

First-Year Success Checklist: Printable Action Guide

Use this guide one section at a time. Add an owner and due date to each action, keep supporting records, and review progress monthly and quarterly. Adapt legal, tax, licensing, insurance, safety, and employment requirements to your business and location.

BUSINESS NAME	START DATE
OWNER OR LEAD	REVIEW DAY
PRIMARY FIRST-YEAR GOAL	

Phase 1: Days 1–30 — Establish the Foundation

- ☐ **Make the business official:** choose and document the structure; register the name and entity; register the tradename (doing business as name, if desired); obtain tax IDs, licenses, and permits; and record filing, renewal, reporting, and payment deadlines.
- ☐ **Protect the business:** review insurance needs with a qualified professional and establish secure passwords, backups, access controls, and cybersecurity practices.
- ☐ **Set up financial records:** open a business bank account; choose a bookkeeping system and accounting method with professional guidance; and organize contracts, receipts, policies, tax records, and renewals.
- ☐ **Define the business:** state who it serves, the need it addresses, and the value it provides; then define the initial offering, scope, pricing or funding model, terms, and delivery timeline.
- ☐ **Build the financial plan:** calculate startup and recurring costs, create a 13-week cash forecast, and set first-year revenue and minimum cash-reserve goals.

Phase 2: Days 31–60 — Reach and Serve Your Market

- ☐ **Understand the market:** talk with prospective customers, clients, users, members, or partners; identify the strongest audience segment; and refine the offering in clear, familiar language.
- ☐ **Plan outreach:** define the audience, message, budget, goals, and two or three marketing, distribution, or partnership channels to test.
- ☐ **Create a clear path to act:** set weekly outreach and follow-up targets and make it easy to inquire, schedule, register, order, apply, or purchase.
- ☐ **Standardize service:** use a repeatable intake, enrollment, proposal, or purchasing process; confirm scope, timing, price or fees, responsibilities, and changes in writing; and set response and update standards.
- ☐ **Learn and follow up:** establish complaint, refund, rework, recovery, and escalation steps; collect early feedback; record common questions; and request an appropriate review, referral, renewal, or next step.



Phase 3: Days 61–90 — Review and Improve

- ☐ **Review finances:** compare revenue and expenses with the plan, reconcile accounts, and review cash, bills, receivables, debt, and tax set-asides.
- ☐ **Check profitability and waste:** calculate each core offering's full cost and contribution, then address slow collections, unnecessary subscriptions, resource waste, and low-value work.
- ☐ **Assess growth:** review opportunities, progress toward the primary goal, average value, decision timing, channel results, and the audience and offering with the strongest fit.
- ☐ **Improve operations:** stop or revise activities without clear results, document at least three recurring processes, and record delays, rework, complaints, and recurring requests.
- ☐ **Set direction:** choose three priorities for the next quarter.

Monthly Operating Checklist: Months 4–12

- ☐ **Close the books:** record income and expenses, retain supporting documents, reconcile bank and credit accounts, follow up on unpaid invoices, and confirm tax set-asides and deadlines.
- ☐ **Check financial health:** update the 13-week cash forecast and review revenue, margin, operating expenses, and cash balance.
- ☐ **Review growth:** assess opportunities, primary-goal progress, average value, results by offering, and outreach, marketing, distribution, and partnership performance.
- ☐ **Review customers and delivery:** assess retention, renewals, repeat business or participation, referrals, returns, complaints, feedback, timeliness, turnaround, rework, and capacity.
- ☐ **Strengthen operations and risk controls:** improve one recurring process; check compliance, insurance, contract, and renewal deadlines; and test backups and access controls.
- ☐ **Plan the next month:** choose one key decision and three priorities.

MEASURE	TARGET	ACTUAL	NEXT ACTION
REVENUE OR FUNDING			
CASH BALANCE AND MARGIN			
GROWTH GOAL AND OPPORTUNITIES			
AVERAGE VALUE AND RETENTION			
ON-TIME DELIVERY OR COMPLETION			

Quarterly Business Review

- ☐ **Compare** quarterly financial and mission results with goals.
- ☐ **Identify** the audiences, accounts, offerings, and channels producing the strongest results.
- ☐ **Review** pricing or funding against materials, labor, fees, overhead, and owner time.



- ☐ **Identify** the strongest offering and the offering that needs improvement.
- ☐ **Review** feedback, complaints, returns, retention, participation, and referrals.
- ☐ **Decide** which outreach, marketing, distribution, and partnership channels to continue, improve, pause, or stop.
- ☐ **Identify** operating bottlenecks and work that depends too heavily on the owner.
- ☐ **Update** needed processes, templates, service standards, and responsibilities.
- ☐ **Review** emergency, supplier, equipment, cybersecurity, and data-continuity risks.
- ☐ **Confirm** licenses, filings, taxes, insurance, contracts, and records are current.
- ☐ **Record** what the business will continue, improve, stop, and start next quarter.
- ☐ **Select** three to five next-quarter priorities and assign an owner and deadline to each.

Months 10–12: Prepare for Year Two

- ☐ **Review year one:** compare the original plan with actual audience, financial, operating, and capacity data and identify the strongest audiences, offerings, and channels.
- ☐ **Choose direction:** decide what to continue, improve, stop, or expand.
- ☐ Set year-two goals: establish applicable revenue or funding, margin, cash, audience, mission, and operating goals; then create a budget and rolling cash plan.
- ☐ **Build the action plan:** select three to five priorities and assign each an owner, measure, deadline, and first action.
- ☐ **Prepare to scale safely:** test whether hiring, equipment, space, or debt addresses a proven constraint and update critical processes to reduce owner dependence.
- ☐ **Protect and reflect:** review cybersecurity, emergency, supplier, and continuity plans; schedule annual legal, tax, insurance, and financial reviews; and document wins and lessons.

PRIORITY	MEASURE	OWNER	DEADLINE	FIRST ACTION
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Important: This checklist is a planning tool, not legal, tax, accounting, insurance, or employment advice. Requirements vary by business activity, structure, and location. Verify applicable obligations with the appropriate agencies and qualified professionals.