

Step Three: Make a Plan

Use this checklist as a starting point, to remind you of the tasks you may have to complete to start your business.

Every business is different. This list is by no means complete. You may not need to do all of the tasks we've listed, and we may not have listed all the tasks you need to do. Laws vary by state and by type of business, so be sure to check with local authorities and any applicable state licensing commission to find out if there are additional legal steps you need to take.

1. Assess your financial resources.
2. Choose a business.
3. Research your business idea.
4. Identify financial risks.
5. Determine start-up costs.
6. Select a lawyer.
7. Select an accountant.
8. Write a business plan.
9. Write a marketing plan.
10. Choose a business name.
11. Verify that you can use the name.
12. Register your business name and get a business certificate.
13. See if the name is available as a domain name.
14. Register the domain name (even if you aren't ready to use it yet).
15. Choose a location for your business.
16. Check zoning laws.
17. Obtain a lease.
18. File partnership or corporate papers.
19. Get any required business licenses or permits.
20. Order any required notices of intent to do business in the community.
21. Have a business phone line installed.
22. Get a business e-mail address.
23. Buy any required business insurance.
24. Find out about health insurance for yourself if you're not covered on someone else's policy.
25. Apply for a sales tax number if necessary.
26. Get tax information. You'll need to know about record keeping requirements, estimating taxes, forms of organization, withholding for employees, hiring independent contractors, and much more.
27. Apply for federal and state employer identification numbers if you will have employees.
28. Find out about workers' compensation if you will have employees.
29. Open a checking account for the business.
30. Have business cards and stationery printed.
31. Purchase equipment and supplies.
32. Order inventory.
33. Order signs.
34. Prepare sales literature.
35. Build a Web site.
36. Place advertising in newspapers or other media.
37. Tell everyone you know that you're in business.