



## ***The Sims 2: Open for Business: Lessons Learned about Business and Life***

by [Chris Dondanville](#)

*The Sims*, the creation of game designer Will Wright, is the best selling computer video game series of all time. A recent addition to the franchise (produced by Maxis and Electronic Arts) is an expansion pack to *The Sims 2* entitled *Open for Business*. For those not familiar with the concept of *The Sims*, it is a life simulator. You control a variety of simulated people (Sims) as they live, love, work, relax, and even go to the bathroom.

In *Open for Business*, your Sim no longer needs to vanish each day to earn a living. They can now start their own business. These businesses can be almost anything imaginable. You can open a retail outlet (where your Sim can buy items and then resell them for a profit), a shop where a Sim can craft his or her own goods, or a service organization where you can charge per person or per service. A Sim can open the business in their home or set up shop on a community lot. Your Sim only needs a phone or a computer to open and maintain a business. You can start the business and also hire employees from that device. Once the business is created, the business control interface is added to your screen. This interface allows you to keep track of your financial status, inventory, and your business rating. Your business rating is determined largely by customer satisfaction, and a high rating will help your business grow and prosper.

The *Open for Business* expansion adds many new items to *The Sims* that are needed for running a business. Perhaps one of the most important things is the Open/Closed sign. You use this sign both to signal your hours of business to the general population of Sim customers and to call your employees to work. They have also added cash registers, retail counters, ticket stands, and workbenches for crafting your own goods.

The game is enjoyable but can become a little monotonous. Fans of *The Sims* will find this expansion to be more of the same addicting game play that they have come to love. With a mature product family like *The Sims*, you would expect the game play to be well-balanced, stable and intuitive, and it is. The graphics can be cranked up to settings that approach cutting-edge, or they can be dialed back to allow support for more modest PC systems.

The simulation of business found in this game is fundamentally accurate. You do not have to worry about globalization, foreign competition, labor laws, or anything like that, but the fundamental business simulation aspects are sound and in line with other, similar business simulators. As a player, you have to try and balance watching costs in order to turn a profit, all the while providing a quality product or service in order to be successful, just like in real life. In fact, there were several themes in the game that reminded me of things that I have learned in my education, my corporate life, and my own failed attempt at starting a business. Below are some basic business principles that I have found presented in the game.







**Figure 1:** My first business: a nursery in my yard!

**Cash (flow) is King!** Just as in real life, the movement of cash is the lifeblood of your business. The temptation to spend everything you have in order to get the business started is strong, but you will find yourself in trouble quickly if you try that. You must have cash reserves for the operation of the business. Things can break and need repair, employees have to be paid, and, in the case of a successful business, you need capital for expansion. Nothing is more stressful than having a shop full of expensive merchandise with a full staff racking up hourly wages and having no customers. If the coffers are empty, then that is a recipe for disaster.





**Figure 2:** A service business: my arcade.

**It is all about the Customer.** Advertising for your Sim's business, with the exception of a few small business signs, is strictly via word of mouth. You will attract your first customers out of curiosity, but the way that you treat them and the experience that they have at your establishment will determine the frequency and amount of customers that will follow the curious. Your success is based largely on your business rating. This rating is a reflection of customer satisfaction. As in real life, you can do everything else right, but if you have a poor product or bad service, then you are on a course for failure.

**Everything is YOUR responsibility.** When you start your own Sim business, you determine which Sim will be the owner. This Sim, with your guidance, will have to make typical business decisions such as when to open and close, who to hire or fire, what to stock, and how much to charge for goods and services. They will also be faced with management minutiae. They will have to send their employees for breaks, give them encouragement, handle problem employees, and give pay increases. They will need to restock merchandise and make sales pitches. They will be, in short, responsible for everything. This is the case for a business owner in real life. When you own a business, you have to be the master of every detail. You could hire people to sweat the details (assuming you have the cash), but you are ultimately responsible for their performance.

**Life Balance is Important.** No matter how much you want to force your Sim to work 18 hours a day so that your business will thrive, they will not do it. Sims have their own internal needs, and they will often exhibit what appears to be free will in order to have those needs met. If they are really tired, uncomfortable, or unkempt they will often walk off the job in protest and head for the nearest bed, couch, or shower to remedy that situation. While we tend to force ourselves to exceed these boundaries on occasion, it is a nice reminder that not meeting these needs in real life will have consequences. Obsessive behavior of any type unbalances the life of your Sim and must be rectified.

The game is entertaining, and, if you are a fan of the series, then you will enjoy the *Open for Business* expansion. A composite rating of 32 reviews compiled by Gamespot (<http://www.gamespot.com>) is a respectable 79%. I found the game to be fun, but it was also very difficult to start and grow a thriving business. Starting your own business is really hard work in the game, just like in real life.

## Biography

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