

IS YOUR BUSINESS IDEA FEASIBLE?

It is often difficult to figure out how to research your business idea, especially if you have never been in business for yourself. You will need to decide if your business idea has profit potential.

Use the following steps as a guide to help you determine if your business idea is viable and that it can be a business. There may be some questions you are unable to answer and these questions are an excellent segue into conducting Primary and Secondary Market Research.

THE STEPS

1. **CREATE A CUSTOMER PROFILE**

Your customers might be consumers or retail stores, wholesalers or manufacturers, government, institutions or other businesses.

List as many points as you can about who you think will buy your product. If you are selling to the consumer market, list their age, gender, marital status, and income, and try to describe their lifestyle.

If you expect to sell to another business or organization, assess what industries they are in, what kind of company they are, how long they have been in business, how many employees they have, annual sales, what department would be interested in your offer, and who their customers are.

2. **LIST AND DESCRIBE THE FEATURES**

Define the features of your idea and determine what these features do for your customer. What problem/need do they solve for your potential target market? You will create a list of the selling points that you can use in your advertising, your brochures, and in your sales presentations. This will help you establish why your customer might buy your product or service over that of your competitor.

3. **DEFINE YOUR GEOGRAPHIC AREA**

Are selling your product or service to your neighborhood? Region? Province? Globally? By defining where you are going to sell, you will likely be able to figure out how many potential customers are located in this area. If you are selling to a large geographic area, you will likely need a good deal of money, marketing, and resources.

Defining this area makes it much easier to figure out what your needs are going to be. It will help focus your area of concentration when conducting market research.

4. **WHO ARE YOUR COMPETITORS?**

Once you determine who and where your customers are, you must determine who you share them with (other competitors). E.g. find out if similar products are carried in retail outlets. Once identified, search for information on competitors in industry directories, either in print or online databases.

5. **WHAT PRICE DO THEY CHARGE?**

Establish what your competitors charge and list the selling points of their product or service. Try to find your industry's wholesale and retail prices.

6. **WHAT PRICE CAN YOU CHARGE?**

Determining how competitive you can be is a big step toward establishing how feasible your idea is. If your product is superior to your competition and your market is not very price sensitive, then you may be able to charge considerably more than your competition. If you are selling to retailers or wholesalers, you will have to leave enough room for others to mark your products up.

7. **DEFINE YOUR USP (Unique Selling Proposition)**

What is unique about your offer that would benefit your customer? There may be something about your product, your price, the friendliness and speed of your service, your hours of operation, your level of quality, the skills of your employees, or other aspects of your business.

8. **IDENTIFY TRENDS IN YOUR MARKET OR INDUSTRY**

Knowing trends in your market or industry will help you determine where it's going and how your business can take advantage. Check business and industry/trade magazines for recent articles. Some libraries have a business periodicals index to help you find these articles.

9. **ANALYZE YOUR GROWTH POTENTIAL**

Is your industry or market growing or declining? Are trends or new fads peaking or declining? Generally, you will be more successful as part of a growing market. Check business and industry/trade magazines for recent articles.

10. HOW WILL YOUR CUSTOMERS KNOW YOU EXIST?

So now you know who your customers are, where they are and why they will buy your product. How are you going to communicate your offer to them? Will you rely on having a good location? How will you promote or advertise?

11. ESTIMATE SALES FOR THE FIRST YEAR

Base your estimates on the size of your market, level of competition, your price, your plans for promotion, and trends in your industry. Create a pessimistic, an optimistic, and a conservative forecast.

12. GOVERNMENT APPROVALS

There may be some extensive or expensive regulations involved with your type of business. www.bizpal.ca can assist you with determining municipal, provincial, and federal regulations and licensing requirements affecting your business.

13. MANUFACTURING, PURCHASING, OR PRODUCTION

State how you will make or acquire the goods, or produce and deliver the services, you plan to sell. Use your sales forecast to help you plan this part of your operation. Think about potential growth in future years.

14. FULFILLMENT

How does your customer get their order and how do you get paid?

15. CAPACITY OF YOUR OPERATION IN THE FIRST YEAR

How big will your operation be? What is the limit of what you can produce, stock, service, and sell? Can you meet your sales forecasts? Have you taken future growth into consideration?

16. POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS

Your concept may rely heavily on the reliability of your raw material suppliers and/or your subcontractors. How dependent will you be? Figure out who your suppliers will likely be and try to find back-up suppliers.

17. RESOURCES YOU'LL REQUIRE

List the employees, floor space, leasehold improvements, equipment, vehicles, inventory, supplies, and services you will require to open your business. Estimate the costs of each item on your list. You will need this list to determine your start up costs.

18. RESOURCES YOU WILL FINANCE, LEASE, OR RENT

You will probably not pay for large purchases outright, but will instead lease, rent, or finance these items. You will need to estimate your monthly payments to help you prepare a cash flow worksheet.

19. FINANCIAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

How much of your own money do you have for this business? What assets can you use as collateral to secure a loan? Do you already own the vehicles, computer equipment, or tools needed to start your business? Do you have family, friends or others who are prepared to invest in your business? Do you have a strong personal credit rating?

20. MONTHLY CASH FLOW FORECAST FOR YOUR FIRST YEAR

A cash flow forecast shows the critical "whens" of cash coming in and cash going out during a certain month. Preparing a monthly cash flow forecast provides you with the opportunity to show dollar figures, representing revenues and expenses, in the month the business expects to collect and spend the cash. Cash flow can demonstrate the need for cash injections at critical periods when sales are lower in seasonal businesses.

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