



Startup Checklist

Before starting a business, you should ask yourself key questions. Find out which ones they are.

Evaluate the real potential of your idea

Good businesses usually start because a need of customers or potential customers is not being addressed: goods or services they want are either unavailable, seemingly impractical to supply or too expensive. Go out into the field and meet potential customers to get their impressions. The greater the need, the bigger the potential. But watch out: can your business idea be easily duplicated?

Why has nobody done it before?

You need to carefully study why others in the market are not addressing the needs you have identified - good reasons, bad reasons, every reason. You need to define a strategy that makes your business proposal sustainable and defensible against competition.

The right skills!

To make your idea work, you need to have a very good understanding of the market and the critical skills required to address it. Do extensive research to see if others have done the same thing elsewhere in the world, and analyse their success factors.

You are going on a long journey

You need savings because your business is unlikely to make a return in the beginning. Your immediate family might support you, but you need to prepare them for it emotionally and financially. Also, some business skills should be acquired before you start because you will not have time once you are operational. Be patient, plan and, when you are ready, put all of your energy into the task.



Lean Startup Checklist

The lean startup is a new approach challenging the conventional way of launching new businesses. Opposed to a three years planning based on unchallenged assumptions and forecast revenue in a static business plan, the lean startup put customers' feedbacks at the core of its deployment. In other words, the lean startup gives priority to experimentation rather than extensive planning, and to a progressive and iterative approach of product development rather than a conception that end up to a product ready to market.

For instance, if you are willing to launch a new restaurant based on a value proposition that offers high quality organic food, with the lean up strategy you don't want to wait to actually have this restaurant operational to test your value proposition's relevancy: get the organic food you want to sale and organize banquets that will allow you to test it and collect precious feed-backs from your family, friends or others guests, and then progressively make the moves up to opening the restaurant.

The main advantage of this new approach is that it allows entrepreneurs to build a process where failure and iterations are going to help building the right business model, whereas in a conventional approach failure can be fatal. Use this approach to build your business model on a strong understanding of your customers' need.

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The Business Model Canvas (cf. appendix) is a great way to have your business model's big picture and therefore challenging it. It allows you to express the fundamental hypothesis regarding the nine main elements your business model is going to be built on: key partners, key activities, key resources, value proposition, customer relationship, channels, customer segments, cost structure and revenue structure. Answer meticulously all the questions as you will challenge them later in the process. This work will enable you to identify the key elements of your value proposition and will allow you to identify the main characteristics of your product/service.

Create a minimum viable product and get feed-back

To start the process of learning as quickly as possible, you can operate a customer development that is focused on collecting feed-back from customers and/or final users: go on the field to meet customers, partners, final users (if different from customers) and get their impressions on first, your idea and then your product basics characteristics.



It means that you are going to build a minimum viable product (MVP) instead of a complete prototype ready to be marketed. It will allow you to test the fundamental business hypothesis you have expressed in the Business Model Canvas and see the reactions toward your product without wasting too much time, money and energy on building the most advanced version of your product. You will then eventually change direction and adapt your MVP based on these feed-backs.

Iterate until you develop the right value proposition

Now that you have a better understanding of your customer expectations you need to step up and challenge once again every hypothesis you have expressed at the beginning of the process. Then, adapt your MVP and business model, get new feed-back and start over and over, until you have found the right value propositions to offer to your customers. You can now create the first final version of your product and market it toward a clearly identified customers' segment.

In Conclusion

No methodology can guarantee success, but it appears that the lean start-up strategy reduces start up's failures rate because it offers a high degree of challenging each steps of your business creation.

Keep in mind that you want to:

1. Confront as soon as possible your product/service to the market
2. Avoid risky assumptions (that your business model may be built on)
3. Be sure of your value proposition when you are actually launching your business
4. Trust feed-backs you are collecting to iterate your business model.



Define your strategy

Defining a strategy is vital if you want to manage your business efficiently and in a consistent way. A business' strategy allows the company to have a baseline and a direction to follow in order to meet its goals. Refer to this checklist to build your own strategy.

Start with the right questions

There are four key questions you have to answer that will help you build the most efficient strategy for your business:

- What consumer need(s) is your business going to meet?
- How do you position your business vis-à-vis your competition?
- What is the mission, vision and values statements that you want for your company?
- What talents and resources do you have to allocate to meet your goals?

All the answers have to be consistent with one another. Always challenge the strategy you are developing in terms of both your internal capabilities (mission, vision, abilities, resources, etc.) and your business environment (customers, market trends, competition, etc.).

Analyze your business environment

You need to have a full understanding of your environment to build an efficient strategy. Use the SWOT analysis tool for an internal analysis that will allow you to build your strategy on your strengths while being aware of your weaknesses

Use Porter's Fives Forces tool to analyze your market's competitive environment and discover opportunities for your business. Compare your internal resources with the competition and identify a competitive advantage upon which you can base your strategy.

Choose the best option

Now that you have a better understanding of your internal and external environments, challenge repeatedly your answers to the four initial key questions. It will allow you to fine-tune strategic options that best suit your company.

Carefully evaluate each strategic option you have had identified and select the one that offers the best odds for reaching your business' goals while being appropriate to your organization's values.

Choosing the right strategy for your business means that:

- it meets a concrete consumer need



- it puts your business on the right path
- it optimizes the use of your resources
- it suits your organizational core values

Being an entrepreneur usually means having over-optimistic assumptions and willingness to take risks. But keep in mind that it can also distort your judgment. Use a second opinion when you are about to make your final call.

Challenge your strategy

Keep in mind that a strategy is a continuously evolving process. Always challenge your current strategy by updating market information, looking for new opportunities, monitoring customers' satisfaction, etc. Stay alert for any significant changes in the market and be prepared to adapt your strategy in a fast and efficient way.

Challenge your strategy with the capabilities of your business and the resources (time and money) that are required to implement the strategy. Carefully monitor your strategy implementation and its capacity to allow your business to reach its goals. Do not hesitate to iterate your strategy every time you believe it is necessary.

Communicating your strategy to your staff, partners or investors is also a good way to challenge, as it obligates you to repeat your arguments at multiple occasions.