

# Business Plan Development Guide



The business plan answers the key questions about the business: who, what, where, when, why, and how. For a developing business, it begins the process of making an idea materialize into reality and determining whether or not an idea should become reality. It also establishes goals and benchmarks for the business. A comprehensive business plan makes it easier for a business to receive external support, especially in terms of financing from potential investors, lenders, and grant sources. Finally, and possibly most importantly, going through the process of planning is very valuable because it forces the business owners and/or managers to think through every detail of the business.

## **Business Plan Elements**

A comprehensive business plan generally includes the following sections:

- I. Description of Business
- II. Marketing Plan
- III. Management & Operations Plan
- IV. Financial Plan

### **I. Description of Business**

This section provides a description of the business, including products and services offered. This section also gives a brief history of the business and background of the owners, and provides a description of why the business is being started or expansion pursued. Key components of this section along with questions covered in this section include:

- **Ownership/Business Structure:** Who are the owners of the business? Is the business legally organized? If yes, how is it organized?
- **History/Background:** When did you start the business? What are the highlights of the history of the business? What is the background of the owners? What sparked your interest in developing this business or launching this expansion?
- **Vision/Mission:** What do you want this business to be in 3-5 years? What characteristics do you want it to embody? What is the purpose of the business—who we are, what we do and for who we do it? The mission statement for the business should state what the business hopes to accomplish in the bigger picture.
- **Goals:** What are your short-term goals for the business (less than 3 years)? What are the long term goals (more than 3 years)? The goals should outline specific measurable goals for the business. They should be numbered and listed in order of importance.
- **Location:** Where is the business located? What is a basic description of the facility and operation?

### **II. Marketing Plan**

The Marketing Plan outlines the key activities of the business. Key components of this section along with questions covered in this section include:

- **Industry Analysis and Trends:** What are the key trends that are impacting your business?

- **Market Background:** What are the demographics for your market area? What are recent developments in your marketplace? Customer feedback or survey results (if this has been done).
- **Target Customers:** What groups will the business be targeting with its products and services? What are key details about these groups? What are their demands and needs?
- **Products/Services:** What are the main products or services offered by the business? What are the features of these products/services? What are the benefits of these products/services? How are new products introduced?
- **Key Competitors:** Who are the key competitors? What products do they offer? What are their capabilities? Where are they located? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? What is their reputation?
- **Market Positioning:** What is your value proposition? What is your competitive advantage? What is the goal of the business in how it wants to be regarded in the marketplace?
- **Pricing Strategies:** What pricing strategies are used in setting prices? Who is responsible for setting prices? What have prices been historically for similar products/services in the market? What prices are necessary to make the target market viable? What are some of initial key product prices?
- **Distribution:** Will distribution involve largely local markets or will there be significant interstate trade? How will products be distributed? Will the business use its own transportation or will it contract with 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers?
- **Sales and Promotion Strategies:** What tactics will be used to promote the business? What forms of media will be in its advertising? What type of advertising will the business use to promote its products/services?, How will the business target the most valued customer groups? How will the business measure the effectiveness of advertising and promotional efforts?
- **Marketing Goals:** What are the specific marketing goals for the business? These should outline specific measurable goals, and they should be numbered and listed in order of importance. Examples include: increase sales by \$X, sell X in volume, etc.
- **Sales Forecasts:** What are the projected sales forecasts for the first 3-5 years broken down by product line or service category?

### **III. Management and Operations Plan**

The management plan describes how the business operates with respect to employees and management structure, and the operations plan should describe the facility and equipment and operations of the business. Key components of this section along with questions covered in this section include:

#### **A. Management Plan**

- **Owners/Investors:** Who are the owners of the business?
- **Business Structure:** What is the legal structure of the business? When did it legally organize?
- **Organization Chart:** Section needs flow chart that shows where line of responsibility for each employee and owner.
- **Key Personnel:** What are the personnel requirements? What are the basic job profiles for each position?
- **Salaries/Benefits:** How are salaries determined? What are the expected ranges for salaries for each position? What benefits are offered to employees?

- **Staff Meeting:** How often does the business have staff meetings?
- **Training/Evaluations:** What training is offered to employees? How are employees evaluated?

## **B. Operations Plan**

- **Facility Description:** What is a basic description of the facility? What are key features?
- **Equipment:** What is the necessary equipment for the business operations?
- **Overview of Production Processes:** What are the different processes of production? What are the key elements?
- **Regulations/Permits:** What are key regulatory requirements that must be met? What permits are necessary?

## **IV. Financial Plan**

The financial plan will include the current financial statements for a business that is in operation and the pro-forma or projected financial statements for a new or expanded operation. It will include the income statement or operating budget, cash flow statement which includes all inflows and outflows of cash to or from the business, and the balance sheet which shows the current or projected net worth of the business. For a startup business, it might also include a capitalization plan. This would list the startup costs and a plan for how the business expects to generate the startup capital. The financial plan should also detail how the financials of the business will be managed. Key components of this section along with questions covered in this section include:

- **Estimated Start-up Costs:** For a start-up or expansion, what are the identified key start-up costs and what are the cost estimates for each?
- **Capitalization Strategy:** What sources of funds will be used to capitalize the business?
- **Inventory Management:** How will inventory be maintained? What system will be used maintain and monitor inventory? Who will be responsible for inventory management?
- **Accounting System:** What type of accounting system will be used? How will record be maintained? Will the record be audited? Who will be responsible for maintaining the records? What reports will be generated to monitor financial performance? Will the business employ a CPA?
- **Insurance:** What types of insurance coverage does the business carry?
- **Financial Projections (3-year cash flow, income statement and balance sheet)**
- **Key Performance Measures:** What performance measures or benchmarks will be monitored to evaluate the performance of the business?

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