

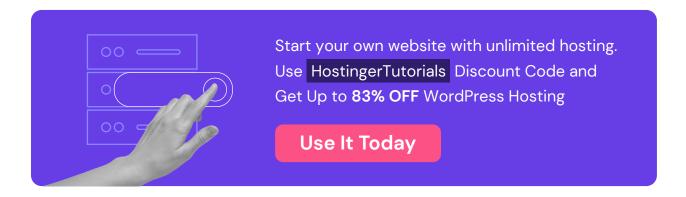
Checklist for

How to Start an Online Business



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Nowadays, thanks to numerous innovative online tools, everyone can start their own online business easily. Make sure not to miss any crucial steps by going through our checklist on how to start a successful online business.





Find and Research Your Business Area

Conduct market research on the potential industries you're interested in and learn about the businesses already operating within them.



Research a Potential Business Niche

- Decide on a business niche. Find a business area you want to join. Preferably
 one that you're well-versed with or simply have a personal interest in.
- **Observe trends.** Use tools like Google Trends to learn what is currently trending in your chosen business niche.
- Perform long-tailed keyword research. Narrow down your business niche
 even further. Look up long-tailed keywords related to the chosen topic using
 toolsets like Wordtracker and Ahrefs. For example, you can look up "healthy
 meal plans" as part of the larger "health" business niche.
- Settle on a sub-niche. Ideally, a profitable sub-niche should have a high search volume and a low number of competitors.



Conduct a Competitive Analysis

• **Find potential competitors.** Search for companies operating in your chosen business niche and list them. It's always a good idea to get a sense of the market you'll be operating in.

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- Find potential competitors. Search for companies operating in your chosen business niche and list them. It's always a good idea to get a sense of the market you'll be operating in.
- Analyze the features of each company. Create a comparison table listing the following aspects of each company in your market:
 - Market niche
- Target audience
- o Business website

- Products and services
- Product pricing
- Marketing tactics

- Locations covered
- Unique qualities
- Customer reviews
- Conduct a SWOT analysis of your online business. Identify your business' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and compare them to the competitors.

Useful Tools for Competitor Research

- SEMrush. Compare site traffic, marketing strategies, ad campaigns, online mentions, keywords, and backlinks.
- **iSpionage**. Used for competitors' research, copywriting, and landing pages.
- Sprout Social. Analyze social media performance to tweak marketing strategies.
- MailCharts. Examine email marketing strategies.
- Buzzsumo. Track content piece performance.



Choose Your Business Model

To make starting an online company easier, choose one of the following four business models:

- Business-to-Consumer (B2C). These companies sell products and services to consumers for personal use.
- Business-to-Business (B2B). This model refers to companies offering products and services to other companies for further product manufacturing or business purposes.
- Consumer-to-Business (C2B). In this type of business, individuals sell their expertise or services to other companies.
- Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C). These individuals buy or sell products and services from/to each other.

Note that it is also possible to apply two or more business models!

Examples of Online Business Ideas

The following are some viable examples you can apply to your business:

- Create an eCommerce store (B2C, B2B, or C2C)
- Run an affiliate marketing website (C2B or C2C)
- Become a content creator (C2B or C2C)
- Tutor online (C2B or C2C)



Learn About Business Licenses and Laws

Online business regulations, licenses, and permits differ depending on the business, country, and city. Make sure to conduct proper research to learn about these requirements.

This checklist focuses on regulations for businesses based in the United States.



The business structure influences personal liability, taxes, fundraising possibilities, and the paperwork you must file. Some examples of structures include sole proprietorship, general partnership, corporation, cooperative, and limited liability company.

Create a Business Name

A good business name should be catchy, unique, represent the brand identity, and reflect the products and services offered. However, it shouldn't be too long as people might struggle to remember it. Use tools such as a business name generator to help you generate some ideas.

Register Your Business Name

There are three ways to register a business name and get the government to protect it – registering a Doing Business As (DBA), an entity name, and a trademark.

The registration may differ according to your state and business structure. Some businesses may qualify for only one type of registration, while others may use all three methods.

In addition, you need to register a domain name and claim usernames on various social media platforms.

- Register your business name as a DBA. Also known as registering for an assumed name, this registration doesn't actually provide legal protection but is mandatory in most states. Without a DBA, sole proprietorships and general partnerships must operate using the business owners' surnames.
 - Some states require DBA registration at the county level, while others require it at the state level. Check the DBA name availability at your local county website or the secretary of state website.
 - Regulations on DBA registration differ from one state to another.
 Conduct proper research and follow the instructions listed.



- Register your business name as an entity. Forming a business entity protects the business name at the state level.
 - Check state records to find out if your business name is available. Look up the name on your state's secretary of state website.
 - Regulations on registering an entity name differ from one state to another. Conduct proper research and follow the instructions listed.
- Register your business name as a trademark. This registration protects the business name at the federal level.
 - O Check the trademark database to avoid possible infringement.
 Use the United States Patent and Trademark Office's (USPTO)
 Trademark Electronic Search System (TESS).
 - O If the name is available, create a USPTO.gov account and log in. Fill out and submit the required forms.
 - Wait for the USPTO to review your application. The process may take up to several months.
 - If the application is approved, your trademark will be listed in the USPTO's weekly published journal. If not, you will receive a rejection letter. You may appeal the final decision for a fee.
 - File the required maintenance documents at regular intervals to keep your trademark alive. It may expire if you miss the deadlines. Check the status of your trademark every year by accessing the TESS.
- Register a domain name. This registration protects the address of a
 business website. Check the availability of your domain name using
 a domain checker. If it is available, purchase it along with the desired
 domain extension via a domain name registrar like Hostinger.
- Claim social media usernames. Go on different social media platforms you plan to use to promote the business. If your business name or close alternatives are available, claim them for future use.





Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN)

Also known as federal and state tax ID numbers, an EIN allows business owners to pay taxes, hire employees, open a bank account, and apply for licenses and permits.

- Determine eligibility for an EIN. Find out if it is necessary for you to apply for an EIN. Requirements may differ based on the location and products sold.
- Understand the online application. Comprehend what to fill in beforehand, as you must complete the application in one session.
 After 15 minutes of inactivity, you will have to start over.
- Submit EIN application. You will get your EIN immediately upon completion. Download, save, and print the EIN confirmation notice.



Obtain Business Licenses and Permits

Businesses in the United States need to get licenses and permits from federal and state agencies. Requirements and fees differ according to the business location, activity, and agency issuing the license or permit.

- Find out who regulates your business. Business activities can be regulated by a federal or state agency. For example, commercial fishing and ocean transportation are controlled by a federal agency. On the other hand, a state agency regulates businesses like restaurants and plumbing companies.
- Apply for licenses and permits according to the regulating agency. File for the required federal licenses and permits to conduct business activities regulated by a federal agency. The same goes for ones regulated by a state agency.
- Renew licenses and permits. Keep track of when to renew them as some expire after a certain period.



Create a Business Bank Account

Opening a business bank account lets you spend or receive money under your business name instead of a personal account. Benefits of having a business bank account include increased credibility, legal protection, and access to revolving loans.



Build Your Business Website

Assuming you have already purchased a domain name, here are some additional aspects of website building you should consider.



Choose a Website Building Platform

- Pick between a website builder and a content management system.
 - Choose a hosted website builder if you want to create simple websites quickly and effortlessly. Examples of website builders include Zyro, Wix, and Shopify.
 - O Choose a self-hosted content management system (CMS) if you want to have more flexibility and full control over your website. Examples of CMSs include WordPress, Magento, and PrestaShop.
- Set up your own web hosting if you go the self-hosted route.
 Purchase a web hosting plan from a web host like Hostinger.



Design Your Website

- Choose a theme. Pick a responsive theme that looks visually appealing and is easy to navigate.
- Customize the theme. Adjust the theme's layout, fonts, and color schemes according to your liking.

- Add essential pages. These include an "About Us" page, a contact page, and legal pages, which may contain elements like a privacy policy, a disclaimer, and terms and conditions. We recommend consulting a lawyer when writing legal pages.
- Set up the eCommerce functionality. This may differ slightly
 according to the type of online business you run. For example, some
 elements to set up for an online store include product pages, payment
 gateways, and shipping options.
- Review and test the website. Proofread all the text, look for broken links, and try sending some test orders to the system to ensure all of the eCommerce features work properly.



Promote Your Business

- Apply the best search engine optimization (SEO) practices. Study the many factors search engines take into account when ranking sites and apply them to your site and content. The higher a site ranks on search engine results pages, the more people will visit it.
- Grow your social media presence. Manage several accounts on different social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to increase brand awareness. Bolster audience engagement through regular posts and genuine interactions.
- Engage in email marketing. Use email marketing automation tools like
 Mailchimp to send emails to people who signed up for your newsletter. Emails may contain such information as updates or promotions.



Track Your Success

- Monitor web analytics. Use web analytics tools like Google Analytics to track various metrics like traffic, bounce rates, dwell time, and conversion rates.
- Adjust strategies accordingly. Evaluate what worked and what didn't, and use the data to shape your future business decisions.



Bonus Tips for Starting an Online Business With a Limited Budget

- Consider dropshipping. The dropshipping model lets you act as the middleman between the customer and the supplier, allowing you to sell products without stocking inventory. As such, starting this type of business requires low startup costs.
- Use guerilla marketing tactics. These strategies market a business through unconventional methods to drive brand publicity, often with no or low costs.
 Examples include viral marketing and promotional events held in public places.
- Invest in pay-per-click advertising. Google Ads offers an affordable pay-per-click (PPC) advertising system, letting you pay for an ad only if someone clicks on it.

