



Fill in the Blank Business Plan

How to use this document

A Business Plan helps you evaluate the feasibility of a new business idea in an objective, critical, and unemotional way. The process of developing your business plan will help you outline your goals and the methods by which you plan to reach them.

Use this document as a starting tool to begin determining these various aspects of your business.

1. Read through each section of this outline.
2. In the spaces provided, begin documenting information or answers to questions posed.
3. If you're unsure of an answer or detail in a certain section, leave it blank for now.
4. Visit our [website](#), select the most convenient location, and register for initial appointment.

Our certified business advisors will review what you've documented so far and work with you to determine answers for any areas that you hadn't yet completed. And, in addition to business plan assistance, our network offers many more [services](#) to help you.

A reminder that as a U.S. Small Business Administration program, our SBDC services are provided at no-cost and they are confidential, personalized and in-depth. Congrats on your plan to start or grow your business. We look forward to helping you succeed!

Why Write a Business Plan?

A business plan is an important tool for any entrepreneur to judge the effectiveness of what you have been doing. Your business plan can also be a useful tool to help you raise capital for your business venture. Lenders like to lend money to businesses they think will be able to make it. Your job is to convince them that your business is going to be successful.

It provides an operating plan to assist you in running the business and improves your probability of success. It communicates your idea to others, serves as a "selling tool," and provides the basis for your financing proposal.

If you won't use the plan to raise money, your plan will be internal and may be less formal. If you are presenting it to outsiders as a financing proposal, presentation quality and thorough financial analysis are very important.

Ten Ways to Ruin Your Business Plan

These errors in business plan preparation and presentation will undermine the credibility of the plan and hurt your chances to receive funding:

1. Submitting a “rough copy,” (with coffee stains and typos) tells the reader that management doesn’t take the planning process seriously.
2. Outdated historical financial information or unrealistic industry comparisons will leave doubts about the entrepreneur’s planning abilities.
3. Unsubstantiated assumptions can hurt a business plan; the business owner must be prepared to explain the “why” of every point in the plan.
4. Too much “blue sky” - a failure to consider prospective pitfalls - will lead the reader to conclude that the idea is not realistic.
5. A lack of understanding of financial information. Even if someone else prepares the projections, the owner must be able to explain them.
6. Lack of specific, detailed strategies. A plan that includes only general statements of strategy (“We will provide world class service and the lowest possible price.”) without important details will be dismissed as fluff.

Especially important if the business plan is prepared for a lender:

7. No indication that the owner has anything at stake. The lender expects the entrepreneur to have some equity capital invested in the business.
8. Unwillingness to personally guarantee any loans. If the business owner isn’t willing to stand behind his or her company, then why should the bank?
9. Starting the plan with unrealistic loan amounts or terms. Do your homework and propose a realistic structure.
10. Too much focus on collateral. Even for a cash-secured loan, the banker is looking toward projected profits for repayment of the loan. Cash flow should be emphasized as the source of repayment.

Section One: The Business

Executive Summary

- 1. My company name will be: _____
- 2. My business purpose is: _____

- 3. I plan to organize my company as (Corporation, Partnership, LLC, Other) _____

- 4. I have been in business since or plan on starting on: _____
- 5. Manager(s) for the company will be _____

- 6. My experience as an owner is: _____

Notes:

Products & Services

1. The products or services I sell are: _____

2. The features and benefits of what I'm selling are: _____

3. My products/services differ from my competition by: _____

4. What makes my product/services unique and desirable is: _____

5. Customers will buy from me because: _____

Notes:

The Industry, Competition & Market

1. I consider my competition to be: _____

2. How I will measure against the competition: _____

3. My local competitors are: _____

4. My national competitors are: _____

5. Some of the trends I see in my industry are: _____

6. Some potential areas I see for growth are: _____

7. My typical customers have these characteristics in common: _____

8. These segments of customers are under-served by competition: _____

Notes:

Marketing Plan

Marketing should address the four P's – Product, Price, Placement, and Promotion

1. My product or service is: _____

2. My pricing strategy is (For example: premium, every day, low price, frequent sales):

3. The places I will sell my product or service are: _____

4. I will promote my product or service by: _____

5. My competitive advantage is: _____

6. I can add value or compete on the following non-price issues: _____

7. I will distribute my product or service by: _____

8. My use of advertising will consist of: _____

9. I will get feedback from my customers by: _____

Notes:

Operating Plan

1. The location of my business is: _____

2. My hours of operation will be: _____

3. This is a good location for my business because: _____

4. I will be involved with the business by completing the following duties: _____

5. The equipment/furniture/fixtures I need for my business would include: _____

6. If I need to hire new employees, I will need to hire for these new positions: _____

7. I will provide the following benefits to my employees: _____

8. I will recruit my employees by or from: _____

9. My suppliers and vendors are: _____

10. My cybersecurity and information management plans are: _____

11. Changes I'm considering for the business (if purchasing an existing business): _____

Notes:

Management & Ownership

1. The owners of my company are: _____
2. I have included resumes for the following key management personnel: _____

3. My attorney is: _____
4. My accountant is: _____
5. Other professionals that I will use are (accountant, banker, insurance agent, engineer, consultant, etc.): _____

SWOT Analysis

6. The strengths of my business are (internal characteristics): _____

7. The weaknesses of my business are (internal characteristics): _____

8. I see the following opportunities for my business (external characteristics): _____

9. I see the following threats/challenges for my business (external characteristics): _____

Notes:

Financials

1. The total investment required is: _____
2. The collateral I can use for financing includes: _____

3. My credit history is: _____

4. My credit score is: _____
5. If I am short on money for my project, I can get more from: _____

6. My bank is, or the banks I would like to work with are: _____

Notes:

Every company has different start-up costs depending on their business model. This section of the document intends to guide you through the costs associated with your start-up. Not everything will apply to your business model. Fill in what is relevant and all can be discussed at your appointment.

If you are building a new property, you will have:

Land: _____

Building: _____

Signage: _____

If you are purchasing existing property, you may have:

Building: _____

Renovations: _____

Signage: _____

If you are renting, you may have:

Renovations: _____

Signage: _____

In all cases, the following may be part of your start-up expenses:

Equipment (business): _____

Equipment (office): _____

Furniture: _____

Fixtures (storage shelves, displays, etc.): _____

Initial inventory: _____

Costs to organize: _____

- Registration with the ND Secretary of State
- Business formation (consultant and attorney if needed)
- Marketing
 - Logo Development
 - Website
 - Business cards and other print materials
 - Initial marketing campaign

Training (do you need training for staff prior to opening? If so, lists costs associated with training:

You will need ongoing operating expenses for your business. Think through the following and provide information where you can. Bring your notes and calculations to your first meeting.

Revenues: _____

Products or services being sold: _____

How many are you selling per day/week/month? _____

What is the average cost of the product/service you are selling? _____

Cost of Goods Sold – if you are reselling and have inventory, that is typically your cost of goods sold. Bring to your appointment any information you have on what the product will cost you and what you will then sell it for. COGS notes: _____

Expenses: _____

Employee wages (We recommend you determine a schedule and list positions with hours worked and rate of pay for each as supporting documentation): _____

Supplies: _____

Maintenance (building, equipment, vehicles): _____

Advertising: _____

Car/Travel: _____

Accounting/Legal: _____

Rent or lease: _____

Real estate taxes: _____

Phone/internet: _____

Utilities – Gas: _____

Electricity: _____

Water: _____

Garbage: _____

Other: _____

Insurance – Professional liability: _____

Automobile (if applicable): _____

Building contents: _____

Key Man (if applicable): _____

Disability or health (if applicable): _____