

One Year Checklist for Entrepreneurs

Starting your own business is not something to be rushed into. Careful, advanced planning can ensure the success of your venture. Below is a suggested one-year plan.

One Year Before Start-Up

- Refine your ideas in writing. Determine exactly where you want to go.
- Decide what business you want to start. Be specific in your business definition.
- Assess the impact on your family and personal life. How will this affect your relationships? Will your family support the use of finances and time?
- Begin research. You must determine if there is a need for your product/service. This research can be performed by students, professionals, or even on your own.
- Build your personal skills by taking formal management/business courses. Check with our local technical college.
- Contact the SBDC for assistance in writing a business plan.
- Contact the GDOL for information on educational seminars on labor/safety issues.

Six Months Before Start-Up

- Determine the focus of your business. What do you want to specialize in? It is easier to excel at one area than at many.
- Start writing your business plan.
- Define your target markets. Who is your intended clientele? Who should you aim your advertising towards?
- Research business and trade organizations. Most areas of business have agencies and organizations set up to facilitate business. Take advantage of what these groups have to offer.
- Seek the best location for your business. How much space do you need? Would your business be better suited downtown or in a rural part of the country? Is a store-front location even needed or can you work from home? Location can make or break a business. Conduct the search on your own or contact a real estate agent.

Four Months Before Start-Up

- Name your business. Be careful in deciding on a name and be aware that someone may already be using the name. Have a few back-up ideas. You can check to see if a name is being used by contacting the Georgia Office of the Secretary of State.
- Select business location. After seeking out several possible locations, now is the time to choose one. Make sure that the location you choose is within your budget.
- Select outside advisors. This will be a very hectic time. It will be beneficial to have people on whom you can call to listen to your ideas,

problems, and plans. These people will provide you with guidance, constructive criticism, and feedback. They should be people experienced and knowledgeable in business.

- Set up a network of mentors. Select people who can help you by giving you insight and ideas.
- Choose your business' legal form. Will you be a partnership, sole proprietorship, or corporation? Legal form should be chosen very carefully as it can impact your business in many ways.
- Set up bookkeeping, accounting and office systems. How are you going to operate your office? If you are going to keep your own books, then you need to learn or refresh your skills. Are you going to hire a bookkeeping/bookkeeping firm?
- Seek outside demographic information. Gather secondary information.
- Work on your business plan.

Three Months Before Start-Up

- Determine your cash needs. How much money do you need for start-up? What will be your monthly variable and fixed costs? What is your break-even point? These are all questions that must be answered. You must estimate your cash flow.
- Review preliminary financial objectives. How much profit do you expect to make? Are you planning on making investments? What is your intended cash flow?
- Decide on your pricing strategy. After determining your variable and fixed costs, decide what your markup rate will be. You will also need to consider demand and competitive factors in setting your price.
- Forecast sales. Contact the SBDC or others in your field to help you forecast accurately.
- Determine your company's employee needs. How many people do you need on your staff? This is important to decide as it affects your requirements for insurance, etc.
- Project our cash flow. Write out an estimated statement of all revenues and expenditures. This statement should cover one calendar year. Also project your net cash flow for the entire year.
- Work on your business plan.

Two Months Before Start-Up

- Prepare your marketing plan. How are you going to market your product? Are you going to use publicity? Are you going to use paid advertisement? You must decide how you will go about introducing your business to the public.
- Get your business license. (See occupational tax).
- Review non-financial objectives (Image, legal questions). How do you want the public to see your business? Are you a family establishment or geared more toward adults? What form is your business taking? Do you have all legal documents needed?

- Prepare a preliminary balance sheet. Contact the SBDC for assistance.
- Secure necessary financing. Whether through a private lender or through other sources, you must obtain the necessary amount of start-up capital.
- Secure insurance coverage if applicable. (See Labor/Safety).
- Determine advertising, promotion, and public relations strategies.
- Order opening inventories. Talk to your suppliers for estimated opening needs.
- Complete improvements to your facility.
- Start your hiring process. (See Labor/Safety).
- Refine your business plan.

One Month Before Start-Up

- Fine tune your cash flow budget.
- Prepare for your grand opening. The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce can be of assistance in planning this event. Be creative but practical.
- Set up your office, display areas, etc. Have everything exactly as you want it. The last few days before opening are not the time to do this. The look of your store or office sets the tone for your business. You should put thought and time into it.
- Review your final checklist.
- Hire your staff. (See Labor/Safety).
- Make sure everything works. It is better to find out that your equipment does not work in advance. In that case, you can make any necessary repairs and be ready to open your doors on time.
- Implement marketing, promotion and opening plans. This will be a good time to start advertising in local newspapers, radio, and television if your budget permits. Remember: Word of mouth is your most powerful publicity! It's also the least expensive. Spread the word.

Start-Up and After

- Budget your time. As a new business owner your time will be precious. Schedule your time wisely. It is important to get the maximum out of the time you have available. You might consider reading some time management materials or speaking with someone who you think manages time wisely.
- Continuously update your product/service. What is good about your product? Make it better. What doesn't work with your product? Eliminate the problem as much as possible. If people patronize your business for the original project, an improved product can only increase that.
- LISTEN to your customers, advisors and vendors. The customers are your cash flow. It is important to gather their opinions and put them to use. Their ideas can be helpful in updating your product. LISTEN to your advisors. You asked them to advise you for a reason. Let them guide you.

LISTEN to your vendors. These vendors have been in the business much longer than you have. They can possibly provide you with money-saving or moneymaking ideas.

- Check cash flow budget against actual performance.
- Maintain good communications with your bankers and vendors. By keeping the lines of communication open you are helping yourself. Should you need their help in the future, you will be more likely to receive it.
- Continue to improve the 5c's of credit (Character, Collateral, Capacity, Capital, and Condition).
- Work with investors. Make sure you are in contact with them. Make sure that you understand the conditions of your repayment. When are payments due? Make sure you fulfill all obligations to investors. You may need to call them again someday.
- Check cost of living budget. If you are drawing money from the company for living expenses, be sure to take only what is necessary. Stick tightly to your budget.
- **CONSIDER DELAYING YOUR OFFICIAL GRAND OPENING/RIBBON CUTTING UNTIL YOU'VE BEEN IN BUSINESS FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS.** If you do, you can make sure that you've worked the "bugs" out and that all is running smoothly.