

SANTA BARBARA ENTREPRENEUR

Small Business Guide

The complete reference handbook
for small to medium enterprises

- Business growth and development
- Effective business planning and strategy
- Recent changes to workplace relations legislation
- Risk management
- Internet and e-commerce
- Successful marketing



Starting and Growing a Business from A to Z

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U.S. Small Business Administration Business Guide



Plan your business

You've got a great idea. Now, make a plan to turn it into a great business.



Launch your business

Turn your business into a reality. Register, file, and start doing business.



Manage your business

Run your business like a boss. Master day-to-day operations and prepare for success.



Grow your business

When business is good, it's time to expand. Find new funding, locations, and customers.

Related: [10 Tips for Starting a Small Business](#)

1. Evaluate yourself.

Why do you want to start a business? Use this question to guide what kind of business you want to start. If you want extra money, maybe you should start a [side hustle](#). If you want more freedom, maybe it's time to leave your 9-to-5 job and start something new.

Once you have the reason, start asking yourself even more questions to help you figure out the type of business you should start, and if you have what it takes.

- What skills do you have?
- Where does your passion lie?
- Where is your area of expertise?
- How much can you afford to spend, knowing that most businesses fail?
- How much capital do you need?
- What sort of lifestyle do you want to live?
- Are you even [ready to be an entrepreneur](#)?

Be brutally honest with your answers. Once you make the decision to start a business, take business training courses to prepare. It will give you the insight and overview of how to do it right in an organized manner which will help you avoid pitfalls, wasted time and contribute to your overall success.

Related: [Free Online Learning Classes of How to Start a Business](#)

2. Think of a business idea.

Do you already have a killer [business idea](#)? If so, congratulations, you can proceed to the next section. If not, there are a ton of ways to start brainstorming for a good idea. An article on *Entrepreneur*, "[8 Ways to Come Up With a Business Idea](#)," helps people break down potential business ideas. Here are a few pointers from the article:

- **Ask yourself what's next.** What technology or advancement is coming soon, and how will that change the business landscape as we know it? Can you get ahead of the curve?
- **Fix something that bugs you.** People would rather have less of a bad thing than more of a good thing. If your business can fix a problem for your customers, they'll thank you for it.
- **Apply your skills to an entirely new field.** Many businesses and industries do things one way because that's the way they've always been done. In those cases, a fresh set of eyes from a new perspective can make all the difference.
- **Use the better, cheaper, faster approach.** Do you have a business idea that isn't completely new? If so, think about the current offerings and focus on how you can create something better, cheaper or faster.
- **Identify your strengths and weaknesses**
 - Conduct a SWOT analysis on yourself
- Come up with a business idea that caters to your strengths
- How to start inventing things (or how to find something to invent)
- Define what success looks like for you
- Do your research: What are popular businesses today?

Related: [Assess the Viability of Your Idea](#)

Also, go out and meet people and ask them questions, seek advice from other entrepreneurs, research ideas online or use whatever method makes the most sense to you.

And, if you've exhausted all your options and you're still stuck, here are [55 great business options](#) you can start.

Related: [63 Businesses to Start for Under \\$10,000](#)

3. Do market research.

Is anyone else already doing what you want to start doing? If not, is there a good reason why?

Start researching your potential rivals or partners within the market by using [this guide](#). It breaks down the objectives you need to complete with your research and the methods you can use to do just that. For example, you can conduct interviews by telephone or face to face. You can also offer surveys or questionnaires that ask questions like “What factors do you consider when purchasing this product or service?” and “What areas would you suggest for improvement?”

Just as importantly, it explains three of the most common mistakes people make when starting their market research, which are:

1. Using only secondary research.
2. Using only online resources.
3. Surveying only the people you know.

The adage goes, “ideas are a dime a dozen”—but what about good ideas? How do you really know you’ve hit upon something that’s going to work on all levels?

We use the lean planning methodology to figure this out. Of course, you may also want to start by getting out and talking to real people—do they *really* want a fancy Basque restaurant in their neighborhood or is another donut shop going to be more to their taste?

- Define the “problem” your business is solving
- Summarize the “solution” your business offers
 - How urgently do people need what you are selling?
 - Will your business continue to be relevant as time passes? How will you adapt?
- Define your target market
 - Define your ideal customer
 - What’s your market size?
 - How easy is it to acquire a customer, and how much will it cost?
 - Figure out the best place to set up shop

- What advantages does your solution have over your competitors?
 - How much money and effort will it cost to deliver value?
 - Do you know your industry?
- Outline the team that will help you execute your idea
 - What key responsibilities will each team member have?
 - Will team members share ownership of the business?
- Create a basic financial plan
 - What up-front investment will you need before you can begin?
 - Estimate your basic expenses and forecast sales to ensure that you can make a profit with your business
- Map out business milestones or goals and when you plan to achieve them
 - How long will it take to get to market?
- Validate your idea
 - Interview potential customers to ensure that they have the problem you are trying to solve
 - Interview potential customers to validate that your solution is something your customers will pay for
 - Determine if your initial price points will work for your customers

* While we advise students and new entrepreneurs to do market research before they start, we'd like to clarify that you should not let **“doing market research”** hold you up if you already know your market. The reality is, the vast majority of real startups are driven by people who know their market from experience and who are ready to bet the farm on it! Market research does not have to be a part of the business planning process. According to Tim Berry, *“If you know your market, move on!”*

Related: [How to Do Market Research for Small Business: 8 Affordable Market Research Techniques](#)

4. Get feedback.

Let people interact with your product or service and see what their take is on it. A fresh set of eyes can help point out a problem you might have missed. Plus, these people will become your first brand advocates, especially if you listen to their input and they like the product.

One of the easiest ways to utilize feedback is to focus on “The Lean Startup” approach (read [more about it here](#)), but it involves three basic pillars: prototyping, experimenting and pivoting. By pushing out a product, getting feedback and then adapting before you push out the next product, you can constantly improve and make sure you stay relevant.

Just realize that some of that advice, solicited or not, will be good. Some of it won't be. That's why you should have a plan on how to receive feedback.

Here are [six steps for handling feedback](#):

1. **Stop!** Your brain will probably be in an excited state when receiving feedback, and it might start racing to bad conclusions. Slow down and take the time to consider carefully what you've just heard.
2. **Start by saying ‘thank you.’** People who give you negative feedback won't expect you to thank them for it, but doing so will probably make them respect you and encourage them to continue be honest in the future.
3. **Look for the grain of truth.** If someone doesn't like one idea, it doesn't mean they hate everything you've just said. Remember that these people are trying to help, and they might just be pointing out a smaller problem or solution that you should look into further.
4. **Seek out the patterns.** If you keep hearing the same comments, then it's time to start sitting up and taking notice.
5. **Listen with curiosity.** Be willing to enter a conversation where the customer is in control.
6. **Ask questions.** Figure out why someone liked or didn't like something. How could you make it better? What would be a better solution?

Also, one way to help you get through negative feedback is to create a "[wall of love](#)," where you can post all of the positive messages you've received. Not only will this wall of love inspire you, but you can use these messages later when you begin selling your product or service. Positive reviews online and word-of-mouth testimonials can help make a big difference.

5. Brand your business.

A strong brand is the [key to customer loyalty and higher sales](#). If you think it's just for big business, think again; a brand is critical for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

This is where all the hard work pays off. Now you know a bit more about your target audience, you've got the opportunity—through your brand—to grab their attention. And of course, to have fun doing it!

- [Choose a name for your business](#) or [choose a brand name you know you can trademark](#)
- Decide on your “brand message,” also known as your [unique selling proposition or value proposition](#)
 - [Develop a tagline](#)
 - [Identify your brand's “tone of voice”](#)—the heart and soul of all your written communication, your voice is what you say and how you say it
- [Define what your brand looks like](#)
 - [Choose a color scheme](#)
 - [Choose your fonts](#)
- [Create a logo](#)

6. Make it official.

Related: [Set up Your Corporate Structure](#)

Get all of the legal aspects out of the way early. That way, you don't have to worry about someone taking your big idea, screwing you over in a partnership or suing you for something you never saw coming. A quick checklist of things to shore up might include:

1. Business structure ([LLC, corporation or a partnership, to name a few.](#))
2. Business name
3. Register your business
4. Federal tax ID
5. State tax ID
6. Permits ([more on permits here](#))

7. License
8. Necessary bank account
9. [Trademarks](#), [copyrights](#) or [patents](#)

Related: [IRS Small Business and Self-Employment Tax Center](#)

While some things you can do on your own, it's best to consult with a lawyer when starting out, so you can make sure you've covered everything that you need.

Here are [some questions you can ask](#) when looking for a small-business lawyer.

Related: [Business License, Fees and Permits for Santa Barbara](#)

7. Write your business plan.

A [business plan](#) is a written description of how your business will evolve from when it starts to the finish product.

As angel investor and tech-company founder Tim Berry [wrote on Entrepreneur](#), "You can probably cover everything you need to convey in 20 to 30 pages of text plus another 10 pages of appendices for monthly projections, management resumes and other details. If you've got a plan that's more than 40 pages long, you're probably not summarizing very well."

Related: [Use Our Template and Write A Business Plan](#)

Here's what [we suggest](#) should be in your business plan:

1. **Title page.** Start with name the name of your business, which is harder than it sounds. [This article](#) can help you avoid common mistakes when picking.
2. **Executive summary.** This is a high-level summary of what the plan includes, often touching on the company description, the problem the business is solving, the solution and why now. (Here's [what you should include in the summary](#) and how you can [make it appeal to investors](#).)
3. **Business description.** What kind of business do you want to start? What does your industry look like? What will it look like in the future?
4. **Market strategies.** What is your target market, and how can you best sell to that market? Test your marketing channels to find which work for your type of business and customer base
5. **Competitive analysis.** What are the strengths and weakness of your competitors? How will you beat them?

6. **Design and development plan.** What is your product or service and how will it develop? Then, create a budget for that product or service.
7. **Operations and management plan.** How does the business function on a daily basis?
8. **Finance factors.** Where is the money coming from? When? How? What sort of projections should you create and what should you take into consideration?
9. **Business Expansion.** Always build growth strategies initially into your business plan so you are not left scrambling when it becomes time to grow. Create scalability and look for ways to adapt, incorporate and innovate within your industry or sector.

For each question, you can spend between one to three pages. Keep in mind, the business plan is a living, breathing document and as time goes on and your business matures, you will be updating it.

Related: [Research Your Business and Do Competitor Analysis](#)

8. Finance your business.

There are many different ways to get the resources you need to start your business. [Angel investor Martin Zwilling](#), whose business Startup Professionals provides services and products for startups and small businesses, recommends [10 of the most reliable ways to fund your business](#). Take a look and consider your own resources, circumstances and life state to figure out which one works best for you.

1. **Fund your startup yourself.** Bootstrapping your business might take longer, but the good part is that you control your own destiny (and equity).
2. **Pitch your needs to friends and family.** It can be hard to separate business from personal relationships, but if you're considering asking for a loan, [here's a resource](#) you can use to make it as straightforward as possible.
3. **Request a small-business grant.** Start by checking out [our guide to small-business grants](#). Then, head over to [Grants.gov](#), which is a searchable, online directory of more than 1,000 federal grant programs. It might be a long process, but it doesn't cost you any equity.
4. **Start a crowdfunding campaign online.** Sometimes power is in numbers, and a bunch of small investments can add up to something major. If you think your business might be a fit for something like Kickstarter or Indiegogo, you should read up on [10 of the best-crowdfunded businesses ever](#) or check out the [most popular crowdfunding websites](#).
5. **Apply to local angel investor groups.** Online platforms such as [Gust](#) and [AngelList](#) and local networking can help you find potential investors who relate to your industry and passion.

6. **Solicit venture capital investors.** VCs typically look for big opportunities from proven teams that need a million dollars or more, so you should have some traction before approaching them.
7. **Join a startup incubator or accelerator.** These companies are designed to help new or startup businesses get to the next level. Most provide free resources, including office facilities and consulting, along with networking opportunities and pitch events. Some, also provide seed funding as well.
8. **Negotiate an advance from a strategic partner or customer.** If someone wants your product or service bad enough to pay for it, there's a chance they'll want it bad enough to fund it, too. Variations on this theme include early licensing or [white-labeling](#) agreements.
9. **Trade equity or services for startup help.** For example, you could support a computer system for office tenants in exchange for free office space. You might not get paid for this, but you won't have to pay for an office, either, and a penny saved is a penny earned.
10. **Seek a bank loan or line of credit.** Here are [10 questions you should ask](#) before applying for a bank loan, including whether you will qualify. If you do meet the requirements, a good place to start for loan opportunities is the [Small Business Administration](#). Depending on whether you are currently in business and have some equipment, cash flow or other assets, there are [business loan options](#) aside from SBA loans.

Related: [7 Seed-Stage Funding Sources That Might Finance Your Startup](#)

9. Develop your product or service.

After all the work you've put into starting your business, it's going to feel awesome to actually see your idea come to life. But keep in mind, it takes a village to create a product. If you want to make an app and you're not an engineer, you will need to reach out to a technical person. Or if you need to mass-produce an item, you will have to team up with a manufacturer.

Here is a [seven-step checklist](#) -- including finding a manufacturer and pricing strategies -- you can use for your own product development. A major point the article highlights is that when you're actually crafting the product, you should focus on two things: simplicity and quality. Your best option isn't necessarily to make the cheapest product, even if it lowers manufacturing cost. Also, you need to make sure the product can grab someone's attention quickly.

When you are ready to do product development and outsource some of the tasks make sure you:

1. **Retain control of your product and learn constantly.** If you leave the development up to someone else or another firm without supervising, you might not get the thing you envisioned.
2. **Implement checks and balances to reduce your risk.** If you only hire one freelance engineer, there's a chance that no one will be able to check their work. If you go the freelance route, use multiple engineers so you don't have to just take someone at their word.
3. **Hire specialists, not generalists.** Get people who are awesome at the exact thing you want, not a jack-of-all-trades type.
4. **Don't put all your eggs in one basket.** Make sure you don't lose all of your progress if one freelancer leaves or if a contract falls through.
5. **Manage product development to save money.** Rates can vary for engineers depending on their specialties, so make sure you're not paying an overqualified engineer when you could get the same end result for a much lower price.

To help you have peace of mind, start learning as much as you can about the production, so you can improve the process and your hiring decisions as time goes along.

This process will be very different for [service-focused entrepreneurs](#), but no less important. You have several skills that people are willing to pay you for right now, but those skills can be hard to quantify. How can you establish yourself and your abilities? You might consider creating a portfolio of your work -- create a website to show your artwork if you're an artist, writing if you're a writer or design if you're a designer.

Also, make sure you have the necessary certificates or educational requirements, so that when someone inquires about your service, you're ready to jump at a good opportunity.

Related: [105 Service Businesses to Start Today](#)

10. Start building your team.

To scale your business, you are going to need to hand off responsibilities to other people. You need a team.

Whether you need a partner, employee or freelancer, these three tips can help you find a good fit:

1. **State your goals clearly.** Make sure everyone understands the vision and their role within that mission at the very start.
2. **Follow hiring protocols.** When starting the hiring process you need to take a lot of things into consideration, from screening people to asking the right questions and having the proper forms. Here is a [more in-depth guide to help you](#).

3. **Establish a strong company culture.** What makes a great culture? What are some of the building blocks? You can see our list of [10 examples of companies with great cultures](#), but keep in mind that you don't need to have Google's crazy office space to instill a positive atmosphere. That's because a great culture is more about respecting and empowering employees through multiple channels, including training and mentorship, than it is about decor or ping-pong tables. In fact, office perks can turn out to be [more like traps than real benefits](#).

Related: [How to Build a Great Small Business Team](#)

11. Find a location.

This could mean an office or a store. Your priorities will differ depending on need, but here are [10 basic things to consider](#):

1. **Style of operation.** Make sure your location is consistent with your particular style and image.
2. **Demographics.** Start by considering who your customers are. How important is their proximity to your location? If you're a retail store that relies on the local community, this is vital. For other business models, it might not be.
3. **Foot traffic.** If you need people to come into your store, make sure that store is easy to find. Remember: even the best retail areas have dead spots.
4. **Accessibility and parking.** Is your building accessible? Don't give customers a reason to go somewhere else because they don't know where to park.
5. **Competition.** Sometimes having competitors nearby is a good thing. Other times, it's not. You've done the market research, so you know which is best for your business.
6. **Proximity to other businesses and services.** This is more than just about foot traffic. Look at how nearby businesses can enrich the quality of your business as a workplace, too.
7. **Image and history of the site.** What does this address state about your business? Have other businesses failed there? Does the location reflect the image you want to project?
8. **Ordinances.** Depending on your business, these could help or hinder you. For example, if you're starting a daycare center, ordinances that state no one can build a liquor store nearby might add a level of safety for you. Just make sure you're not the one trying to build the liquor store.
9. **The building's infrastructure.** Especially if you're looking at an older building or if you're starting an online business, make sure the space can support your high-tech needs. If you're getting serious about a building, you might want to hire an engineer to check out the state of the place to get an objective evaluation.

10. **Rent, utilities and other costs.** Rent is the biggest facilities expense, but check out the utilities, as well, and whether they're included in the lease or not. You don't want to start out with one price and find out it's going to be more later.

Once you know what to look for and it's time to start searching for a place that fits all of your qualifications, these [four tips](#) can help.

1. **Think on your own timeframe.** Landlords are starting to offer shorter-term office rentals. Don't get stuck in a long-term lease if it doesn't make sense for your business.
2. **Play the whole field.** There are all sorts of places to use -- co-working spaces, office business centers, sublets and more. Keep your options open.
3. **Click around town.** You might be able to find the perfect place by using online resources.
4. **Do the deal on your terms.** Again, you have options. Don't get roped into something that makes you uncomfortable.

After you have a location, you can focus on the aesthetic. You can check out [a few design ideas here](#).

Related: [5 Best Online Businesses to Start This Year \(Infographic\)](#)

12. Build a website and optimize it. (Critical)

Nothing is more important for your business than your website. If you are not familiar with how to build one, check out this [guide](#). Personally, Word press is the platform you want to use unless you have specific reasons for not doing so. It's fast and easy and very user friendly. You can add plugins to dial it in for just about anything. Most of all, it doesn't require coding skills. I also recommend using [Hostgator](#) for hosting and [Namecheap](#) for domain services. If you ever run into issues or need help, their customer service is excellent. Additionally, I always recommend [Fiverr](#) and [Upwork](#) for all the ins and outs like logo design, content, etc... Your website is your digital storefront and how people perceive what your business is all about. It's the face of your business and very critical. In order to build a website correctly it needs to conform to several key factors:

1. **Make the theme responsive.** Mobile search is the primary way people are searching to find your business. You need a responsive theme to do this so it conforms to the mobile devices on the various platforms.
2. **Consider setting up a separate mobile website.** This trend is becoming more and more popular and moving towards a necessity if you want to stay ahead of the game.
3. **Optimize your website for the search engine.** Of all the things you can do, this is probably the most critical. If your site structure is not efficient and you not aligned

with the format Google needs it to be, you simply won't rank and you won't be found. You also need to make sure that you use NAP (Name, Address and Phone Number on your site)

- 4. On-Page SEO.** Learn it. Do it. This is part of site structure, but a huge category in its own right. This primes all of the pages and posts on your website to seamlessly connect with Google to rank and index your website. Every time you create a page or a post you need to draft it using on-page SEO. Once understood, it's just like writing a letter in a format and style that the receiver recognizes as acceptable. Word press plugins such as [Yoast SEO](#) will do the job, you just have to fill out additional fields and make adjustments until it gives you the green light.
- 5. Site Audit.** Once you've completed your site, run a site audit to see how it performs. A critical component is page load speed. You can lose a lot of traffic if your pages take too much time to load. You can further optimize your site's performance.

Making sure your website is dialed in across the board is of paramount importance. Yes, this is a time intensive process. It has to be done. By building it with precision, you are now ready to connect it with Google and adding in the local SEO component. These two work together in symbiosis. If they are not completely optimized and synced up, you will not high-performance results! You can always outsource this aspect too.

Related: [The Ultimate Guide to Site Structure](#)

13. Local SEO (Even More Critical)

Putting it all together and creating a local online presence is what it's all about. By adhering to local search rank factors of using Google My Business, anchor text, Google reviews, NAP, etc, you can achieve getting into the coveted Google 3-pack listing. This creates visibility and will lead to more customers finding your business. There are a ton of variables and information related to local search rank factors, but once you understand how it works it's little more than doing the work to dial it all in:

- 1. Google My Business Listing.** Optimize and complete your listing thoroughly not only to have the most impact in Google, but also to allow your customers to understand what your business is all about and what you stand for.
- 2. Google Reviews.** These are huge. The more you get and the better the review the more it will not only help you getting in the Google local 3-pack, but customers will flock to your business with great reviews. You also need to reply to customer reviews quickly and in a certain way. Additionally, Google reviews containing the city name and the state along with specific keywords will further propel the 3-pack success.
- 3. Submit To Local Directories.** This is a time intensive process, but it is an essential one. Get your business out there so it can be found. By doing so, it will create no-

follow and do-follow backlinks which will increasing your site's visibility in local search engine rankings

4. **Reputation Management.** With the positive reviews, come the negative reviews. It's how you reply and how you improve your product and or service is what matters. There are also reputation management companies you can use to assist you with this aspect.

Take the time to go through and systematically learn the [local search ranking factors](#) and local SEO. I cannot stress enough how important this part is in creating a local online presence. This is a time intensive process, but it can be done with little to no cost and you will forever reap the benefits of doing so. You can also outsource this aspect, but is can be expensive.

Related: [Guide to Local SEO](#)

14. SEO (search engine optimization). – Off-Page SEO

SEO is an organic constantly changing component utilized for the purpose of ranking your website in Google by the various keywords in relation to other websites attempting to rank for the same keywords. It's such an expansive topic; it really doesn't make sense to even try to get into it. The main things you need to know are how do the other aspects of digital marketing and local SEO relate, overlap and influence:

1. **Backlinks.** There are two types: nofollow and dofollow. When these are created linking to other websites that are related, are authority and have a higher ranking in Google, your website ranking will increase.
2. **Anchor Text.** These are huge. **Anchor text** is the visible characters and words that hyperlinks display when linking to another document or location on the web. It usually appears as blue underlined **text**, but you change your website's link colors and styles through your HTML or CSS. It's SEO best practice to write anchor link text that's descriptive and relevant to the page you're linking. It's best to have a strong branded **anchor text profile**, so you can easily build natural looking inner page links without worry of penalty by Google.
3. **Keyword Research.** This is a time intensive process, but it is an essential one. Get your business out there so it can be found. By doing so, it will create nofollow and dofollow backlinks which will increasing your site's visibility in local search engine rankings
4. **Types of search results.** We've all seen the first page search results when you time in a keyword or phrase in Google. Organic results are those that get displayed in the top ten. Really, only the top couple of results get all the traffic

5. **SEO Title and Meta tag description.** These are used in on-page SEO when creating pages and posts. They are viewed in the results when a keyword or phrase is searched. The SEO title is a clickable and is meant to be an accurate and concise description of a page's content. The meta tags and snippets of text that describe a page's content but do not appear on the page itself. Other techniques such as rich snippets and schema can be used to make a search result stand by giving a star ranking and/or number of reviews, etc.

If you have the time, go through and systematically learn the [search engine optimization](#). Once you have a general understanding of this component it is easier to see how SEO, Local SEO and Digital Marketing all fit together. This is a time intensive process, but it can be done with little to no cost and you will forever reap the benefits of doing so as SEO is a continuous process. I recommend outsourcing SEO as this is an extremely time consuming and constantly changing practice. There are reputable, inexpensive and [trustworthy companies](#) out there, but they are few and far between. The cost of SEO is one of the most prohibitive barriers in creating an online presence. Do as much of it yourself as possible will greatly help out, and where there are gaps, definitely outsource. Putting out amazing content and using social media channels, representing your brand and your voice will help rank your site and drive traffic to it, but using an SEO professional will allow you to create specific anchor text and a specific anchor text profile which is an essential part. These two aspects are very important in regards to local search ranking factors and dominating the Google 3-pack business listings.

Related: [Beginner's Guide to SEO](#)

15. Deploy marketing strategies.

Putting it all together and creating a local online presence is what it's all about. By adhering to local search rank factors of using Google My Business, anchor text, Google reviews, NAP, etc, you can achieve getting into the coveted Google 3-pack listing. This creates visibility and will lead to more customers finding your business. There are a ton of variables and information related to local search rank factors, but once you understand how it works it's little more than doing the work to dial it all in:

1. **Create Your Brand and Your Voice.** Find out who your customers are and how you want to connect with them. Your blog posts should be a true reflection of what your business is all about and how it speaks to your customers in a way that ultimately translates to sales.
2. **Social Media Marketing.** Mostly, this is Facebook Ads which allow you to drill down on specific demographics to really hone in on your target audience. It's also a great tool for market research.

3. **Search Engine Marketing.** You're basically using Google Adwords to buy by placement in the search engine results and pay for clicks linking to your site.
4. **Content Marketing.** One of the most effective marketing strategies to connect with our customer base in all phases of the buying cycle and move them down the funnel from initial inquiry to buyers of product or service. Create buyer personas which allow you to determine exactly who your customers are and speak to them directly. You can use services such as [Hubspot](#) or [Marketo](#). Take your time to really understand how this works; it is amazingly effective depending on your type of product or service. It can also be on the more expensive side.
5. **Email Marketing.** A tried and true marketing approach. The goal here is to gather emails by a variety of different ways in order to remarket your customer base. Always use opt-out and unsubscribe. Otherwise it can really frustrate customers and lead to reputation management issues.
6. **Test Your Marketing Channels.** Further optimize your marketing channels in terms of effectiveness and ROI. Take a look at what your competitors are doing so you're not reinventing the wheel. Dial in your marketing channels and continue evaluate for effectiveness and efficiency.

Creating your website, optimizing for local search rank factors and combining all of your marketing strategies into symbiotic unison is the key to creating a connection between your business and your customers through a digital interface. Utilizing these components in an efficient manner will give you a competitive advantage in today's digital marketplace.

16. Start getting some sales.

No matter your product or industry, your business's future is going to depend on revenue and sales. [Steve Jobs](#) knew this -- it's why, when he was starting Apple, he spent day after day calling investors [from his garage](#).

There are a ton of different sales strategies and techniques you can employ, but here are four tenets to live by:

7. **Listen.** "When you listen to your clients/customers, you find out what they want and need, and how to make that happen," says investor and entrepreneur [John Rampton](#).
8. **Ask for a commitment, but don't be pushy about it.** You can't be too shy to ask for a next step or to close a sale, but you also can't make customers feel as though you're forcing them into a sale.
9. **Don't be afraid of hearing "no."** As former door-to-door salesman (and now co-founder of software business [Pipedrive](#)) [Timo Rein said](#), "Most people are too polite. They let you make your pitch even if they have no interest in buying. And that's a problem of its own. Time is your most important resource."

10. **Make it a priority.** As entrepreneurial wizard [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) said, “Actually creating revenue, and running a profitable business, is a good strategy for business. Where are we that people think users or visits or time on site is the proxy to a successful business?”

But how do you actually make those sales? Start by identifying targets who want your product or service. Find early adopters of your business, [grow your customer base](#) or [put out ads](#) to find people who fit your business. Then, figure out the right sales [funnel](#) or [strategy](#) that can convert these leads into revenue.

Related: [63 Businesses to Start for Under \\$10,000](#)

17. Grow your business.

There are a million different ways to grow. You could acquire another business, start targeting a new market, expand your offerings and more. But, no growth plan will matter if you don't have the two key attributes that all growing companies have in common.

First, they have a plan to market themselves. They use [social media effectively](#) through organic, influencer or paid campaigns. They have an email list and know how to use it. They understand exactly who they need to target -- either online or off -- with their marketing campaigns.

Then, once they have a new customer, they understand how to retain them. You've probably heard many people state that the easiest customer to sell to is the one you already have. Your existing customers have already signed up for your email list, added their credit card information to your website and tested what you have to offer. In doing so, they're starting a relationship with you and your brand. Help them feel as good about that relationship as possible.

Start by utilizing [these strategies](#), which include investing in your customer service and getting personal, but realize your work will never be done. You'll constantly be competing for these customers in the marketplace, and you can never simply rest on your laurels. Keep researching the market, hiring good people and making a superior product and you'll be on your way to building the empire you always dreamed about.

Additionally, it is always wise to use a business management consulting approach to streamline and create ultimate efficiency within your business. A [growth business plan](#) is usually drafted to outline the process effectively. Once the refined and growth strategies implemented your business is ready to take off to new heights in a scalable fashion.

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