**How to Write a Business Plan**

A business plan is an essential roadmap for business success. This living, breathing document generally projects 3-5 years ahead and outlines the route a company intends to take to reach, maintain and grow revenues. A well thought out plan also helps you to step-back and think objectively about the key elements of your business venture and informs your decision-making.

The following guides offer tips that will help you research and develop a winning plan.

**Essential Elements of a Good Business Plan**

What are the key elements of a business plan? From market analysis to your company financials, this guide walks you through the essential components of your plan, including how to develop a funding request.

* [Business Plan Executive Summary](http://www.sba.gov/content/business-plan-executive-summary)

Your executive summary is a snapshot of your business plan as a whole and touches on your company profile and goals. This section offers tips on what to include and how to keep it brief and succinct.

* [Market Analysis](http://www.sba.gov/content/market-analysis)

Read about the specific industry, market and competitive analysis information you should conduct and include in your plan.

* [Company Description](http://www.sba.gov/content/company-description)

What do you do? What differentiates your business? Which markets do you serve? Get tips on how to present this information.

* [Organization & Management](http://www.sba.gov/content/organization-management)

All businesses are structured differently. Find out how best to describe your organization and its management structure, regardless of its size.

* [Marketing & Sales Management](http://www.sba.gov/content/marketing-sales-management)

How do you plan to market your business? What is your sales strategy? Read more about how to present this information in your plan.

* [Service or Product Line](http://www.sba.gov/content/service-or-product-line)

What do you sell? How does it benefit your customers? What is the product lifecycle? Do you plan R&D activities? Get tips on how to tell the "story" of your product or service.

* [Funding Request](http://www.sba.gov/content/funding-request)

If you are seeking funding for your business, find out what information you need to include in your plan to ensure success.

* [Financial Projections](http://www.sba.gov/content/financial-projections)

If you need funding, providing financial projections to back up your request is critical. Find out what information you need to include in your financial projections for your small business.

* [Appendix](http://www.sba.gov/content/appendix)

An appendix is optional, but a useful place to include information such as resumes, permits, leases, and so on. Find out what else you should include in your appendix.

**Business Plan Executive Summary**

The executive summary is often considered the most important section of a business plan. This section briefly tells your reader where your company is, where you want to take it, and why your business idea will be successful. If you are seeking financing, the executive summary is also your first opportunity to grab a potential investor’s interest.

The executive summary should highlight the strengths of your overall plan and therefore be the last section you write. However, it usually appears first in your business plan document.

**What to Include in Your Executive Summary**

Below are several key points that your executive summary should include. If you are an established business, be sure to include the following information:

* **The Mission Statement** – This explains what your business is all about. It should be between several sentences and a paragraph.
* **Company information –** Include a short statement that covers when your business was formed, the names of the founders and their roles, your number of employees, and your business location(s).
* **Growth highlights** – Include examples of company growth, such as financial or market highlights (for example, “XYZ Firm increased profit margins and market share year-over-year since its foundation). Graphs and charts can be helpful in this section.
* **Your Products/Services --** Briefly describe the products or services you provide.
* **Financial information** – If you are seeking financing, include any information about your current bank and investors.
* **Summarize future plans** – Explain where you would like to take your business.

With the exception of the mission statement, all of the information in the executive summary should be covered in a concise fashion and kept to one page. The executive summary is the first part of your business plan many people will see: therefore, each word should count.

**Funding Request**

If you are seeking funding for your business venture, use this section to outline your requirements.

Your funding request should include the following information:

* Your current funding requirement
* Any future funding requirements over the next five years
* How you intend to use the funds you receive: Is the funding request for capital expenditures? Working capital? Debt retirement? Acquisitions? Whatever it is, be sure to list it in this section.
* Any strategic financial situational plans for the future, such as: a buyout, being acquired, debt repayment plan, or selling your business. These areas are extremely important to a future creditor, since they will directly impact your ability to repay your loan(s).

When you are outlining your funding requirements, include the amount you want now and the amount you want in the future. Also include the time period that each request will cover, the type of funding you would like to have (e.g., equity, debt), and the terms that you would like to have applied.

To support your funding request you’ll also need to provide [historical and prospective financial information](http://www.sba.gov/../content/financials).

**Financial Projections**

Financials is **Part 8 of your business plan**. The financials should be developed after you've analyzed the market and set clear objectives. That's when you can allocate resources efficiently. The following is a list of the critical financial statements to include in your business plan packet.

**Historical Financial Data**

If you own an established business, you will be requested to supply historical data related to your company's performance. Most creditors request data for the last three to five years, depending on the length of time you have been in business.

The historical financial data you would want to include would be your company's income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow statements for each year you have been in business (usually for up to three to five years). Often creditors are also interested in any collateral that you may have that could be used to ensure your loan, regardless of the stage of your business.

**Prospective Financial Data**

All businesses, whether startup or growing, will be required to supply prospective financial data. Most of the time, creditors will want to see what you expect your company to be able to do within the next five years. Each year's documents should include forecasted income statements, balance sheets, cash flow statements, and capital expenditure budgets. For the first year, you should supply monthly or quarterly projections. After that, you can stretch it to quarterly and/or yearly projections for years two through five.

Make sure that your projections match your funding requests; creditors will be on the lookout for inconsistencies. It's much better if you catch mistakes before they do. If you have made assumptions in your projections, be sure to summarize what you have assumed. This way, the reader will not be left guessing.

Finally, include a short analysis of your financial information. Include a ratio and trend analysis for all of your financial statements (both historical and prospective). Since pictures speak louder than words, you may want to add graphs of your trend analysis (especially if they are positive).

**Finding a Niche: Make Your Business Plan Stand Out**

One of the first steps to business planning is determining your target market and why they would want to buy from you.

For example, is the market you serve the best one for your product or service? Are the benefits of dealing with your business clear and are they aligned with customer needs? If you unsure about the answers to any of these questions, take a step back and revisit the foundation of your business plan.

The following tips can help you clarify what your business has to offer, identify the right target market for it and build a niche for yourself.

**Be Clear About What You Have to Offer**

Ask yourself: Beyond basic products or services, what are you really selling? Consider this example: Your town probably has several restaurants all selling one fundamental product—food. But each is targeted at a different need or clientele.

One might be a drive-thru fast food restaurant, perhaps another sells pizza in a rustic Italian kitchen, and maybe there’s a fine dining seafood restaurant that specializes in wood-grilled fare. All these restaurants sell meals, but they sell them to targeted clientele that is looking for the unique qualities each has to offer. What they are *really* selling is a combination of product, value, ambience, and brand experience.

When starting a business, be sure to understand what makes your business unique. What needs does your product or service fulfill? What benefits and differentiators will help your business stand out from the crowd?

**Don’t Become a Jack of All Trades-Learn to Strategize**

It’s important to clearly define what you’re selling. You do not want to become a jack-of-all trades and master of none because this can have a negative impact on business growth. As a smaller business, it's often a better strategy to divide your products or services into manageable market niches. Small operations can then offer specialized goods and services that are attractive to a specific group of prospective buyers.

**Identify Your Niche**

Creating a niche for your business is essential to success. Often, business owners can identify a niche based on their own market knowledge, but it can also be helpful to conduct a market survey with potential customers to uncover untapped needs. During your research process, identify the following:

* Which areas your competitors are already well-established
* Which areas are being ignored by your competitors
* Potential opportunities for your business

**SBA lenders near 68005:**

1. **American National Bank**  
   *(0.3 miles)*  
   1314 Galvin Rd South  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005-3064  
   Phone: 402-291-7500
2. **Wells Fargo Bank, National Association**  
   *(0.4 miles)*  
   1101 Galvin Rd South  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005-3000  
   Phone: 402-536-5417  
   Fax: 402-536-5450
3. **Bank of Nebraska**  
   *(0.5 miles)*  
   923 Galvin Rd South  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005  
   Phone: 402-537-2600  
   Fax: 402-537-2601
4. **Great Western Bank**  
   *(0.6 miles)*  
   919 Galvin Rd South, Ste 100  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005-2257  
   Phone: 402-551-4310  
   Fax: 402-293-7401
5. **U.S. Bank National Association**  
   *(0.6 miles)*  
   801 Galvin Rd South  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005  
   Phone: 402-292-7832
6. **Great Southern Bank**  
   *(0.7 miles)*  
   1902 Harlan Dr  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005-3667  
   Phone: 402-291-2000  
   Fax: 402-291-4511
7. **SAC FCU**  
   *(1.0 miles)*  
   2204 Longo Dr  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68005  
   Phone: 402-829-6417  
   Fax: 402-293-9013
8. **SAC FCU**  
   *(1.4 miles)*  
   102 Nelson Dr  
   Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska 68113  
   Phone: 402-829-6229  
   Fax: 402-291-4959
9. **Great Western Bank**  
   *(1.6 miles)*  
   10504 S 15th St  
   Bellevue, Nebraska 68123  
   Phone: 402-551-4310  
   Fax: 402-952-6071
10. **Bank of the West**  
    *(1.7 miles)*  
    505 Galvin Rd North  
    Bellevue, Nebraska 68005-4647  
    Phone: 402-554-9425  
    Fax: 402-731-4424

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