Road To Small Business Success Begins With Making The Right First Steps

Recently our chapter has served many clients that are just starting to form their first business. So, I think it is time to focus on that person who is beginning to be serious about having their own small business.

Building a successful small business requires a lot of time, thought, and planning. If you’ve never traveled the road to entrepreneurship before, you might find it overwhelming. With so many details to pay attention to, where should you begin? I am going to pass on some great “first steps” from a SCORE colleague of mine.

Marc Goldberg, the Chairperson of the Cape Cod & the Islands SCORE chapter and a SCORE mentor with business management and marketing expertise, has outlined some first steps that are appropriate for nearly every type of business:

- **Contact your local chapter of SCORE** to get guidance from a business mentor and learn what you can expect when starting a business.

- **Determine your value proposition**. What customer needs will you fulfill and do you have a large enough base of prospects with those needs?

- **Find a good attorney who specializes in small business issues**. Legal formation, human resources issues, etc.

- **Find a small business accountant** to ensure you comply with requirements and file taxes accurately.

- **Determine what legal form will your business take**? Sole proprietorship, Limited Liability Corporation (LLC), S Corp, or C Corp? Consult with your attorney and accountant.

- **Create a business plan**. You don’t need a full plan with financials unless seeking start-up capital. You may wish to go to the SCORE website and find a helpful template or consider using the lean start-up approach of the Business Model Canvas.

- **Select a bank or financial institution** for general use and one that can potentially provide funding if you’ll need it to start or expand your business.

- **Secure business insurance for liability protection**. Talk with a trusted agent who can guide you in acquiring the proper types and amount of insurance coverage.
• **Create your brand identity.** Choose your business name and develop a logo. Verify with the state and U.S. Patent and Trademark Office that the name and logo design aren’t already taken.

• **Have a website created.** An online presence for your business is essential, as most potential customers will look for information there to learn about your company and its products and services.

• **Identify the appropriate social media platforms** that will work for your business based on where your potential customers spend their online time.

• **Find a printing company.** While much of your marketing and sales may be done online, you’ll need a reliable printing source for business cards, sell sheets, brochures, etc.

• **Secure a dedicated location for your business.** Your needs may be vastly different if you’re a brick and mortar retail store vs. a service provider.

• **Identify your technology needs.** What hardware, software, apps, IT services, etc. will you need to serve customers, market your company, and manage your business?

• **Execute a cash flow analysis.** The #1 reason small businesses fail is that they are underfunded from the beginning and they run out of cash. Do a month-by-month Source and Use of Cash projection for the first year. It will help you determine what your selling terms need to be so you’ll have enough revenue to support your business. SCORE also has a template for this.

• **If you have employees, get a quote for payroll services.** Most are reasonably priced and deliver peace of mind as they process payroll (including applicable taxes), file the necessary paperwork, and handle tax filings.

Your new business may have other needs as well, but these steps from Goldberg are a solid starting point. To learn more about what’s involved in starting and managing a business, visit the SCORE.org and Small Business Administration websites. Also consider reaching out to your local SCORE chapter for direction and small business resources.

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