**Starting a Business: The Great Big Checklist of Everything**

By **Docstoc Articles**, Monday, April 29, 2013

This checklist (available [here](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/154776844/Starting-a-Business---The-Great-Big-Checklist-of-Everything)) breaks down everything you *must* and *should* do when [starting a business](http://premium.docstoc.com/c/46/ch/236/l/1501/Introduction).

**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**

o Pick a company name and check any potential trademark infringements on [Trademarkia](http://www.trademarkia.com/) or [KnowEm](http://knowem.com/)

o Determine whether your business name needs to be trademarked, and if does [Trademark](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/94578991/What-is-a-trademark) it at the [USPTO](http://www.uspto.gov/)

o Protect your [written works](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/94579651/What-is-a-copyright) and code through [the Copyright Office](http://www.copyright.gov/)

o If you are inventing or creating a product, understand [patents](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/94578076/What-is-a-Patent) and register for one at the [USPTO](http://www.uspto.com/)

**Recommended**

o Vet your idea with the [idea checklist](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/124390739/Business-Idea-Checklist)

o Protect your ideas when sharing them with others by using an [NDA](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/272018)

o Search your state’s corporation and LLC name registration database to ensure your business name has not been taken

o Check [Google](http://www.google.com/), [Yellow Pages](http://www.yellowpages.com/), and local directories to ensure your business name is not taken

o Learn how to select a [good business name](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/21774)

.**Forming Your Entity**

**Mandatory**

o Pick a structure ([Sole Proprietorship](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/121845292/Sole-Proprietorship-Formation-To-Do-and-Information-Check-List), [Corporation](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/107467072/Long-form-Articles-of-Incorporation), [S-Corp](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/22073942/Forming-an-S-Corporation---Step-by-Step-Guide), [LLC](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/22073387/Forming-a-Limited-Liability-Company-%28LLC%29---Step-by-Step-Guide), [Partnership](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/12883684/Partnership-Agreement), [LP](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/2843632/Limited-Partnership-Agreement), [LLP](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/107467070/Limited-Liability-Partnership-Agreement), [Non-Profit](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/3277183/Starting-a-non-profit-organization)) and ensure that you comply with business [formation requirements](http://lztrk.com/?a=3345&c=3&p=r&s1=)

o Creating a corporation? File [Articles of Incorporation](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/24850789/Articles-of-Incorporation) and [Bylaws](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/25826687/Bylaws-of-a-Business-Corporation) with the Secretary of State’s Office

o Forming an LLC? File the [Articles of Organization](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/23514201/Articles-of-Organization) and an [Operating Agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=108281155) with the Secretary of State’s Office

o Get the necessary [licenses and permits](http://www.license123.com/) to operate legally

o Apply for an [Employer Identification Number](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-%26-Self-Employed/Apply-for-an-Employer-Identification-Number-%28EIN%29-Online) (EIN)

o If you are incorporating, appoint a [Board of Directors](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/111143735/Board-of-Directors-Agreement)

o For a corporation and LCC, you must [register a service agent](http://www.legalzoom.com/additional-business-services/registered-agent-services.html)

**Recommended**

o Going into a Partnership? Create a [Partnership Agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=130940691)

o Check your [state government’s website](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-%26-Self-Employed/State-Links-1) for other state-specific registration, taxation and employment rules

o Get your [DBA](http://www.license123.com/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](http://www.sba.gov/community/blogs/how-open-small-business-bank-account-online)

.**Identity and Branding**

**Recommended**

o Design a logo ([99designs](http://www.kqzyfj.com/click-6760130-10793364?cm_mmc=CJ-_-3693077-_-6760130-_-WordPress%20Designs))

o Search for and register a unique online domain name ([GoDaddy](http://www.tkqlhce.com/click-6760130-10602879), [1and1](http://www.anrdoezrs.net/click-6760130-10896871), [Register](http://www.register.com/))

o Create your website ([Wordpress](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/153259413/wordpress.com), [Intuit](http://www.intuit.com/), [Weebly](http://www.weebly.com/), [Wix](http://www.wix.com/), [SiteKreator](http://www.sitekreator.com/))

o Ensure your business name is available on a wide variety of social networking websites in order to develop consistent branding ([KnowEm](http://knowem.com/))

o Create and manage your [social media](http://premium.docstoc.com/c/33/ch/147/l/749/Social-Media-Options-101) presence

o Get business cards and other physical collateral ([Vistaprint](http://www.vistaprint.com/))

o List your business online with [MerchantCircle](http://www.merchantcircle.com/), [Manta](http://www.manta.com/), [Yelp](http://www.yelp.com/) and [DandB.com](http://www.dandb.com/)

.**Financing and Business Planning**

**Recommended**

o [Prepare for](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/126733936/6-Steps-You-Should-Take-Before-You-Draft-a-Business-Plan) and create a [Business Plan](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/1350396) ([if you need one](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/127259634/7-Situations-Where-You-Will-Need-a-Formal-Business-Plan))

o Find sources of capital— friends & family, [business bank loans](https://www.usbank.com/small-business/credit-financing/sba-loans.html), [angel investment](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/115859786/Angel-Investor-Agreement), [venture capital](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/122998987/Venture-Capital-Due-Diligence-Checklist), or even crowdfunding ([Crowdfunder](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/153259413/crowdfunder.com), [Fundable](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/153259413/fundable.com))

o If seeking investors, create a [business pitch deck](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/928472)

For those issuing stock to finance the company (corporations), use a [Shareholder’s Agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/95707789/Shareholder-and-Stock-Agreement)

.**Operations**

**Mandatory**

o Find a retail space, set up a [home-based office](http://www.entrepreneur.com/homeoffice/index.html) or find an office space on [LoopNet](http://www.loopnet.com/), [OfficeFinder](http://www.officefinder.com/), or [ShowCase](http://www.showcase.com/)

o Choose a broker to help find an adequate business space on [TheBrokerList](http://thebrokerlist.com/search_profiles)

o For corporation, keep record of [Meeting Minutes](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/951627/Template-for-Meeting-Minutes)

**Recommended**

o Set up an online phone system ([Ring Central](http://www.tkqlhce.com/click-6760130-10904029), [Google Voice](https://www.google.com/voice/?setup=1#setup/), [Onebox](http://www.onebox.com/)) or set up a traditional land line ([Verizon](http://www.anrdoezrs.net/click-6760130-11023385), [AT&T](http://www.att.com/smallbusiness/index.jsp))

o Set up your computer and network

o Pick an internal email system ([Gmail](http://www.gmail.com/), [Outlook](https://www.outlook.com/))

o Choose an email system to connect with customers ([Constant Contact](http://www.jdoqocy.com/click-6760130-10296165), [MailChimp](http://www.mailchimp.com/), [Sendgrid](http://www.sendgrid.com/))

Set up a collaboration method for business documents, spreadsheets and presentations ([GoogleApps](http://www.google.com/intl/en/enterprise/apps/business/))

.**Financial Planning & Accounting**

**Mandatory**

o Choose a [tax year](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-%26-Self-Employed/Tax-Years)

o Determine which type of federal [business taxes](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-%26-Self-Employed/Business-Taxes) you will be responsible for

o Determine [state tax](http://www.sba.gov/content/learn-about-your-state-and-local-tax-obligations) obligations

o Create and maintain the top 3 financial statements: [income statement](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/150116004/Create-an-Income-Statement-in-4-Easy-Steps), [balance sheet](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/149368666/5-Simple-Ways-to-Create-a-Balance-Sheet) and [cash flows](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/150324085/The-6-Essentials-of-a-Basic-Cash-Flow-Statement) on at least a quarterly basis

**Recommended**

o Set up an accounting system ([Quickbooks](http://www.dpbolvw.net/click-6760130-10873809))

o Find the [right accountant](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/83713232/Choosing-the-Right-Accountant-for-Your-Small-Business)

o Set a [budget](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/356737/Business-Budget-Projection-Template) for the coming year

o Create a [sales forecasts](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/13435796/Sales-Forecasting) and [financial projections](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/3983/Financial-Projections-Template) regularly

o Get a business [credit card](http://www.nerdwallet.com/business-credit-cards) and

o Register with [Dun & Bradstreet](http://www.tkqlhce.com/click-6760130-10985849) to build business credit and obtain a [D-U-N-S Number](http://www.dnb.com/get-a-duns-number.html) to accurately gauge and share your creditworthiness

o If a corporation, decide whether to elect [S Corporation tax status](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/111927424/What-is-an-S-Corporation)

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**Business Mentors**

**Recommended**

o Speak to entrepreneurs and leaders in your industry, consider asking them to be your mentor

o Ask mentors to join your [Board of Advisors](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/20466) (for the [overall benefit](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/92801810/How-an-Advisory-Board-Can-Benefit-Your-Company) of the company)

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**Building a Team**

**Mandatory**

o Determine the company founders and leadership ([partnership](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=130940691), owners, CEO, etc.)

o Clarify who gets [equity](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/23519460/Equity-Incentive-Plan-Agreement), and how much

o Conduct [job interviews](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/10633180/Interview-Questions-Dos-and-Donts)—look out for [red flags](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/107186880/Hire-the-Right-Employee-Red-Flags-During-the-Interview-Process)

**Recommended**

o Find team members through personal connections, recruiters or job boards ([Ziprecruiter](http://www.tkqlhce.com/click-6760130-10855585), [Craigslist](http://www.craigslist.org/), [Monster](http://www.monster.com/), [Indeed](http://www.indeed.com/), [SimplyHired](http://www.simplyhired.com/))

o Run a [background check](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/111143742/Consent-to-Background-Check) on new hires

o For one-off or task based activities, use [AmazonTurk](http://www.mturk.com/) or [Odesk](http://www.odesk.com/)

.**Human Resources**

**Mandatory**

o Make sure workers are properly classified ([employee](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/102269552/Employee-vs-Independent-Contractor), [independent contractor](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/83713694/The-Difference-Between-an-Employee-and-an-Independent-Contractor), [part-time employee](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/81726253/Part-time-vs-Full-time-Employees), intern, etc.)

o Have employees fill out [Form I-9](http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-9.pdf) and [Form W-4](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw4.pdf)

o Familiarize yourself with the [Department of Labor laws](http://www.dol.gov/compliance/) and regulations regarding employment

o Put up the necessary [labor law posters](http://www.dol.gov/oasam/boc/osdbu/sbrefa/poster/matrix.htm) to meet federal and state requirements

o Familiarize yourself with [federal discrimination laws](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html) and heed them

o [Terminate employees](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/146279917/The-10-Steps-You-Should-Take-When-Firing-an-Employee) properly to avoid discrimination claims

**Recommended**

o Create [job descriptions](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/135996745/If-Your-Company-is-Hiring-You-Must-Have-These-3-Documents)

o Understand the definition of an ["At Will" employee](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/147136123/At-Will-Employment---What-Every-Employer-Must-Know)

o Have workers sign the proper [Employment Agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=133667634)

o Protect the inventions employees create for you with an Employee [Non-Compete and Confidentiality Agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/117344764/Employee-Confidentiality-Non-Compete-and-Invention-Assignment-Agreement)

o Give all new employees an [Employee Handbook](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=10090809)

o Lay out the [employee benefits](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/80821914/Understanding-Employee-Benefits) you will provide (paid leave and holidays, health insurance, bonuses)

o Choose a payroll service ([ADP](http://www.adp.com/), [Trinet](http://www.trinet.com/), [Paychex](http://www.paychex.com/))

o Set up a system for [employee discipline](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=108724063)

.**Sales**

**Recommended**

o Determine a [pricing system](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/13435565/Pricing-Strategies) for your product(s)

o Execute the [5 Step Sales Process](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/79810979/The-5-Step-Sales-Process)

o Learn the [art of persuasion](http://premium.docstoc.com/c/58/ch/356/l/1542/Introduction)

o [Hire](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=127261151) and [train](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/110249347/Sales-Training-Assessment) salespeople

o Use a sales management service (one that fits your business size, from [smaller](http://www.salesmanagementservices.com/) to [larger](http://www.salesmanagementservices.com/) companies)

o Pick a [Customer Relationships Management System](http://crm.venturebeat.com/) (CRM)

o Make a [Customer Service Plan](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/114731663/Customer-Service-Plan-Template) to standardize procedures for complaints and refunds

o Track which products perform better, and which have the best margins

o Decide on possible discounts, specials and coupons to attract new customers

o List your products on [online marketplaces](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/123209975/20-Online-Marketplaces-to-List-Your-Product-on-Today)

.**Marketing & PR**

**Recommended**

o Plan your [marketing strategy](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/1399291)

o Decide on a target market and conduct a market analysis

o Determine your [Key Performance Indicators](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/83916993/How-to-Define-Your-Key-Performance-Indicators-%28KPI%29-and-Can-They-Help-Your-Business)

o [Get free online traffic](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/126287399/7-Free-Ways-to-Get-Online-Traffic)

o [Improve SEO](http://premium.docstoc.com/c/60/ch/369/l/1589/What-is-SEO)

o Get paid online ads, such as [Google AdWords](http://adwords.google.com/) and [Facebook Advertising](https://www.facebook.com/advertising)

o Master [social media marketing](http://premium.docstoc.com/course/62/The-Six-Step-Strategy-to-Profitable-Social-Media-Marketing)

o Look into relevant [trade shows](http://www.tsnn.com/) and conventions to market your product

o Print [flyers](http://www.vistaprint.com/flyers.aspx?&GP=4%2f10%2f2013+1%3a32%3a18+PM&GPS=2803203625&GNF=1), brochures or catalogs

o Leverage current customers with [email marketing](http://premium.docstoc.com/course/48/Email-Marketing-for-Small-Business)

o Decide if you want to hire a [PR Agency](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/69748340)

o [Go mobile](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/81265956/Options-for-Taking-Your-Business-Mobile) and consider [app development](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/110689398/App-Design-Contract)

o Reach out to relevant newspapers and press

.**Insurance**

**Mandatory**

o Decide which [types of business insurance](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/153240631/Different-Types-of-Business-Insurance-Top-Options-to-Consider) you need.

* Common: [workers' compensation](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/39844), [unemployment](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-unemployment-insurance.htm) and [disability insurance](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/20/your-money/life-and-disability-insurance/determining-if-disability-insurance-is-necessary.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
* Others: [property](http://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/property-insurance), [liability](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-professional-liability-insurance.htm) or [business overhead insurance](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/107810315/Why-Every-Entrepreneur-Should-Consider-Business-Overhead-Expense-Insurance)

**Recommended**

o Check any potential insurance providers [here](http://www.naic.org/state_web_map.htm)

.**Legal**

**Recommended**

o [Find an attorney](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/107170952/3-Tips-for-Choosing-the-Right-Attorney-for-Your-Business) you trust

o Use [waivers](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/9655803/Waiver-Of-Liability-Template) and [contracts](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/87048716/Prevent-Legal-Battles-with-Contracts) to prevent litigation

o Prepare for [when your company is sued](http://premium.docstoc.com/video/100906251/My-Business-is-Being-Sued-Now-What)

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**CHECKLIST FOR YOUR SPECIFIC BUSINESS**

.**Service-Based Businesses**

**Mandatory**

o Determine the [price](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/81814821/How-to-Price-My-Services) of your services

**Recommended**

o Don’t forget to clarify the deliverable, deadline and cost in your [service agreement](http://premium.docstoc.com/DocComplete/landing?docId=137912043)

.**Retail/Brick and Mortar Businesses**

**Mandatory**

o Check [zoning laws](http://www.sba.gov/content/basic-zoning-laws)

o Secure a [lease](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/14620/Office-Lease-Agreement)

o Decide on days and hours of operation

o Determine staffing needs (for prime hours, slower times, closing an inventory)

o Secure the correct [permits and licenses](http://www.license123.com/) for your city and state

o Set up lighting and utilities

o Acquire furniture, register, racks, tables and wall displays, a register, etc.

o Get a state-specific Seller’s Permit or Resale Permit to properly collect sales tax

**Recommended**

o [Choose a location](http://www.sba.gov/content/tips-choosing-business-location) with good foot traffic, size and appearance

o Speak with a commercial realtor to get an idea of what to look for and what to expect

o Establish agreements with your [manufacturer](http://premium.docstoc.com/docs/31374040/Contract-for-Manufacture-of-Goods), distributor or wholesale supplier

o Set up inventory tracking (understand a [Stock Keeping Unit](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/stock-keeping-unit-sku.asp))

o Set up your [Yelp page](https://biz.yelp.com/)

.**Online Business**

**Mandatory**

o Purchase computers

o [Find images](http://www.istockphoto.com/) for your website

o Set up your e-commerce or online store ([Shopify](http://www.shopify.com/), [FlyingCart](http://www.flyingcart.com/), [Goodsie](http://goodsie.com/))

o Choose a shipping or delivery system ([FedEx](http://www.fedex.com/), [UPS](http://www.ups.com/), [USPS](http://www.usps.com/))

o Set up a system for payment processing ([PayPal](https://www.paypal.com/home), [Google Checkout](http://google.checkout.com/))

**Recommended**

o Track and improve traffic [through Google Analytics](http://premium.docstoc.com/course/45/Google-Analytics-for-eCommerce)

o Determine storage options, such as [cloud computing](http://premium.docstoc.com/article/89514149/Small-Businesses-Going-All-In-on-the-Cloud) ([Box](https://www.box.com/), [DropBox](https://www.dropbox.com/))

o Set up a system for IT bugs and tickets ([Jira](http://www.atlassian.com/software/jira/overview))

o If outsourced development is needed, use [Guru](http://www.guru.com/) or [Elance](http://www.elance.com/)

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Check out a free and comprehensive online course on [starting your business here](http://premium.docstoc.com/c/46/ch/236/l/1501/Introduction).