Sample Business Plan and Step by Step Guide

Ready to start writing your business plan? Here’s our step-by-step guide.

1. Executive summary. This is the outline of your plan, and a snappy explanation of your business. It’s used to pique the reader’s interest, and to explain what’s in the rest of the document. The executive summary shouldn’t generally be more than a couple of pages, and most people choose to write this section last.

2. The problem. This is where you explain the need for your business. What’s the problem you’re solving, or what’s the opportunity? Why do people need or want what you’re selling?

3. The solution. Here, you explain how you’re solving the problem you outlined in the previous section. What is it that your business will do? How does it meet the needs you’ve identified?

4. The market. In this section you explain the size and nature of your market. You’ll need to do some research to back this up, and that might be either quantitative, qualitative, or ideally both. Potential investors will want to know how big the market is, how many existing competitors there are, and whether the market is set to grow or contract.

5. Competitor analysis. Here, you’ll look at a few of your key competitors and analyse their strengths and weaknesses. What are they doing well, and what can you improve on?

6. SWOT analysis. This is a key part of the business plan. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This section helps you understand some of the most important factors that might affect the success of your proposition, and how you’re going to compete effectively with other companies operating in your market. Read more about how to create a SWOT analysis.

7. The execution. Now that you’ve done the analysis, this section allows you to explain how you’re actually going to run your business. How will you turn the opportunity into a profit-making enterprise? This section will have a number of subsections, including marketing and sales, operations, and benchmarks.

8. The team. Here you’ll explain who’s involved in the business and what their strengths are. You should outline each key team member’s experience, and what they bring to this new business. You might also want to include outside advisors and experts, such as your accountants.

9. Financials. Your business plan won’t succeed without watertight financial forecasts. Here, you’ll need to outline your sales forecasts and the cost of goods sold. You’ll also need a profit and loss forecast, cash flow statement, and balance sheet, each of which should be presented in raw figures and as charts. If you’re seeking equity investment, you should also think about including details of potential exit strategies.

10. Appendices. Finally, many business plans include appendix sections featuring other graphs, tables, or notes that are too long or involved to include in the body of the plan itself.

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| **1.** **Your business and objectives** |
| **Briefly describe your business, outlining the different product(s) and/or service(s) you offer:** |
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| **Objectives:** |
| **Short term (current year):** |
|  |
| **Medium term (next 1 – 2 years):** |
|  |
| **Long term (3 years and beyond):** |
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| **Your Start Up Loan:** |
| **Describe how you will use your Start Up Loan and how it will help you achieve these objectives:** |
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| **2. Your skills and experience** |
| **Outline any previous experience, employment or other work that you have done that is relevant to your business:** |
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| **Outline any education or training you have had that is relevant to your business:** |
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| **Outline any transferable skills, talents or traits you have that are relevant to your business:** |
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| **Briefly outline any gaps in your skills, experience or qualifications and explain how you will address these:** |
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| **3.** **Your target customers** | | | | |
| **Demographic details:**  *Delete any answers not applicable to you and provide some description as relevant.* | | | | |
| **Age:** | **Gender:** | **Income:** | **Types:** | **Target regions:** |
| * 0 - 5 yrs * 6 - 12yrs * 13 - 17yrs * 18 - 30yrs * 31 - 50yrs * 51yrs + * All ages | * Males * Females * All genders | * £0 - £25,000 * £26,000 - £99,000 * £100,000 + | * Individuals * Businesses * Families * Other | * Local? * County? * National? * International? |
| **How many potential customers do you estimate are in your target regions for this financial year?** | | | | |
|  | | | | |
| **Briefly describe your target customers and any other distinguishing features, expanding on any of the areas you have already highlighted above:** | | | | |
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| **What customer need or problem does your product(s) and/or service(s) address?** | | | | |
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| **Explain your approach to pricing your product(s) and/or service(s):** | | | | |
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| **4.** **Your market and competition** | |
| **What research have you conducted to understand your market, including your industry, regions, customers, competitors?**  *Delete any answers not applicable to you and provide some description as relevant.* | |
| * Surveys & questionnaires * Focus groups * Interviews * Desk or online research * Market testing * Trade fairs or exhibitions * Met with suppliers * Personal experience * Social media research * Mystery shopping competitors * Family and friends * Other | |
| **Competitor 1:** | |
| **Name, location, website:** | **Average prices:** |
|  |  |
| **Strengths:** | **Weaknesses:** |
|  |  |
| **Competitor 2:** | |
| **Name, location, website:** | **Average prices:** |
|  |  |
| **Strengths:** | **Weaknesses:** |
|  |  |
| **Your business:** | |
| **What sets your business apart from your competitors?** | |
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| **Your strengths:** | **Your weaknesses:** |
|  |  |
| **Current or future opportunities:** | **Current or future threats:** |
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| **5.** **Your sales and marketing plans** |
| **How do you or will you promote your business?** *Delete any answers not applicable to you and provide some description as relevant.* |
| * Website (information only) * Website (for e-commerce) * Advertising (online) * Advertising (print, radio, TV) * Search engine marketing * Social media * Retail outlets * Telesales * Referrals * Leaflets * Events and exhibitions * PR * Other |
| **Pick three of your key promotional activities and describe how they currently (or will in the future) help you meet your business objectives:** |
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| **6.** **Your operational plans** | | | | |
| **Please provide details of two key suppliers or key relationships that are or will be important to running your business:** *Detail as relevant in the boxes provided below.* | | | | |
| **Supplier / Relationship 1:** | | | | |
| **Organisation:** | | **Relationship status:**  *Delete any answers not applicable to you.* | | |
|  | | * No contract/commitment * Contact under negotiation * Project-based arrangement * Contract or retainer in place * Other | | |
| **Service provided:** | | **Key terms of the relationship:** | | |
|  | |  | | |
| **Supplier / Relationship 2:** | | | | |
| **Organisation:** | | **Relationship status:**  *Delete any answers not applicable to you.* | | |
|  | | * No contract/commitment * Contact under negotiation * Project-based arrangement * Contract or retainer in place * Other | | |
| **Service provided:** | | **Key terms of the relationship:** | | |
|  | |  | | |
| **Other operational considerations:** | | | | |
| **Do you currently employ staff?**  *Delete any answers not applicable to you and provide some description as relevant.* | | | | |
| * Yes *(proceed to question A below)* * Not yet but I have plans to take on staff in the next 12-months *(proceed to question B)* * No and I have no plans to take on staff in the next 12-months *(proceed to next section)* | | | | |
| 1. **How many staff do you currently employ?** | | | | |
| **Full time:** |  | | **Part time:** |  |
| **Outline the key staff** **roles within your business (e.g. job title, responsibilities, key skills):** | | | | |
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| 1. **How many staff do you intend to take on in the next 12-months?** | | | | |
| **Full time:** |  | | **Part time:** |  |
| **Describe the key responsibilities and skills you anticipate giving to these new staff:** | | | | |
|  | | | | |
| **Where does or will your business operate from?** *Delete any answers not applicable to you and provide some description as relevant.* | | | | |
| * Home business * Office * Retail unit * Manufacturing unit * Mobile business (vehicle) * Work-hub * Other | | | | |
| **What laws or regulations have you considered for your business and/or industry?** | | | | |
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| **What insurance do you currently have in place or do you intend to put in place for your business?** | | | | |
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| **7.** **Back-up plan** |
| **How will you manage your loan repayments if your business doesn’t go according to plan?**  Your back-up plan should highlight:   * What your loan repayments are * How you would manage these repayments in the case of an unexpected event * Why you feel this is a realistic plan |
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| **7.** **Supporting evidence** |
| **You can either copy and paste any supporting evidence in this section, or create a bullet point list of your supporting items and send them in with your application separately. Any supporting evidence you provide should support and strengthen the claims you have made and help our loan assessment team feel more confident about lending to you.**  *Please note, this is not a mandatory field but your Business Adviser may request additional supporting evidence once they have reviewed your full application.* |
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