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Guide to starting a business

If you're new to being in business or self-employed, the tips below outline what's involved, from testing your idea to registering a trade mark.

If you're starting a business in New Zealand or working for yourself, here are things you can do up-front to safeguard your investment in the future.

1. Make sure your idea is viable

It's best to be confident your business idea will work. Write a business plan as a way of thinking it through.

[Business plan template](#)

[\(/getting-started/business-planning-tools-and-tips/how-to-write-a-business-plan\)](/getting-started/business-planning-tools-and-tips/how-to-write-a-business-plan)

2. Choose a business name

If you have a name in mind — even if it's your own — use our ONECheck tool to quickly see if it's available. With one search you can see its availability as a business name, trade mark, web domain and social media username, to help you choose a name you can market and protect.

[ONECheck](#)

[\(/onecheck\)](/onecheck)

[Choosing a business name](#)

[\(/getting-started/building-a-brand/choosing-a-business-name\)](/getting-started/building-a-brand/choosing-a-business-name)

3. Choose a business structure

If you're a business or self-employed you can choose the structure that best suits you. The most common are sole trader, partnership or company. Each structure offers various benefits and considerations. Depending which you choose, you might have to register with government in different ways. Our Choose Business Structure tool can help you make the right choice.

[Choose Business Structure tool](#) 

[Business structure overview](#)

(/getting-started/choosing-the-right-business-structure/business-structure-overview)

4. Get a RealMe® login

You may need to get a few registrations from government agencies. Several agencies use a RealMe® login. If you don't already have a login (username and password), you can create one when you register for a New Zealand Business Number (see step 5).

[RealMe](#) 

*RealMe® is a registered trademark of the New Zealand Government.

5. Get a New Zealand Business Number

The New Zealand Business Number (NZBN) is a unique identifier for your business. Your NZBN links to the information others need in order to work with you, like a trading name, phone number or email.

Having an NZBN will make it easier to do business because you won't have to keep repeating the same information when dealing with someone new or when something changes. If you're a company, you'll automatically get an NZBN. Sole traders, self-employed people or partnerships can register for an NZBN online and it's free.

Complete all the data fields on your NZBN profile and set to public. Having an online presence on New Zealand's biggest register means other businesses and customers can easily find you and adds to your businesses' credibility. You can update your NZBN profile by logging into MyNZBN on the NZBN website.

[Register for an NZBN](#)  — NZBN

6. Secure your business name

Whether you're new to being self-employed or in business, a small investment now will mean you won't lose your ability to market and protect your name while getting other things in order. Use our ONECheck tool as your starting point.

[ONECheck](#)

([/onecheck](#)).

Step 6i: Register a domain name

Get a web address. Low cost, quick and easy. See the Domain Name Commission's list of authorised registrars.

[Authorised registrars](#) — Domain Name Commission

Step 6ii: Reserve your company name

If you decide to structure your business as a company you need to reserve your company name with the Companies Office — it's low cost, quick and easy. You'll need a RealMe login. You must use the name to incorporate your company within 20 working days of reserving it.

[Reserving company name](#) — Companies Office

Step 6iii: Check for trade marks

Get an initial assessment report from the Intellectual Property Office (IPONZ) before you invest in applying for a registered trade mark. Do this by applying online for a search and preliminary advice (SPA) report on the IPONZ website. It's low cost, easy and you'll get it within five days. You can also search the trade mark register for free.

You'll need a RealMe login.

[Search and preliminary advice](#) — IPONZ

[Trade mark register](#) — IPONZ

Did you know:

- Before registering, make sure your business name has been given the green light from your IPONZ SPA check.


7. Look into regulations

Specific regulations might apply in your industry or region. For example, fair trading, consumer guarantees, privacy, health and safety, food licensing, and music licensing. Look into which central and local government regulations apply to your business. Our website is a good starting point. You can also search central government regulations tailored to your industry on our Compliance Matters tool.

[Compliance Matters](#) 

8. Register your company

If you've decided to structure your business as a company then register online with the Companies Office — it's low cost, quick and easy. You'll need a RealMe login.

[Start a company](#)  — Companies Office


Did you know

- You can register for GST at the same time as you register your company.

9. Register for GST

Register online with Inland Revenue.

You'll need to register for GST if you're earning more than NZ\$60,000 each year. You can register for GST at the same time you register your company.

If you don't or if you're another type of business you can do it online at ird.govt.nz . It's quick, easy and free.

[GST](#)  — Inland Revenue

10. Register your trade mark

A registered trade mark is the best way to protect your brands in the marketplace. You can use your SPA check to begin your application online with IPONZ. It's quite quick and easy, low cost for a high level of protection. You'll need a RealMe login.

[Trade marks](#)  — IPONZ

Related content

Research your market

Knowing about your market and rivals is crucial, whether you're starting, growing or well established.

How to research your market

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Get planning advice

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