomplish them. Business plans are rarely required, but the process of thinking through the details of your business plan will create the blueprint for your success. [Read more in this free ebook.](#)

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Choose your legal business structure

The legal business structure you choose will dictate practical aspects of your business like your taxes and your personal risk level, among other things. Be sure to choose the structure that will serve your business best in the long run. [Learn more.](#)

Name your business

Your business name should grow from the brand you defined earlier. [Here's how to choose a great business name.](#)

Incorporate or register your business

Complete all business licenses and permits. And, get a registered agent ([if you need one](#)). The Small Business Association outlines [what you need to know](#).

Trademark your business name

(values, traits, differentiating factors, brand voice)

A trademark will protect your business name from being used by another entity in all 50 states. This important step helps to defend the valuable brand equity your business will accrue. [Learn more.](#)

Get a federal and state tax ID

In order to operate within the law, your business will need to file and pay taxes and you will need a federal and state tax ID to do so. [You can get started here.](#)

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Set up business financial accounts

(bank account, business credit card, and merchant account)

Your business will need a bank account so you can keep track of your expenses, deposit revenue, and pay bills from one place. You may need a business credit card for a more flexible cash flow. [Here's a good resource](#) to help you decide if you need a merchant account.

Register a web domain

An easy-to-find web domain is a key ingredient to a successful web presence. So choose a domain that people will find easy to remember and spell. We recommend [that you check to see if your desired web domain is available](#).

Get business insurance

Business insurance helps to protect you and your business in case something goes wrong. There are six common types of business insurance to choose from. The SBA provides a great intro to [this topic](#).

Get your custom business logo

Your business logo will become the “face” by which people know your brand. So, keep your brand top of mind and always choose [custom logo design](#) over generic templates.

Build your website

Your website is an important tool for your business. It's the online ambassador of your brand, representing your business when live people can't. [Learn how to create a business website from scratch](#).

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Create social media accounts

Social networks offer free platforms for creating relationships with your customers and future customers. Extend your online brand with an engaging professional social media presence. Set up accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Choose infrastructure vendors and apps

(virtual phone system, accounting, project management, email, analytics, etc.)

Think carefully about the day-to-day workings of your business. Then find the resources that will allow you to complete them as effortlessly as possible.

Crunch the numbers

Determine how much it will cost to run your business. Factor in start-up costs as well as regularly occurring expenses.

Raise funds

Consider business micro-loans, crowd-sourced funding, investors, business credit cards, or grants to find the right option (or combination of options) for your business needs.

Create a marketing plan

Marketing is the ongoing process of promoting your business, products or services to potential customers. Identify how you will communicate with potential customers, what you will say, and when. Plan to test and then revise your tactics. [Learn more here.](#)

Starting a Business?

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