

Business Plan Checklist

By Jake R Brady

- Gather your basic financial statements
 - Provide documentation Financial statements are formal records of your business' financial activities. There are four basic statements:
 - Income statement: Your bottom line subtracting costs from revenue to come up with net profit
 - Balance sheet: A financial snapshot that shows what you own, what you owe, and what your company is worth
 - Cash flow statement: A cash monitor that follows the flow of cash in and out of your company
 - Budget: Your financial forecast that indicates where you plan to make and spend money
- Determine your audience
 - Identify customers and the competition This is a critical part of a successful business plan. Incorporate research on both groups.
 - Ask these questions of customers: Who is buying, what do they buy, and why do they buy?
 - Ask these questions of competitors: How big are they, which customers are they after, and what is their strategy?
- Incorporate these elements
 - Executive summary
 - Company overview
 - Business environment
 - Company description
 - Company strategy
 - Financial review
 - Action plan
- Consider these topics
 - Plans: Company mission, vision, goals, and objectives that all work together
 - Organization: A structure for your company that makes sense
 - Procedures: Efficient and effective ways of doing things
 - Leadership: An ability to influence and encourage others around you
 - Skills: The talents and expertise your people need to succeed

- Culture: Beliefs and attitudes that lead to doing the right thing
- Consider the other factors on this list of business-planning essentials:
 - Get everyone involved in setting goals and objectives
 - Learn all you can about your customers
 - Understand who your competitors are
 - Identify your strengths and weaknesses relative to opportunities and threats
 - Determine which capabilities you absolutely need to succeed
 - List all the things you do that add customer value
 - Make sure that you do your financial homework
 - Imagine several different versions of your company's future
- Avoid business failure
 - Do your research, and prepare If you're not prepared, your business will likely fail.
 - Establish a long-term company vision Be sure to establish and follow clear goals and objectives to meet the vision.
 - Prepare for change Stay flexible and you will succeed.
 - Focus on the customers And whatever you do, don't underestimate the competition.
 - Be a strong leader Communicate well, and often.