

Business Plan Contents

There are many varied layouts for a business plan, though often your bank, investor or funder will have their own preferred format. Here we cover standard contents for any plan and a couple of content checklists to help you form your own template. Consult our [Starting a Business Plan Guide](#) to help you prepare for writing your plan and our [Cash Flow Guide and Template](#) to help you with presenting financial information.

Standard contents

Any business plan will consist of four basic areas – the business; marketing; finance; the management team. These are usually prefaced by an executive summary.

The business

A cover sheet should provide the company name, address and owner.

A short paragraph should outline the company's legal structure (i.e. sole trader, partnership etc.) and who owns it.

Describe your business, the product or services that you are providing and your proposed market. Explain how your product and business can be sustainable. Who will want to view or buy your product and why?

Sell yourself: explain how or why your product is unique, or of better quality than rivals in the current market. If you feel that your work is unique, you may want to consider establishing 'intellectual copyright' and / or [protecting it](#).

Include an analysis of the sector, and its potential for growth and development. Use competitors and peers as an indication of the size of the market, and to indicate the size of audience you anticipate you can capture. Give a clear idea that you are aware of who your customers are, and how you will be able to get them to buy or view your product.

Conclude this section with a summary of your aims and objectives for the business, and how you plan to achieve them.

Marketing

The key to marketing is to understand your audience. You must be able to profile your target clients and customers, their likes and dislikes, and the changing trends and developments in your field of work. This will make it clear that you are aware of where and how to position your product in the market place, how to price your product, and how your audience is likely to change or develop over a period of time.

Present a clear description of your target market and analysis based on your research. Charts and tables are a strong visual option to include. Include a realistic SWOT analysis of each area.

State any current competition. Don't overlook any potential rivals, but be realistic about the company's prospects; early refusal of a plan by a bank or funder is better at this stage than later failure of the project.

Finance

This section is often looked at first by funders and other backers as a good indicator of how well you understand your market, as they can quickly assess how realistic you are about level of sales and audience and your own and others' fees. You should give detailed information on the financial situation of your business by including:

- previous accounts, at least the previous year and up to three years if possible
- details of any outstanding loans or assets
- current management accounts, cash flow forecasts and a break-even analysis

Ensure that realistic financial projections are outlined and that you provide a range of different scenarios for sales, costs, and cash flow (both short and long-term).

Be as honest as you can – to exaggerate figures could prove to be more damaging in the long run. Bear in mind that investors are used to examining business propositions in detail. Be realistic about your costs.

Management

This section should outline your background and experience, as well as that of all key members of your management team. CVs for each individual should be included. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of the team as a unit. If you are lacking certain necessary skills, this can often be resolved through consultation, and you may be able to recruit advice or board members in a non-executive capacity if your legal structure allows for this. Alternatively you could investigate the possibility of recruiting a group of volunteer advisers.

Executive summary

The executive summary will be the last section that you should tackle, but will be the first thing to appear in your business plan. It is an important section that will summarise, in about two pages, what will then be explained in detail over the rest of the document.

It should include the company's 'Mission Statement': one or two paragraphs detailing what your business does, who your audience are, the company's aims and objectives, your aims for the company and its future, and what gives you a competitive edge.

State your company's current business situation, and your aims and aspirations for its development.

Ensure that your summary is clearly written, positive and persuasive. Balance sales talk with realism and a clear knowledge of your specialist area and art form.

Don't underestimate the importance of spending time on this section, as it could be the best opportunity to sell your idea to investors.

Contents of a simple business plan

- **Contact details**
- **Business structure** and **executive summary** (do the summary last)
- **Experience** and **CV** – who I am
- **Objectives** – what I'm aiming to achieve
- **Market research** – how I know this will work
- **Marketing plan** – how I'm going to reach the audience
- **Operational details** – practical stuff
- **Legal requirements** and **policies** – obligations
- **SWOT** or **risk analysis** – what happens if.....
- **Cash flow notes** – explanation of figures
- **Cash flow projection** – 12 months minimum of "guesstimates"

Contents of a business plan for investment

Cover – business / company name, address and owner

Table of contents

Executive summary

The business

- **Who** you are: history of your business organisation (how it was set up, how it has changed over the years)
- **Mission statement** (why you exist!)
- **People**: the quality, experience and skills mix of your staff / directors / managers / owners

Market information

- **Product & services**: review of your core products / services
- **Process**: the systems and infrastructure behind your work
- **Evidence**: tangible reference to your service / work and how it benefits the client / audience / customer (e.g. letters of endorsement, evaluations)
- **Market**: review of the key / target / strategic markets / clients
- **Competition**: review/analysis of key competitors
- **Advertising & promotion**: how you will tell people and encourage up-take
- **Price**: your pricing policy and profit margin
- **Planning / scheduling**: sales plan / strategic objectives and timescale
- **Performance indicators**: targets and measures of success
- **Place**: location of your core activity and your distribution methods
- **Capital expenditure**
- **SWOT** analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)

Finance

- Resources required
- Amount requested (if applying for a loan or grant)
- Purpose of funding
- Use of Funds
- Description of security (if seeking a loan)
- Financial projections and assumptions (see financial appendixes below)
- Schedule of major assets and liabilities
- Financial status of owners

Financial appendixes and supporting documentation

- Projected profit and loss account
- Monthly cash flow projection
- Projected balance sheet
- Monthly analysis of sales/purchases
- Monthly analysis of key cash flow figures
- Monthly analysis of employment costs (if applicable)

Management appendixes

- Business details (e.g. business status, staffing structure)
- CV

Next steps

Further information on this subject will be listed within [Starting Out](#) and [Development](#) and you can search [Business Planning](#) and [Project Planning](#) on our website to find other business planning resources and templates.

Do you have a question? @ enquiries@culturalenterpriseoffice.co.uk ☎ 0844 544 9990

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