



Starting a Business: The Great Big Checklist of Everything

This checklist breaks down everything you *must* and *should* do when starting a business.

Mandatory tasks are required under the law in order to operate a valid and compliant business.

Recommended tasks, although not strictly required under the law, are tasks that should be undertaken in order to grow and protect a new business.

Ideation & Protecting Ideas

Mandatory

- Pick a company name and check any potential trademark infringements on [Trademarkia](#) or [KnowEm](#)
- Determine whether your business name needs to be trademarked, and if does [Trademark](#) it at the [USPTO](#)
- Protect your [written works](#) and code through [the Copyright Office](#)
- If you are inventing or creating a product, understand [patents](#) and register for one at the [USPTO](#)

Recommended

- Vet your idea with the [idea checklist](#)
- Protect your ideas when sharing them with others by

- using an [NDA](#)
- Search your state's corporation and LLC name registration database to ensure your business name has not been taken
- Check [Google](#), [Yellow Pages](#), and local directories to ensure your business name is not taken
- Learn how to select a [good business name](#)

Forming Your Entity

- **Mandatory**

- Pick a structure ([Sole Proprietorship](#), [Corporation](#), [S-Corp](#), [LLC](#), [Partnership](#), [LP](#), [LLP](#), [Non-Profit](#)) and ensure that you comply with business [formation requirements](#)
- Creating a corporation? File [Articles of Incorporation](#) and [Bylaws](#) with the Secretary of State's Office
- Forming an LLC? File the [Articles of Organization](#) and an [Operating Agreement](#) with the Secretary of State's Office
- Get the necessary [licenses and permits](#) to operate legally
- Apply for an [Employer Identification Number](#) (EIN)
- If you are incorporating, appoint a [Board of Directors](#)
- For a corporation and LCC, you must [register a service agent](#)

- **Recommended**

- Going into a Partnership? Create a [Partnership Agreement](#)
- Check your [state government's website](#) for other state-specific registration, taxation and employment rules
- Get your [DBA](#) (Doing Business As) which allows a business to operate under a fictitious name (this is

required for sole proprietorships that want to operate under any name other than the name of the business owner)

- Open your [company bank account](#)

Identity / Branding

Recommended

- Design a logo ([99designs](#))
- Search for and register a unique online domain name ([GoDaddy](#), [1and1](#), [Register](#))
- Create your website ([Wordpress](#), [Intuit](#), [Weebly](#), [Wix](#), [SiteKreator](#))
- Ensure your business name is available on a wide variety of social networking websites in order to develop consistent branding ([KnowEm](#))
- Create and manage your [social media](#) presence
- Get business cards and other physical collateral ([Vistaprint](#))
- List your business online with [MerchantCircle](#), [Manta](#), [Yelp](#) and [DandB.com](#)

Financing and Business Planning

Recommended

- [Prepare for](#) and create a [Business Plan](#) ([if you need one](#))
- Find sources of capital (friends & family, [business bank loans](#), [angel investment](#), [venture capital](#))
- If seeking investors, create a [business pitch deck](#)
- For those issuing stock to finance the company (corporations), use a [Shareholder's Agreement](#)

Operations

Mandatory

- Find a retail space, set up a [home-based office](#) or find an office space on [LoopNet](#), [OfficeFinder](#), or [ShowCase](#)
- Choose a broker to help find an adequate business space on [TheBrokerList](#)
- For corporation, keep record of [Meeting Minutes](#)

Recommended

- Set up an online phone system ([Google Voice](#), [Ring Central](#), [Onebox](#)) or set up a traditional land line ([AT&T](#), [Verizon](#))
- Set up your computer and network
- Pick an internal email system ([Gmail](#), [Outlook](#))
- Choose an email system to connect with customers ([MailChimp](#), [Constant Contact](#), [Sendgrid](#))
- Set up a collaboration method for business documents, spreadsheets and presentations ([GoogleApps](#))

Financial Planning & Accounting

Mandatory

- Choose a [tax year](#)
- Determine which type of federal [business taxes](#) you will be responsible for
- Determine [state tax](#) obligations
- Create and maintain the top 3 financial statements: [income statement](#), [balance sheet](#) and [cash flows](#) on at least a quarterly basis

Recommended

Set up an accounting system ([Quickbooks](#))

Find the [right accountant](#)

Set a [budget](#) for the coming year

Create a [sales forecasts](#) and [financial projections](#) regularly

Get a business [credit card](#) and

Register with [Dun & Bradstreet](#) to build business credit and obtain a [D-U-N-S Number](#) to accurately gauge and share your creditworthiness

If a corporation, decide whether to elect [S Corporation tax status](#)

Business Mentors

Recommended

- Speak to entrepreneurs and leaders in your industry, consider asking them to be your mentor
- Ask mentors to join your [Board of Advisors](#) (for the [overall benefit](#) of the company)

Building a Team

Mandatory

- Determine the company founders and leadership ([partnership](#), owners, CEO, etc.)
- Clarify who gets [equity](#), and how much
- Conduct [job interviews](#)—look out for [red flags](#)

Recommended

- Find team members through personal connections,

- recruiters or job boards ([Ziprecruiter](#), [Craigslist](#), [Monster](#), [Indeed](#), [SimplyHired](#))
- Run a [background check](#) on new hires
 - For one-off or task based activities, use [AmazonTurk](#) or [Odesk](#)

Human Resources

Mandatory

- Make sure workers are properly classified ([employee](#), [independent contractor](#), [part-time employee](#), intern, etc.)
- Have employees fill out [Form I-9](#) and [Form W-4](#)
- Familiarize yourself with the [Department of Labor laws](#) and regulations regarding employment
- Put up the necessary [labor law posters](#) to meet federal and state requirements
- Familiarize yourself with [federal discrimination laws](#) and heed them
- [Terminate employees](#) properly to avoid discrimination claims

Recommended

- Create [job descriptions](#)
- Understand the definition of an ["At Will" employee](#)
- Have workers sign the proper [Employment Agreement](#)
- Protect the inventions employees create for you with an Employee [Non-Compete and Confidentiality Agreement](#)
- Give all new employees an [Employee Handbook](#)
- Lay out the [employee benefits](#) you will provide (paid leave and holidays, health insurance, bonuses)
- Choose a payroll service ([ADP](#), [Trinet](#), [Paychex](#))

- Set up a system for [employee discipline](#)

Sales

Recommended

- Determine a [pricing system](#) for your product(s)
- Execute the [5 Step Sales Process](#)
- Learn the [art of persuasion](#)
- [Hire](#) and [train](#) salespeople
- Use a sales management service (one that fits your business size, from [smaller](#) to [larger](#) companies)
- Pick a [Customer Relationships Management System](#) (CRM)
- Make a [Customer Service Plan](#) to standardize procedures for complaints and refunds
- Track which products perform better, and which have the best margins
- Decide on possible discounts, specials and coupons to attract new customers
- List your products on [online marketplaces](#)

Marketing & PR

Recommended

- Plan your [marketing strategy](#)
- Decide on a target market and conduct a market analysis
- Determine your [Key Performance Indicators](#)
- [Get free online traffic](#)
- [Improve SEO](#)
- Get paid online ads, such as [Google AdWords](#) and [Facebook Advertising](#)
- Master [social media marketing](#)

- Look into relevant [trade shows](#) and conventions to market your product
- Print [flyers](#), brochures or catalogs
- Leverage current customers with [email marketing](#)
- Decide if you want to hire a [PR Agency](#)
- [Go mobile](#) and consider [app development](#)
- Reach out to relevant newspapers and press

Insurance

Mandatory

- Decide which [types of business insurance](#) you need.
 - Common: [workers' compensation](#), [unemployment](#) and [disability insurance](#)
 - Others: [property](#), [liability](#) or [business overhead insurance](#)

Recommended

- Check any potential insurance providers [here](#)

Legal

Recommended

- [Find an attorney](#) you trust
- Use [waivers](#) and [contracts](#) to prevent litigation
- Prepare for [when your company is sued](#)

Checklist for Your Specific Business

Service-Based Businesses

Mandatory

- Determine the [price](#) of your services

Recommended

- Don't forget to clarify the deliverable, deadline and cost in your [service agreement](#)

Retail/Brick and Mortar Businesses

Mandatory

- Check [zoning laws](#)
- Secure a [lease](#)
- Decide on days and hours of operation
- Determine staffing needs (for prime hours, slower times, closing an inventory)
- Secure the correct [permits and licenses](#) for your city and state
- Set up lighting and utilities
- Acquire furniture, register, racks, tables and wall displays, a register, etc.
- Get a state-specific Seller's Permit or Resale Permit to properly collect sales tax

Recommended

- [Choose a location](#) with good foot traffic, size and appearance
- Speak with a commercial realtor to get an idea of what to look for and what to expect
- Establish agreements with your [manufacturer](#), distributor

- or wholesale supplier
- Set up inventory tracking (understand a [Stock Keeping Unit](#))
 - Set up your [Yelp page](#)

Online Business

Mandatory

- Purchase computers
- [Find images](#) for your website
- Set up your e-commerce or online store ([Shopify](#), [FlyingCart](#), [Goodsie](#))
- Choose a shipping or delivery system ([FedEx](#), [UPS](#), [USPS](#))
- Set up a system for payment processing ([PayPal](#), [Google Checkout](#))

Recommended

- Track and improve traffic [through Google Analytics](#)
- Determine storage options, such as [cloud computing](#) ([Box](#), [DropBox](#))
- Set up a system for IT bugs and tickets ([Jira](#))
- If outsourced development is needed, use [Guru](#) or [Elance](#)