

Guide to starting a business in...

# Downtown Monroe



## Step 1

### Create a business plan.

For any business, the first step is to turn your basic idea into a written, viable plan of action. A well-thought-out business plan is necessary for obtaining loans and is a model for your success.

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Read More:

[Overview to the Development of a Business Plan](#)

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## Step 2

### Decide on your business structure and register your business name.

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Read More:

[Business Structure](#)

[Additional Business Forms](#)

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## Step 3

### Get license requirements

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Read More:  
[Local Permits, license, and zoning contacts](#)

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## Step 4

### Obtain the necessary tax information.

Taxation for small businesses may be simple or complex, depending on the size and structure of your business. The tax liability for each business will be different. Consult your attorney and accountant regarding comprehensive tax planning.

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Read More:  
[Business Tax Information](#)

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## Step 5

### Identify sources of financing.

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Read More:  
[The 12 Best Sources of Business Financing](#)  
[Sources of Financing Small Businesses](#)

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## Step 6

### Learn about employer reporting requirements and responsibilities.

Learn more about how to register as an employer, unemployment insurance and worker's compensation insurance.

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Read More:

[Employer Requirements](#)

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## Overview to the Development of a Business Plan

A business plan is more than a means to an end. Most likely the reason you are reading this is that you need a business plan to obtain capital for your business and that you are either pursuing equity participation or are applying for a loan. If this is the case, then a business plan will be both essential and critical for your endeavor. If financial support is the only reason you are preparing a business plan, then you are making a grave mistake.

Most business start-ups fail within three years. They fail for two reasons. The first is that the business has insufficient capital to operate until cash flow can pay expenses and generate an operating profit. The second is due to poor management. A business plan is the first line of defense to make sure that your business does not succumb due to these two reasons. A good business plan is a road map, showing where your business is going, how it proposes to get there, and the resources needed for the journey. As such it can also alert you if the business begins to run off-course, allowing you ample time to take appropriate action. Finally, you also need to understand how your business will be evaluated and judged as a business especially when you need services or access to capital.

The purpose of this handbook is to act as a self-directing guide to enable you to properly and correctly develop your own business plan. The SBCN hopes that this guide will be of assistance to you in completing your plan and securing the capital for your business.

## The Cover Sheet

The cover sheet is the first page of the proposal. It identifies the:

- Name, address and telephone number of the business
- Name, address and telephone number of the owners
- Date of the proposal or loan request
- Identifies who prepared the plan, if not the own

## Executive Summary

Write this section last.

It is suggested that you make it two pages or fewer.

Include everything that you would cover in a five-minute interview.

Explain the fundamentals of the proposed business: What will your product be? Who will your customers be? Who are the owners? What do you think the future holds for your business and your industry?

Make it enthusiastic, professional, complete, and concise.

If applying for a loan, state clearly how much you want, precisely how you are going to use it, and how the money will make your business more profitable, thereby ensuring repayment.

The *Executive Summary* explains the purpose of this proposal. It should include a very brief summary of the business as an introduction. Then it should include the basic points of the financing proposal. This section is frequently written last and can be modified for different presentations. The Statement is sometimes called an *Executive Summary* and should include:

1. What is the business? What are its objectives?
2. How is the business structured or organized (single proprietor, partnership, corporation, limited liability company)?
3. Who are the principals involved in the business?
4. Why will the venture be successful?
5. What is the total amount of funding needed to implement the plans?
6. How will the funds benefit the business?
7. How much of the funds are being requested from this funding source? At what terms (interest, payment rate, time)? What is the 'deal' offered?
8. Why does the loan or investment make sense?

9. What are the critical risks and assumptions for this venture? What strategies are planned to overcome these risks?

## General Company Description

What business will you be in? What will you do?

**Mission Statement:** Many companies have a brief mission statement, usually in 30 words or fewer, explaining their reason for being and their guiding principles. If you want to draft a mission statement, this is a good place to put it in the plan, followed by:

**Company Goals and Objectives:** Goals are destinations—where you want your business to be. Objectives are progress markers along the way to goal achievement. For example, a goal might be to have a healthy, successful company that is a leader in customer service and that has a loyal customer following. Objectives might be annual sales targets and some specific measures of customer satisfaction.

**Business Philosophy:** What is important to you in business?

To whom will you market your products? (State it briefly here—you will do a more thorough explanation in the *Marketing Plan* section).

Describe your industry. Is it a growth industry? What changes do you foresee in the industry, short term and long term? How will your company be poised to take advantage of them?

Describe your most important company strengths and core competencies. What factors will make the company succeed? What do you think your major competitive strengths will be? What background experience, skills, and strengths do you personally bring to this new venture?

The *Description of the Business* should enable a reader to become familiar with the business including gaining a detailed understanding of the product and/or service that will be provided. Remember to explain what the product and/or service does for customers, as all successful businesses are customer-driven.

The goals and objectives of the business should be indicated and, if an existing business, a summary of the history of the business should be included. Some of the key questions that need to be addressed are:

1. What type of business is this (retail, wholesale, service, or manufacturing)?
2. Is the business a start-up, an expansion of an existing business, or the take-over (acquisition) of an existing business?

3. What is the business's legal structure (proprietorship, partnership, or corporation)? Why have you selected this form? Summarize the ownership of the business, and any previous capitalization (share outstanding, management's investment of cash/property?)
4. When did (will) the business open? What is the schedule of operation? (Hours the store is open, days of the week, production schedule, and special seasonal considerations.)
5. Describe materials and supply sources, methods of production, merchandising strategy or how orders are received.
6. What will be special/unique about your business?

**For a new business or new business owners:**

What experience do you have in this industry?

What do you know about the business, and what is the source of your knowledge?

**In a take-over situation, additional questions must be answered:**

Why are the owners selling the business?

How was the purchase price established?

What has been the sales trend? How can you make sales more profitable?

## Products and Services

Describe in depth your products or services (technical specifications, drawings, photos, sales brochures, and other bulky items belong in *Appendices*).

What factors will give you competitive advantages or disadvantages? Examples include level of quality or unique or proprietary features.

What are the pricing, fee, or leasing structures of your products or services?

## Marketing Plan

### Market research - Why?

No matter how good your product and your service, the venture cannot succeed without effective marketing. And this begins with careful, systematic research. It is very dangerous to assume that you already know about your intended market. You need to do market research to make sure you're on track. Use the business planning process as your opportunity to uncover data and to question your marketing efforts. Your time will be well spent.

### Market research - How?

There are two kinds of market research: primary and secondary.

Secondary research means using published information such as industry profiles, trade journals, newspapers, magazines, census data, and demographic profiles. This type of information is available in public libraries, industry associations, chambers of commerce, from vendors who sell to your industry, and from government agencies.

Start with your local library. Most librarians are pleased to guide you through their business data collection. You will be amazed at what is there. There are more online sources than you could possibly use. Your chamber of commerce has good information on the local area. Trade associations and trade publications often have excellent industry-specific data.

Primary research means gathering your own data. For example, you could do your own traffic count at a proposed location, use the yellow pages to identify competitors, and do surveys or focus-group interviews to learn about consumer preferences. Professional market research can be very costly, but there are many books that show small business owners how to do effective research themselves.

In your marketing plan, be as specific as possible; give statistics, numbers, and sources. The marketing plan will be the basis, later on, of the all-important sales projection.

### Economics

Facts about your industry:

- What is the total size of your market?
- What percent share of the market will you have? (This is important only if you think you will be a major factor in the market.)
- Current demand in target market.

- Trends in target market—growth trends, trends in consumer preferences, and trends in product development.
- Growth potential and opportunity for a business of your size.
- What barriers to entry do you face in entering this market with your new company? Some typical barriers are:
  - High capital costs
  - High production costs
  - High marketing costs
  - Consumer acceptance and brand recognition
  - Training and skills
  - Unique technology and patents
  - Unions
  - Shipping costs
  - Tariff barriers and quotas
- And of course, how will you overcome the barriers?
- How could the following affect your company?
  - Change in technology
  - Change in government regulations
  - Change in the economy
  - Change in your industry

## Product

In the *Products and Services* section, you described your products and services as you see them. Now describe them from your customers' point of view.

## Features and Benefits

List all of your major products or services.

For each product or service:

- Describe the most important features. What is special about it?
- Describe the benefits. That is, what will the product do for the customer?

Note the difference between features and benefits, and think about them. For example, a house that gives shelter and lasts a long time is made with certain materials and to a certain design; those are its features. Its benefits include pride of ownership, financial security, providing for the family, and inclusion in a neighborhood. You build features into your product so that you can sell the benefits.

What after-sale services will you give? Some examples are delivery, warranty, service contracts, support, follow-up, and refund policy.

## **Customers**

Identify your targeted customers, their characteristics, and their geographic locations, otherwise known as their demographics.

The description will be completely different depending on whether you plan to sell to other businesses or directly to consumers. If you sell a consumer product, but sell it through a channel of distributors, wholesalers, and retailers, you must carefully analyze both the end consumer and the middleman businesses to which you sell.

You may have more than one customer group. Identify the most important groups. Then, for each customer group, construct what is called a demographic profile:

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Income level
- Social class and occupation
- Education
- Other (specific to your industry)
- Other (specific to your industry)

For business customers, the demographic factors might be:

- Industry (or portion of an industry)
- Location
- Size of firm
- Quality, technology, and price preferences
- Other (specific to your industry)
- Other (specific to your industry)

## **Competition**

What products and companies will compete with you?

List your major competitors:  
(Names and addresses)

Will they compete with you across the board, or just for certain products, certain customers, or in certain locations?

Will you have important indirect competitors? (For example, video rental stores compete with theaters, although they are different types of businesses.)

How will your products or services compare with the competition?

Use the Competitive Analysis table below to compare your company with your two most important competitors. In the first column are key competitive factors. Since these vary from one industry to another, you may want to customize the list of factors.

In the column labeled **Me**, state how you honestly think you will stack up in customers' minds. Then check whether you think this factor will be a strength or a weakness for you. Sometimes it is hard to analyze our own weaknesses. Try to be very honest here. Better yet, get some disinterested strangers to assess you. This can be a real eye- opener. And remember that you cannot be all things to all people. In fact, trying to be causes many business failures because efforts become scattered and diluted. You want an honest assessment of your firm's strong and weakpoints.

Now analyze each major competitor. In a few words, state how you think they compare.

In the final column, estimate the importance of each competitive factor to the customer. 1 = critical; 5 = not very important.

**Table 1: Competitive Analysis**

Factor	Me	Strength	Weakness	Competitor A	Competitor B	Importance to Customer
Products						
Price						
Quality						
Selection						
Service						
Reliability						
Stability						
Expertise						
Company Reputation						
Location						
Appearance						

Factor	Me	Strength	Weakness	Competitor A	Competitor B	Importance to Customer
Sales Method						
Credit Policies						
Advertising						
Image						

Now, write a short paragraph stating your competitive advantages and disadvantages.

Competition should be recognized and analyzed to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how this may affect your share of the market. Most small businesses will not create additional demand for a particular good or service. They obtain sales by attracting customers from existing businesses in the same market. Be honest in your analysis and do not neglect consideration of indirect competition or alternative uses of the customers' limited dollars. You should clarify your reasons for believing that potential customers will choose to spend their money at your business instead of elsewhere.

Some key questions that should be asked are:

1. Who are the five closest competitors? Where are they located in relation to you? Are there any potential new competitors?
2. How is their business? Steady? Increasing? Decreasing?
3. What are their strengths, weaknesses, and resources? How do you compare to them on these same factors?
4. How will competitors react to your entry?
5. What have you learned from their operation?

## Niche

Now that you have systematically analyzed your industry, your product, your customers, and the competition, you should have a clear picture of where your company fits into the world.

In one short paragraph, define your niche, your unique corner of the market.

## **Strategy**

Now outline a marketing strategy that is consistent with your niche.

## **Promotion**

1. How will you get the word out to customers?
2. Advertising: What media, why, and how often? Why this mix and not some other?
3. Have you identified low-cost methods to get the most out of your promotional budget?
4. Will you use methods other than paid advertising, such as trade shows, catalogs, dealer incentives, word of mouth (how will you stimulate it?), and network of friends or professionals?
5. What image do you want to project? How do you want customers to see you?
6. In addition to advertising, what plans do you have for graphic image support? This includes things like logo design, cards and letterhead, brochures, signage, and interior design (if customers come to your place of business).
7. Should you have a system to identify repeat customers and then systematically contact them?

## **Promotional Budget**

1. How much will you spend on the items listed above?
2. Before startup? (These numbers will go into your startup budget.)
3. Ongoing? (These numbers will go into your operating plan budget.)

## **Pricing**

1. Explain your method or methods of setting prices. For most small businesses, having the lowest price is not a good policy. It robs you of needed profit margin; customers may not care as much about price as you think; and large competitors can under price you anyway. Usually you will do better to have average prices and compete on quality and service.
2. Does your pricing strategy fit with what was revealed in your competitive analysis?
3. Compare your prices with those of the competition. Are they higher, lower, the same? Why?

4. How important is price as a competitive factor? Do your intended customers really make their purchase decisions mostly on price?
5. What will be your customer service and credit policies?

## **Proposed Location**

Probably you do not have a precise location picked out yet. This is the time to think about what you want and need in a location. Many startups run successfully from home for a while.

You will describe your physical needs later, in the *Operational Plan* section. Here, analyze your location criteria as they will affect your customers.

1. Is your location important to your customers? If yes, how?
2. If customers come to your place of business:
3. Is it convenient? Parking? Interior spaces? Not out of the way?
4. Is it consistent with your image?
5. Is it what customers want and expect?
6. Where is the competition located? Is it better for you to be near them (like car dealers or fast food restaurants) or distant (like convenience foodstores)?

## **Distribution Channels**

1. How do you sell your products or services?
2. Retail
3. Direct (mail order, Web, catalog)
4. Wholesale
5. Your own sales force
6. Agents
7. Independent representatives
8. Bid on contracts

## Operational Plan

Explain the daily operation of the business, its location, equipment, people, processes, and surrounding environment.

### Production

1. How and where are your products or services produced?

Explain your methods of:

- Production techniques and costs
- Quality control
- Customer service
- Inventory control
- Product development

### Location

1. What qualities do you need in a location? Describe the type of location you'll have.

Physical requirements:

- Amount of space
- Type of building
- Zoning
- Power and other utilities

2. Access:

3. Is it important that your location be convenient to transportation or to suppliers?

4. Do you need easy walk-in access?

5. What are your requirements for parking and proximity to freeway, airports, railroads, and shipping centers?

6. Include a drawing or layout of your proposed facility if it is important, as it might be for a manufacturer.

7. Construction? Most new companies should not sink capital into construction, but if you are planning to build, costs and specifications will be a big part of your plan.

8. Cost: Estimate your occupation expenses, including rent, but also including maintenance, utilities, insurance, and initial remodeling costs to make the space suit your needs. These numbers will become part of your financial plan.

9. What will be your business hours?

### **Legal Environment**

Describe the following:

- Licensing and bonding requirements
- Permits
- Health, workplace, or environmental regulations
- Special regulations covering your industry or profession
- Zoning or building code requirements
- Insurance coverage
- Trademarks, copyrights, or patents (pending, existing, or purchased)

### **Personnel**

- Number of employees
- Type of labor (skilled, unskilled, and professional)
- Where and how will you find the right employees?
- Quality of existing staff
- Pay structure
- Training methods and requirements
- Who does which tasks?
- Do you have schedules and written procedures prepared?
- Have you drafted job descriptions for employees? If not, take time to write some. They really help internal communications with employees.
- For certain functions, will you use contract workers in addition to employees?

### **Inventory**

- What kind of inventory will you keep: raw materials, supplies, finished goods?
- Average value in stock (i.e., what is your inventory investment)?
- Rate of turnover and how this compares to the industry averages?
- Seasonal buildups?
- Lead-time for ordering?

### **Suppliers**

Identify key suppliers:

- Names and addresses
- Type and amount of inventory furnished
- Credit and delivery policies
- History and reliability

1. Should you have more than one supplier for critical items (as a backup)?
2. Do you expect shortages or short-term delivery problems?
3. Are supply costs steady or fluctuating? If fluctuating, how would you deal with changing costs?

## Credit Policies

- Do you plan to sell on credit?
- Do you really need to sell on credit? Is it customary in your industry and expected by your clientele?
- If yes, what policies will you have about who gets credit and how much?
- How will you check the creditworthiness of new applicants?
- What terms will you offer your customers; that is, how much credit and when is payment due?
- Will you offer prompt payment discounts? (Hint: Do this only if it is usual and customary in your industry.)
- Do you know what it will cost you to extend credit? Have you built the costs into your prices?

## Managing Your Accounts Receivable

If you do extend credit, you should do an aging at least monthly to track how much of your money is tied up in credit given to customers and to alert you to slow payment problems. A receivables aging looks like the following table:

	Total	Current	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	Over 90 Days
Accounts Receivable Aging						

You will need a policy for dealing with slow-paying customers:

- When do you make a phone call?
- When do you send a letter?
- When do you get your attorney to threaten?

## Managing Your Accounts Payable

You should also age your accounts payable, what you owe to your suppliers. This helps you plan whom to pay and when. Paying too early depletes your cash, but paying late can cost you valuable discounts and can damage your credit. (Hint: If you know you will be late making a payment, call the creditor before the due date.)

Do your proposed vendors offer prompt payment discounts?

A payables aging looks like the following table.

	Total	Current	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	Over 90 Days
<b>Accounts Payable Aging</b>						

## Management and Organization

Who will manage the business on a day-to-day basis? What experience does that person bring to the business? What special or distinctive competencies? Is there a plan for continuation of the business if this person is lost or incapacitated?

If you'll have more than 10 employees, create an organizational chart showing the management hierarchy and who is responsible for key functions.

Include position descriptions for key employees. If you are seeking loans or investors, include resumes of owners and key employees.

## Professional and Advisory Support

List the following:

- Board of directors
- Management advisory board
- Attorney
- Accountant
- Insurance agent
- Banker
- Bookkeeper
- Consultant or consultants
- Mentors and key advisors

## Personal Financial Statement

Include personal financial statements for each owner and major stockholder, showing assets and liabilities held outside the business and personal net worth. Owners will often have to draw on personal assets to finance the business, and these statements will show what is available. Bankers and investors usually want this information as well.

## Startup Expenses and Capitalization

You will have many startup expenses before you even begin operating your business. It's important to estimate these expenses accurately and then to plan where you will get sufficient capital. This is a research project, and the more thorough your research efforts, the less chance that you will leave out important expenses or underestimate them.

Even with the best of research, however, opening a new business has a way of costing more than you anticipate. There are two ways to make allowances for surprise expenses. The first is to add a little "padding" to each item in the budget. The problem with that approach, however, is that it destroys the accuracy of your carefully wrought plan. The second approach is to add a separate line item, called contingencies, to account for the unforeseeable. This is the approach we recommend.

Talk to others who have started similar businesses to get a good idea of how much to allow for contingencies. If you cannot get good information, we recommend a rule of thumb that contingencies should equal at least 20 percent of the total of all other start-up expenses.

Explain your research and how you arrived at your forecasts of expenses. Give sources, amounts, and terms of proposed loans. Also explain in detail how much will be contributed by each investor and what percent ownership each will have.

## Financial Plan

The financial plan consists of a 12-month profit and loss projection, a four-year profit and loss projection (optional), a cash-flow projection, a projected balance sheet, and a break-even calculation. Together they constitute a reasonable estimate of your company's financial future. More important, the process of thinking through the financial plan will improve your insight into the inner financial workings of your company.

### 12 Month Profit and Loss Projection

Many business owners think of the 12-month profit and loss projection as the centerpiece of their plan. This is where you put it all together in numbers and get an idea of what it will take to make a profit and be successful.

Your sales projections will come from a sales forecast in which you forecast sales, cost of goods sold, expenses, and profit month-by-month for one year.

Profit projections should be accompanied by a narrative explaining the major assumptions used to estimate company income and expenses.

Research Notes: Keep careful notes on your research and assumptions, so that you can explain them later if necessary, and also so that you can go back to your sources when it's time to revise your plan.

### Four-Year Profit Projection (Optional)

The 12-month projection is the heart of your financial plan. The Four-Year Profit projection is for those who want to carry their forecasts beyond the first year.

Of course, keep notes of your key assumptions, especially about things that you expect will change dramatically after the first year.

### Projected Cash Flow

If the profit projection is the heart of your business plan, cash flow is the blood. Businesses fail because they cannot pay their bills. Every part of your business plan is important, but none of it means a thing if you run out of cash.

The point of this worksheet is to plan how much you need before startup, for preliminary expenses, operating expenses, and reserves. You should keep updating it and using it afterward. It will enable you to foresee shortages in time to do something about them—perhaps cut expenses, or perhaps negotiate a loan. But foremost, you shouldn't be taken by surprise.

There is no great trick to preparing it: The cash-flow projection is just a forward look at your checking account.

For each item, determine when you actually expect to receive cash (for sales) or when you will actually have to write a check (for expense items).

You should track essential operating data, which is not necessarily part of cash flow but allows you to track items that have a heavy impact on cash flow, such as sales and inventory purchases.

You should also track cash outlays prior to opening in a pre-startup column. You should have already researched those for your startup expenses plan.

Your cash flow will show you whether your working capital is adequate. Clearly, if your projected cash balance ever goes negative, you will need more start-up capital. This plan will also predict just when and how much you will need to borrow.

Explain your major assumptions, especially those that make the cash flow differ from the *Profit and Loss Projection*. For example, if you make a sale in month one, when do you actually collect the cash? When you buy inventory or materials, do you pay in advance, upon delivery, or much later? How will this affect cash flow?

Are some expenses payable in advance? When?

Are there irregular expenses, such as quarterly tax payments, maintenance and repairs, or seasonal inventory buildup, that should be budgeted?

Loan payments, equipment purchases, and owner's draws usually do not show on profit and loss statements but definitely do take cash out. Be sure to include them.

And of course, depreciation does not appear in the cash flow at all because you never write a check for it.

## **For Raising Capital**

### **For Bankers**

- Bankers want assurance of orderly repayment. If you intend using this plan to present to lenders, include:
  - Amount of loan
  - How the funds will be used
  - What this will accomplish—how will it make the business stronger?
  - Requested repayment terms (number of years to repay). You will probably not have much negotiating room on interest rate but may be able to negotiate a longer repayment term, which will help cashflow.
  - Collateral offered, and a list of all existing liens against collateral

### **For Investors**

- Investors have a different perspective. They are looking for dramatic growth, and they expect to share in the rewards:
  - Funds needed short-term
  - Funds needed in two to five years
  - How the company will use the funds, and what this will accomplish for growth.
  - Estimated return on investment
  - Exit strategy for investors (buyback, sale, or IPO)
  - Percent of ownership that you will give up to investors
  - Milestones or conditions that you will accept
  - Financial reporting to be provided
  - Involvement of investors on the board or in management

### **Opening Day Balance Sheet**

A balance sheet is one of the fundamental financial reports that any business needs for reporting and financial management. A balance sheet shows what items of value are held by the company (assets), and what its debts are (liabilities). When liabilities are subtracted from assets, the remainder is owners' equity.

Use a startup expenses and capitalization spreadsheet as a guide to preparing a balance sheet as of opening day. Then detail how you calculated the account balances on your opening day balance sheet.

Optional: Some people want to add a projected balance sheet showing the estimated financial position of the company at the end of the first year. This is especially useful when selling your proposal to investors.

## **Break-Even Analysis**

A break-even analysis predicts the sales volume, at a given price, required to recover total costs. In other words, it's the sales level that is the dividing line between operating at a loss and operating at a profit.

Expressed as a formula, break-even is:

$$\text{Breakeven sales} = \frac{\text{Fixed costs}}{1 - \text{Variable costs}}$$

(Where fixed costs are expressed in dollars, but variable costs are expressed as a percent of total sales.)

Include all assumptions upon which your break-even calculation is based.

## Appendices

Include details and studies used in your business plan; for example:

- Brochures and advertising materials
- Industry studies
- Blueprints and plans
- Maps and photos of location
- Magazine or other articles
- Detailed lists of equipment owned or to be purchased
- Copies of leases and contracts
- Letters of support from future customers
- Any other materials needed to support the assumptions in this plan
- Market research studies
- List of assets available as collateral for a loan

## Refining the Plan

The generic business plan presented above should be modified to suit your specific type of business and the audience for which the plan is written.

### For Type of Business

#### ***Manufacturing***

- Planned production levels
- Anticipated levels of direct production costs and indirect (overhead) costs—how do these compare to industry averages (if available)?
- Prices per product line
- Gross profit margin, overall and for each product line
- Production/capacity limits of planned physical plant
- Production/capacity limits of equipment
- Purchasing and inventory management procedures
- New products under development or anticipated to come online after startup

#### ***Service Businesses***

- Service businesses sell intangible products. They are usually more flexible than other types of businesses, but they also have higher labor costs and generally very little in fixed assets.
- What are the key competitive factors in this industry?
- Your prices
- Methods used to set prices
- System of production management
- Quality control procedures. Standard or accepted industry quality standards.
- How will you measure labor productivity?
- Percent of work subcontracted to other firms. Will you make a profit on subcontracting?
- Credit, payment, and collections policies and procedures
- Strategy for keeping client base

#### ***High Technology Companies***

- Economic outlook for the industry
- Will the company have information systems in place to manage rapidly changing prices, costs, and markets?
- Will you be on the cutting edge with your products and services?
- What is the status of research and development? And what is required to:
  - Bring product/service to market?
  - Keep the company competitive?

- How does the company:
  - Protect intellectual property?
  - Avoid technological obsolescence?
  - Supply necessary capital?
  - Retain key personnel?

High-tech companies sometimes have to operate for a long time without profits and sometimes even without sales. If this fits your situation, a banker probably will not want to lend to you. Venture capitalists may invest, but your story must be very good. You must do longer-term financial forecasts to show when profit take-off is expected to occur. And your assumptions must be well documented and well argued.

### ***Retail Business***

- Company image
- Pricing:
  - Explain markup policies.
  - Prices should be profitable, competitive, and in accordance with company image.
- Inventory:
  - Selection and price should be consistent with company image.
  - Inventory level: Find industry average numbers for annual inventory turnover rate (available in RMA book). Multiply your initial inventory investment by the average turnover rate. The result should be at least equal to your projected first year's cost of goods sold. If it is not, you may not have enough budgeted for startup inventory.
- Customer service policies: These should be competitive and in accord with company image.
- Location: Does it give the exposure that you need? Is it convenient for customers? Is it consistent with company image?
- Promotion: Methods used, cost. Does it project a consistent company image?
- Credit: Do you extend credit to customers? If yes, do you really need to, and do you factor the cost into prices?

# BREAK EVEN POINT CALCULATION

## STEP 1: Determine total overhead costs.

Rent	
Electricity	
Telephone	
Water /Sewer	
Advertising	
Salaries	
Owner's Draw	
Postage/Shipping	
Office Supplies	
Loan Payment	
Insurance	
Miscellaneous	
Other	
Total Overhead	

## STEP 2: Determine average profit margin for products/services.

Products/Services	% of Sales	Sales Price	COGS	Contribution	Profit Margin	Weighted Profit Marg.

(Must equal 100%) \_\_\_\_\_

Average profit margin: \_\_\_\_\_

Average sales per customer: \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 3: Determine monthly break-even in dollars.

Total Overhead divided by Average Profit Margin \_\_\_\_\_

= BREAK EVEN \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 4: Determine break-even point by week, day, hour, and unit.

Avg Sales per Customer \_\_\_\_\_

Days Open Per Week \_\_\_\_\_

Hours Open Per Day \_\_\_\_\_



# Types of Business Structures

## **Sole Proprietorship**

A sole proprietorship is a business that is owned and operated by an individual. The owner is personally and legally responsible for his or her actions. All profit or loss from a sole proprietorship belongs to the owner.

## **General Partnership**

A general partnership is formed by two or more people who agree to contribute money, labor and/or skill to a business and to share its profits, losses, and management. All partners typically are held legally responsible for their own actions and the actions of the other partners.

To file your sole proprietorship or general partnership business name:

- Download the [Certificate of Assumed Name](#).
- File your Assumed Name form with the [County Register of Deeds](#).
- Note: There is no statewide name registration for sole proprietorships or general partnerships, so you must file your business name in the county where you conduct business.

## **Corporation (C-Corporation)**

A corporation is a separate legal entity from the individuals who form it and its owners. Owners are generally protected from personal liability.

To establish a corporation, download the [Articles of Incorporation](#).

## **Limited Liability Company (LLC)**

A limited liability company (LLC) is legally distinct and separate from its owners. An LLC offers its owners both limited personal liability for actions of the business and special tax treatment that may prevent what has been called “double taxation” of the owners’ income.

To form an LLC, download the [Articles of Organization](#).

## **Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)**

A limited liability partnership (LLP) has only general partners but nonetheless affords protection from personal liability.

To form an LLP, download the [Application for Registration of a LLP](#).

## **Limited Partnership (LP)**

A limited partnership (LP) may be formed by two or more individuals, partnerships or corporations. Limited partnerships have both general and limited partners. A limited partner is usually the investor. General partners are involved in operating and managing the business and are subject to unlimited liability for the acts and debts of the partnership.

To form an LP, download the [Certificate of Domestic Limited Partnership](#).

Professional corporations and professional LLCs are filed with the Corporations Division of the Department of the Secretary of State. To determine whether a particular corporation is such a “professional corporation,” it is necessary to examine the requirements of [NCGS 55B-2\(5\)](#).

For information on filing corporations, LLCs, LLPs, and limited partnerships, contact the [North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State](#).

### **S-Corporation**

According to the IRS, S corporations are corporations that elect to pass corporate income, losses, deductions, and credits through to their shareholders for federal tax purposes. Shareholders of S corporations report the flow-through of income and losses on their personal tax returns and are assessed tax at their individual income tax rates. This allows S corporations to avoid double taxation on the corporate income. S corporations are responsible for tax on certain built-in gains and passive income at the entity level.

A business must first exist as an LLC or a C-Corp to be considered for S-Corp status. To register as an S-Corporation, complete [IRS Form 2553](#).

## LOCAL LICENSE, PERMIT, AND ZONING CHECK LIST

Please contact the **City of Monroe** and **Union County** for the following: **Downtown (Events & Street Closings/ Space Needs) ABC & Restaurant, Permits, Signage, Inspections, Utilities, Waste water & Sewer, Health Inspections (County)**.

### Matthew Black (Downtown Information)

City of Monroe- Downtown Director

704-282-4500 / x 6041

[mblack@monroenc.org](mailto:mblack@monroenc.org)

### Ellen Reynolds (Union County / Environmental Health)

704-283-3824

[ellenreynolds@co.union.nc.us](mailto:ellenreynolds@co.union.nc.us)

### Cody Eiss (ABC officer)

Monroe Police

704-282-4775 / 704-776-0577

[ceiss@monroenc.org](mailto:ceiss@monroenc.org)

### Lisa Stiwinter (zoning)

City of Monroe-Director of Planning and Development

**704-282-4569 p**

**704-282-4537 f**

[lstiwinter@monroenc.org](mailto:lstiwinter@monroenc.org)

**Tom Brown (inspections)**

*City of Monroe- Chief Building Inspector*

*Monroe Building Standards*

**704-282-4560**

[tbrown@monroenc.org](mailto:tbrown@monroenc.org)

**Catherine Mullis (permits & signage)**

*City of Monroe -Permit Technician- International Code Certified*

**Tel: 704-282-4524**

Fax: 704-282-4735

[cmullis@monroenc.org](mailto:cmullis@monroenc.org)

**Utilities/ Customer Service (Check in with receptionist)**

*City of Monroe- Utilities/Customer Service*

704-282-4518

[Utilities@monroenc.org](mailto:Utilities@monroenc.org)

**Kevin Keesler (Restaurant Waste Water and Sewer, Grease Trap)**

*City of Monroe- Water Resources Engineer*

*Phone: 704-282-4613*

[kkeesler@monroenc.org](mailto:kkeesler@monroenc.org)

## **Business Tax & Employment Information**

### **Sales & Use Tax**

Every retail or wholesale merchant in the business of selling, renting or leasing taxable tangible personal property in North Carolina is required to obtain a Certificate of Registration unless specifically exempt by statute. Once registered, you will receive information from the Department of Revenue on sales and use tax reporting and remittance requirements.

Apply online for your Sales and Use Tax number, complete the Application for Sales and Use Tax (Form NC-BR) or contact the North Carolina Department of Revenue at (877) 252-3052.

### **Privilege License Tax**

The state privilege license tax is applicable to certain professions in North Carolina and should be applied for before business commences. The privilege license is not a certification the holder is qualified to perform a specific business or profession. It is a tax for the privilege of doing business in the state. Our business counselors can tell you about any privilege licenses that might apply to your business.

Download the Application for State Privilege License (Form B-202A) or contact the North Carolina Department of Revenue at (877) 308-9103.

### **Franchise & Income Tax**

A franchise tax is imposed on corporations for the privilege of doing business in North Carolina. This tax is due annually as long as the corporation remains incorporated, domesticated or continues to do business in the state. For questions concerning franchise and income tax obligations, visit the North Carolina Department of Revenue's Corporate Taxes page or call (877) 252-3052.

### **State and Local Tax Forms**

As a business owner, you are responsible for listing your business personal property with the County Tax Assessor. You must also provide the assessor with information concerning any real property improvements such as the addition of a new structure.

### **State Withholding Taxes**

State withholding taxes must be withheld from employee wages and remitted to the North Carolina Department of Revenue. To register with the State of North Carolina, complete an Application for Income Tax Withholding (Form NC-BR), apply online or contact the Department of Revenue at (877) 252-3052.

## **Unemployment Insurance Tax**

The North Carolina unemployment insurance program is designed to provide temporary economic benefits to eligible workers. To determine the extent of your obligation, contact your local Division of Employment Security Job Service Center.

## **Employer Requirements**

### **Workers' Compensation**

The Workers' Compensation Act is administered via the North Carolina Industrial Commission. It requires any employer with three or more employees provide workers' compensation coverage. Any sole proprietor or partner of a business whose employees are eligible for benefits may also be covered as an employee. To obtain workers' compensation insurance, contact your insurance agent.

### **New Hire Reporting Guide**

Federal and state law require employers to report newly hired and re-hired employees to the North Carolina State Directory of New Hires. Register with the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services online or by phone at (888) 514-4568.

### **Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of North Carolina**

The North Carolina Department of Labor administers and implements the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of North Carolina. OSHA standards protect workers from unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. For information regarding OSHA requirements, contact the North Carolina Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Division or call (919) 807-2900.

### **Federal Taxes**

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requires every employer who pays wages to one or more employees file an application for an employer identification number (EIN). To register, file an Application for Employer Identification Number (Form SS-4) or contact the IRS at (800) 829-4933.

The Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) is the tax contribution to Social Security and Medicare.

### **Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)**

The U.S. Department of Labor administers and enforces the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) rules designed to protect workers from workplace hazards.

For information regarding compliance with federal standards, contact the U.S. Department of Labor Raleigh-Area Office at (919) 790-8096 or visit [OSHA.gov](http://OSHA.gov).

## **Employment Eligibility Verification**

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 requires employers to verify employment eligibility by completing and retaining a one-page Employment Eligibility Form (Form I-9).