What You Need to Know to Launch a Successful Business
Yahoo Small Business empowers business owners to launch and scale their ideas online. From creating a website to promoting a brand, our products help entrepreneurs succeed.
INTRODUCTION: HOW TO TURN YOUR PASSION INTO A BUSINESS
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49% of workers in the U.S. have made a dramatic career change—and for those who haven’t, 65% say they’re thinking about it or previously considered it. Given these statistics, there’s a strong chance you are also considering a career change. There could be many reasons behind this, but since you’re reading this, it’s probably because you’d rather do what you love than find yet another job.

This begs the question—*are you working your dream job or dreaming of working on something else?*

We’re talking about exploring your passion and embracing your potential life as an entrepreneur. We know that word can be intimidating for some, but the steps we share below will make the idea much more tangible—perhaps they’ll even inspire you to *create your dream job* instead of searching for it.

**Identify whether your passion is a viable business opportunity**

We often choose certain career paths because of how much they pay, or because we have the skills required to excel in them. In *this Inc article*, one expert offers another reason people make certain choices about their career paths: “Because they didn’t have all the information they needed at the time to make the right one.”

But history has shown that all kinds of passions make viable businesses. For example, your passion may be cooking or baking. You might dream of opening a premier restaurant, artisan bakery, or boutique pasty shop downtown. Your delectable dishes could delight the palettes of foodies throughout the city.

You might dream of creating unique crafts like custom jewelry or even birdhouses. While once just a hobby people dabbled in to sell at weekend fairs, crafting items like these has become lucrative in recent years thanks to the internet. Etsy, in particular, has provided crafters with the opportunity to make their passion their dream job, such as *this charms seller* that became a top seller on the site.

There are two key actions you can take to determine whether your passion can make it as a business:

**See if someone else has already done it**

If there are already businesses that center around your passion, that’s a good sign. Extra points if those businesses are successful. Though if there aren’t many (or any) relevant businesses out there, it doesn’t mean your passion isn’t viable. You may have found a niche market that needs to be filled. Though if there are other businesses like yours in the marketplace it shows an initial signal of possibility.
Write a business plan

This exercise encourages you to think critically and practically about your passion. Conducting market research, identifying potential customers, performing financial planning—these are all important tasks in creating a business plan that help you consider how your idea can become a reality.

Remember the immortal words of Walt Disney: “If you can dream it, you can do it.”

Consider Bootstrapping

Sure, you could save up for years to invest heavily in a business—but why wait when you can take strides to become a business owner sooner rather than later? Enter bootstrapping, the act of starting and building your business with existing resources like personal savings and readily available equipment.

Bootstrapping provides several benefits:

- You can get your business up and running quickly.
- You maintain complete control over the business and associated decisions.
- You can spend critical time and money on the core of your business, like the product or service you offer, instead of ways to get capital.

Prioritize these key business areas

Once you’ve started your company, there are a hundred different directions you can go in—but it’s important you remain focused on these important areas of your business:

Product Offering

Here the concept of a minimum viable product (MVP) is important. An MVP is essentially a product (or service) you put out that’s “good enough” for customers to purchase, even if it isn’t perfect. Selling an MVP is especially useful in the early stages of your business since you have limited resources—you can gauge customer interest and willingness to purchase without investing a lot of money upfront.

Market Testing

Even after you’ve done some initial research and identified a need in the market, you still have to verify how deep the need is and what people are willing to pay to address it. Put your MVP in front of potential customers and put your theory to the test with actual sales.

Customer Feedback

Insights from customers can be invaluable to not only identify the viability of your product, but also improving it for future sales. For example, your customers can show you ways they use the product that you didn’t initially consider, or they may ask for features they would be willing to pay more for. Just keep in mind that some insights may not be useful or feasible, so consider all feedback carefully—such as paying more attention to feedback that’s shared by multiple customers.

Your dream job could very well be your passion brought to life. Pursue it practically with Business Maker—an all-in-one solution that helps entrepreneurs get started with their business idea. Get recommended products that fit your needs and help your business grow.

HOW TO START A BUSINESS IN 7 SIMPLE STEPS
How to Start a Business in 7 Simple Steps

Are you planning to start a business this year? These 7 steps will take you from idea to launch day in no time. Soon, you’ll know how to open your small business like a seasoned entrepreneur.

You have a great business idea that you’re itching to unleash. The only problem is that you’re not sure how to piece it all together. There are so many questions that need answers!

Starting a new company can be daunting, especially if you’ve never done it before. Luckily, there are ways to failure and amplify your shot at success.

These 7 simple steps to start a business will help you last longer, grow faster and make a real impact in your market. It’s the step-by-step blueprint you’ve been waiting for.

**Step 1: Create a Business Plan**

The best place to start is with a business plan. Companies that don’t draft a plan have trouble navigating their way to consistent profit. And that’s what you want!

It’s time to take your winning idea and put it down on paper. As you write, add details that will help it become something tangible and viable for the real world.

These details can be as brief as a one page summary, or they can include deep and insightful market analysis. Consider that 17% of businesses fail because they didn’t have a model to begin with.

Skipping step 1 is a dangerous decision, so it’s better to scale your plan to suit your needs. If you’re pursuing investors then spend more time working on an impressive document. If it’s only for direction, one page will do.

Your plan will tell you what is and isn’t possible. Sometimes it will even tell you that your business idea won’t work, and that’s okay. Success is about constant change – so stay the course.

The first step to creating your business is to have a plan in place.

**Step 2: Make Your Business a Corporation**

The second step tackles the legal side of setting up your company. Choosing the right business entity is a complex process. But there are many benefits that make it worth the challenge.

Incorporating your business before you earn a single dollar is a common plan for a lot of businesses.

Corporations are separate legal entities altogether. This means that it will protect your personal finances if any customers ever get litigious. You will want to keep your business bank account apart from your personal bank accounts, and you may also need a business license.

These 3 things can become the legal infrastructure of your business.
If you want to incorporate, the easiest way is to use a service that assesses your needs and helps you select a business entity that will work for your business model.

Yahoo Small Business Legal Package is an example of one.

Step 2 tells you how you can incorporate your business before you start trading.

**Step 3: Build an Online Business Presence**

You have your business idea, your plan and your legal documents are in order. What’s next? The third step requires you to build a functional online presence for your company.

That means buying a domain name, and setting up your business website. It also includes little details like a professional company logo, a company address, and an email signature.

Being online today is critical to small business sales success. That’s why two-thirds of SMBs have a website. Not only does it make you visible, it helps you reach and convert customers on the internet.

Best of all, there are plenty of services that allow you to build your own website. These drag-and-drop builders don’t need any code, training or expensive upfront costs to run.

Step 3 means you need to get online with a serious business presence.

**Step 4: Choose the Right Accounting Software**

You’ve reached step 4, which deals with how you handle your money. Choose the right accounting software now – and things, like invoicing and paying bills, won’t be a chore.

Some 82% of small businesses fail because of cash flow problems, and this relates to the way that they manage their money, invoice their customers, and keep track of their income.

Anyone can start a business, but few people get their finances right from day 1. You will need to file taxes, understand your expenses, and track your progress as your business grows.

**Examples are:**

- Wave
- Quickbooks
- Freshbooks

Give yourself an immediate competitive edge by introducing reliable accounting software that integrates with your point-of-sale system.

Step 4 says pick the right accounting software for better money management.

**Step 5: Hire an Accountant to Do Your Taxes**

At step 5, you need to find yourself an accountant. Let’s be real – you’re going to be running your business and you don’t have the time or the skills necessary to manage your own taxes.

Too many small business owners end up violating tax laws and this often closes company doors. Find a good tax accountant and adviser, and you’ll never look back.

With a strong business plan, decent accounting software and a competent accountant on your side, the sky’s the limit for your small business.

Step 5 insists that you hire an accountant to do your taxes.
**Step 6: Get Funding from Multiple Sources**

The sixth step is to find funding for your business. Most SMB’s focus on self-funding, or they get friends and family to invest in their venture. But there are other ways to realize your dream.

Business funding using many sources allows you to get the money you need to start strong, with the added benefit of business advice from your investors.

Consider peer-to-peer lending, drumming up venture capital for your big idea, or finding angel investors who can see the value in your product.

However you look at it, investment capital helps you cut start-up risk, maximize profit potential and gives you more avenues for growth in the future.

Consider peer-to-peer lending, drumming up venture capital for your big idea, or finding angel investors who can see the value in your product. You can also take a look at Paypal Working Capital just to see what’s possible.

**Paypal Working Capital**

Step 6 prompts you to find capital investment for your small business.

**Step 7: Promote Your Business by Marketing It**

The final step takes your small business all the way to the top. The last thing you have to do is promote your company far and wide. Get out there and tell the world that you exist!

Marketing your business is one of the biggest challenges new entrepreneurs face. A recent survey suggests that 15.3% of owners do all their own business marketing. Will that be you?

If so, you need to make use of smart tools to maximize your time investment. Listing your company on directories is that much easier when you have a central dashboard for updates and changes.

Take advantage of technology to simplify your marketing processes.

Step 7 urges you to use marketing software for easier online promotions.

With these 7 essential steps, you will take that business idea and transform it into something special. Make sure that you have your legal paperwork, business license and accounting setup in place – and don’t be afraid to pursue investors.

If you need a suite of tools that makes it easy to write a business plan, incorporate your company, build an online presence, accept customer payments and market your business – [Yahoo Business Maker](https://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/resource-center/how-to-start-a-business-in-7-simple-steps/) is for you. It’s an all-in-one suite that helps you launch a business, right away.

Now you can start a business that becomes an enormous success this year.

Be fearless and take the risk. In entrepreneurship, learning happens on the job. You will fail, and you will succeed. Before you know it, you’ll be an established entrepreneur with a thriving small business.

HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN
How To Write A Business Plan

Planning to succeed

No professional sports team goes into a game without a plan. Business is no different.

Here's what a formal, written business plan does for you: Your plan is your North Star. It helps organize ideas, set priorities, and keep your decisions focused on achieving your goals. A well-constructed plan — and we're here to help you with that construction — also makes it easier to manage your business and know you're on track in terms of growing your product or services, your sales, and more.

A clear plan is also extremely useful in helping you get funding and create partnerships.

And finally, the process of writing the plan can clarify your thinking, identify challenges and solutions, and generally raise your chances of success.

Great news: Your plan doesn’t need to be perfect, so you don’t need to get bogged down trying to make it perfect. A business plan is a living document. It will change over time, and that’s completely normal — you’ll test, learn, and improve your plan as you go along. (The competitive business world calls to mind the famous WWI quote, “No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy.”)

The most important thing is to get going. This guide spells out all the elements to include, so you’re ready!

Here are the seven building blocks a business plan should include:

1. A title page, with a good company name.
3. A company description. Who are you?
4. A market analysis. Who is the customer, and the competition?
5. A product or service description. What do you make or do?
6. A marketing and sales plan. How will you find and keep customers?
7. A financial plan, covering the next 18 to 24 months.

Experts say a good plan balances detail and summary. It’s important to provide some specific information, but you can’t be all things to all people, nor plan for every single possibility — and of course you want to spend your energy building the business, not churning out a 500-page document. (In fact, most sources say going beyond 20 to 30 pages suggests a business plan should be further simplified and summarized. That means each of the following sections will be between one and three pages long.)

Let’s dig into each section and identify the details that will make the plan work for you.
1. Title page

What could be simpler than a title page? Well, your simple title page reflects one very crucial aspect of your business: Its name.

Your company name matters. Most experts suggest choosing something clear and direct (Dave’s Lawn Care, The Hot Dog Company, Polished), so customers can easily find you and know what you do.

Yes, there is room for creativity in business, and many successful companies have unusual names. Ultimately you want a name that you love — but it helps if customers love it too. (You can learn more in our companion guide, How to Choose a Business Name.)

2. Executive summary

The executive summary is a short description of who you are, the problem you solve, and why you matter now. It should also include your high-level vision for the company.

A short executive summary highlights key points that are spelled out later in the plan. This paragraph or two will be enough for any reader – a potential customer, a partner, Mom or Dad — to understand what your business does and why people need it.

If you are seeking an investment partner or some form of funding, that will be a primary use of the business plan, so the summary should include the most important relevant numbers from the financial section that you will include later in the document.

The executive summary is also a good place to put a table of contents for the rest of the plan — reflecting the outline above.

You might write a quick first draft of this executive summary, and then revisit and revise it after you’ve completed the more detailed sections that follow.
3. Company description

Who are you, and what do you stand for?

Those are first questions for your company description. Yours may include a full-blown ‘mission statement,’ like Patagonia’s “We’re in business to save our home planet,” but it may be simpler or less ambitious than that. The description lets readers quickly understand why you’re in business.

The company description section of your business plan should also cover:

- How the company is organized. Are you starting a Limited Liability Company (LLC), a sole proprietorship, or some other legal structure? (The web offers convenient definitions of all these terms and their implications for things like taxes and liability. A lawyer can help with advice and filing necessary paperwork.) This section of the plan can also describe how your company will operate on a daily basis.
- The management team, if applicable.
- The company location, and, if applicable, surrounding areas that the business serves.

3. Company value proposition.

The central question of your value proposition is, how you are different than other businesses that are already in your market — in terms of what you offer customers?

Will you offer high-touch service, a new technology, lower prices, exclusive products, a more convenient location?

You will have an opportunity later in the plan for a more comprehensive list of product/service features. This section can be shorter and more focused on the value you will uniquely provide.

4. Market Analysis

The market analysis section identifies and analyzes important factors including:

- Whether there is likely to be an appetite for the specific features/products or competitive differentiation you propose (i.e. the company value proposition you described in the previous section).
- The rough potential size of the demand for your offerings.
- The number and strength of your competitors.

This analysis needs to be supported by solid numbers, not just casual observation! That means market research will be the foundation of this section of your business plan.

Typical market research involves two types:

- Secondary research: Looking at already-published data sources.
- Primary research: Research you conduct, like surveying potential customers.

Secondary research: Let’s start here, because (despite the name) this is a logical first step — secondary research is usually easier and faster to get, and it will help you identify who you want to talk to later, in the primary research phase.

Public data sources provide information such as demographics by geographic location. Paid market research data services may provide additional details.

Again, you will want to capture not only general market data, but also as much useful data as possible about your direct competitors — what are their sales, number of employees or locations, and so on. Online services such as ComScore and Google’s AdWords give insights into competitors’ digital performance, including online traffic.
Depending on your product or service, however, secondary sources probably won’t tell you everything you need to know. 

**Primary research**, on the other hand, allows you to ask potential customers for exactly the data you want, and get as much detail as you need. (The tradeoff, as you would expect, is that this direct customer contact is often more expensive and time-consuming than secondary research.)

Methods for primary research can include:

- One-on-one interviews.
- Surveys and questionnaires.
- Focus groups or panels.

Each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Fortunately, today you will find more options and services for conducting primary research than ever before.

While you can scale your research efforts to match your available budget, a solid business plan is expected to include some primary research, particularly for investment or other partners who want to see potential buyers validating your idea.

### 5. Your product or service description

At last! With the market conditions and demand laid out in the previous section, you have provided context for the reader to understand what comes next. Now you are ready to describe your offering in some detail.

This description will include:

- What you are offering.
- The benefits to the customer.
- Sourcing and fulfillment, if applicable — how you will get the inventory, raw materials, or ingredients that go into your product, and how customers will receive their orders.
- Pricing models — these models can vary even for a single product, depending on how it is being distributed, with different channels taking different costs and markups.

### 6. Marketing and sales plan

Customers don’t just show up as soon as you hang out your shingle — so many entrepreneurs have learned the hard way.

This section of your business plan will spell out your initial and ongoing efforts to build and retain your customer base.

Here are some elements to include in this section:

- Your sales and marketing budget, including
- Dedicated sales personnel or outsourced sales services
- Advertising or direct marketing expenses
- The cost of producing supporting materials such as sales sheets and ‘leave-behinds’
- How you will measure the success of sales and marketing initiatives, versus their cost.
- What marketing support services you plan to utilize.
- Customer retention plans, which might include descriptions of customer service, sales follow-up or service renewal contacts, and more.

### 7. Financials

Potential partners and investors will take great interest in your financial projections, which show how you expect your revenue, costs, and profits to grow over time.
But an even greater benefit is that the financials section of your plan helps you take a clear-eyed look at milestones you want to hit, and then make the decisions needed to get there.

Experts recommend including three years’ worth of projected financial performance in your business plan. Naturally, the first year will provide even more detail, broken out on a quarterly or even monthly basis.

Your business plan should include:

- Income forecasts.
- Capital expense budget projections.
- Cash flow statements.
- Balance sheets.
- Tax planning, including expected quarterly payments.

You can find templates for each of these elements online, and built into web-based or packaged financial software. Many accountants specialize in small-business finance as well, and their services can be very helpful if this not your strong suit.

No one is completely certain about how small business finances will unfold. However, being specific about your expected numbers allows you to recognize when things are off course, and potentially identify the root cause more quickly.

And on the positive side of the ledger, a plan allows you to know how to best invest money that comes in ahead of schedule.

So get started!

A business plan covering all of this ground might feel like a lot of work. Fortunately, each step can help you clarify your ultimate goals, and how to reach them. Your business plan really works for you.

Again, a business plan is a living document — your first draft certainly won’t be your last, and you should expect to update and improve the plan as you launch your business and learn from experience.

https://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/businessmaker/businessplan
WALKING THE LINE OF INNOVATION AND ORDER IN A GROWING STARTUP
GothamCulture is a little too old to still be referring to ourselves as a startup, but even as we have evolved and scaled, the startup spirit remains embedded in the way our team approaches their work every day. We view constant and innovative change as what gives us our competitive edge and unique service offerings.

The problem rapidly growing companies like ours tend to run into is that innovative change can occur in a vacuum. You may get so lost in the task at hand that you don’t think to discuss it with outside team members, and once the task is over, you simply move on to the next, without taking a step back to objectively review it.

If rapidly growing companies don’t share or document their successes, team members are often required to reinvent the wheel when the same obstacle arises on another project.

An effective approach to project management and documentation is critical for these organizations, but how do you sell the value of managing projects in a (somewhat) consistent manner to a group of people who view it as a hindrance to innovation or a burdensome layer of administration? How do you manage the tension between innovation and order?
Here are a few strategies to use to navigate these waters:

1. **Embrace customer collaboration over contract negotiation.** For those familiar with Agile, you’ll recall this from the Agile Manifesto. As an Operations Manager, our frontline staff is my customer. Reframing my approach to process design as collaborative instead of a negotiation makes for a much better outcome and a much more positive work environment. Work with your frontline staff to understand how operational processes impact their daily lives, and inform them of the value the project management process brings to the business if properly instituted.

2. **Open brainstorming discussions to teams and departments outside of your project team or your regular “go-to” people.** Every time we do this, we leave with a great idea. An issue many organizations face is that by sticking to their project teams, they develop “skillset tunnel vision”, and don’t properly leverage the resources at their disposal (i.e., you forget that the Stats guy is also an Executive Coach). Institute “Lunch and Learns” or other opportunities for staff to share lessons learned. It helps build your team and improves the way you resource your future projects.

3. **Communicate early and often!** It sounds so simple, but it never is. If you’re going to do Lunch and Learns, or Book Clubs, or any opportunity to get to know and learn from your staff, don’t just do it once a quarter. The sell should be easy: it’s a chance to break from your tactical work, collaborate with others, and get yourself back into a strategic headspace.

At the core of these tips is reinforcing to staff that interaction is key, and pausing to reflect strategically is critical to sustainable growth. If you can communicate these core concepts to staff effectively, carving out time to do both should come easily.

Our solutions

What does Yahoo Small Business do?

Yahoo Small Business empowers business owners to launch and scale their ideas online. From creating a website to promoting a brand, our products help entrepreneurs succeed.

The tools offered by Yahoo Small Business include:

**Websites**: An easy-to-use, drag-and-drop website building tool. Choose from 150+ themes, customize, and publish in just minutes.

**Ecommerce**: Online stores that come with shipping integration, inventory management, credit card processing, live insights, and apps to help your business grow.

**Domains**: Choose from a huge selection of domain extensions with the industry’s most competitive prices.

**Web Hosting**: We can host your website on our own servers. Our hosting system also comes with site building tools.

**Wordpress Hosting**: Take control of your business listings on 70+ local directories from a single dashboard and be discovered by potential customers near you.

**Business Mail**: Increase your credibility with business email that uses your domain name.

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**Website Design**

Professional designers and writers are waiting to build your site. Get a team that designs, builds, and manages a website that grows your business.

**Business Maker**

Business Maker takes the guesswork out of starting your own company. Handle every part of your business from one easy-to-use dashboard.

**Localworks**

Localworks puts you in control of your business across 70+ online local listings. Being found has never been so easy.

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**What’s next**

let’s talk about the Resource Center

With well over 20,000 articles, videos, webinars, tools, news, and much more our resource center is a one-stop-shop for SMB information

[Find out more](#)