



# **START IT BUILD IT**

**THE STARTUP CHECKLIST**

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You have decided to start your own business venture. Its exciting, isn't it!

Congratulations on taking a bold and brave step towards a rewarding future,

I bet you wish you could just jump forward to the successful bit. Straight to the Hollywood ending. So did everyone. I still do. However, there are countless things to get done in a startup before you can even think about the end goals.

Being honest, the 'to-do-list' is an enormous, and at times can be totally overwhelming.

Fear not, however. The trick is to break it all down. Make it manageable. Make it easier to understand. Most importantly, make it achievable.

Enter the '**The Startup Checklist**', created for you, to help you work through the early stages in organised, methodical, manageable steps. Keep it on your phone, even print it off (do people still do that?), and use it to keep you in the right road.

The purpose of this checklist is to assist you in putting down solid foundations for your startup to work on. That is how you will succeed, as without solid ground to stand on you will crumble.

Let get to work!

## TASK #1 - YOUR IDEA / VISION

The Lesson - Know, and Understand, Your Idea / Vision.

Sounds obvious. You cannot have a startup company without an idea.

Thanks for the advice, dude. I hope it gets better than this...

Seriously though, you would be surprised how many startups believe they have an idea or company vision, but find it hard to clearly define.

The founder/founders may have trouble explaining it to others, or each founder may describe it differently when asked. This is confusing. It will send mixed messages to potential investors or clients, and this will reflect badly. You need to know the basics.

Checklist.

### ☐ **The What**

Write down a short paragraph, setting out 'What We Are'

(i.e. what does your startup do? Is it a product, or a service? What is it looking to change or effect? What market are you moving into?)

### ☐ **The Who**

Write down a short paragraph, setting out 'Who We Are'

(i.e. who are you, and your team? Why you? What has inspired this startup journey?)

### □ **The Talk**

Combine and edit 'The What' and 'The Who' together to form a short 30 second **elevator pitch**.

The idea behind this is you can describe (and sell) your startup in a quick snippet, at a moments notice. The more clear and concise, the better. Imagine Dragon's Den, or Shark Tank. Sell your shit well.

### □ **The Motto**

Write a motto / strap line, that encompasses the 'What We Are' and the 'Who We Are'.

Keep it short and sweet, and if you can work a rhyme or ring into it you are on to a winner. Be sure to highlight a key benefit of your idea, or a key belief / value.

Most importantly, be honest! Do not over promise if you cannot deliver. This will just expose you further down the line.

### **Some examples;**

Spread Ideas - TED

To create a better everyday life for the many people - IKEA

We work hard every day to make American Express the world's most respected service brand - American Express

Impossible Is Nothing - Adidas

The world's local bank – HSBC

Every little helps – Tesco

## **BONUS TASK - IDEA GENERATION**

This is a bonus task, on a subject that is so important when you are going to start a business...

Your idea!

Or more importantly, ways to refine your idea so it goes from lightbulb moment, to game changing concept. This email will cover two methods. It is a little information overload, so be sure to take your time with it.

### **#1. The 100 Ideas Method**

Buy yourself a notebook of some kind (the size or number of lines or thickness of paper matter one jot).

Use whatever your preference is and find yourself a pen or pencil.

Open the notebook, and write down the number 1. Sketch out the concept or idea you currently have. This is your starting point

Now, the fun begins.

Turn the page and flesh out idea 1 until it becomes idea 2. Flesh out idea 2 until it becomes 3.

Highlight one area of the 3rd idea. 'Zoom in' to finer details. Expand these a couple of times to form ideas 4, 5 and 6. Expand those finer details to become ideas 7-10.

The idea of this method is to push the boundaries of your original idea. No idea is to 'wacky' or 'weird'. No idea is wrong!

This is a safe space to go wild.

By idea 30 it probably seems pointless. You were happy with concept 17 and have not managed to muster up anything better since.

And that is another point of this exercise. Exhausting all possibilities. If there really is nothing better after 17, then bingo, 17 is your idea.

But who is to say that idea 83, or 91, won't completely change your concept?

No matter how many days / weeks it takes, get to the magic 100. Then, cut this down to a final 5-10.

Turn this 5-10 into 2-3.

With these 2-3, you can either repeat the development process (not necessarily 100 though) or take the best features of each and put them together.

Somewhere in here, lies your new, upgraded idea or concept.

## **#2. The Six Thinking Hats Method**

This method will help you look at your concept through different mindsets.

Although designed to make meetings more productive, it can be used to critique your idea. These various angles and approaches will expose the areas that need reworked or redeveloped.

The Six Thinking Hats are as follows —

The **White Hat** only looks for the facts and data. Many use this hat near the start to set out the relevant information before the discussion starts.

Next, go more positively with the **Yellow Hat**. Look at your idea and find the benefits and value it brings. Look for the good and the positive here. What is great about your idea?

The **Red Hat** is the emotional one. Look at idea and note your gut reaction. What would a user's reaction be if they had no understanding of the concept?

The **Green Hat** is when the brain juices get unleashed. This is the creative hat. What solutions can you come up with for the issues that have arisen? It is time to generate some new directions and new ideas.

The **Black Hat** goes for the negative. Where are the flaws and problems? Finding these issues allows you to counter them, remove them and develop a stronger concept. Try to avoid bringing this hat in too early, as it will only serve to shoot down ideas and opinions.

Finally, the **Blue Hat** brings the control and structure to the critique. Here you set new objectives and outline the new situations and defines the new problems to be tackled.

As these hats are perspectives, and therefore not people or personalities, it allows you and anyone else participating to be honest and open.

They allow you to look at your concept through various view-points, and give it a fair and honest assessment that will lead to real, valuable points and improvements.



## TASK #2 - VALUES

The Lesson - Set Out Your Startup's Core Values.

This is both beneficial and necessary for yourself and your team. It keeps everyone pulling in the same direction, which is vital to the success of the startup.

Checklist.

- ☐ You need to be clear on the **'Why We Are'**

(i.e. why are starting your startup? What are your beliefs, or ethos? What are the fundamental differences you believe you can make?)

- ☐ You need to be clear on the **'How We Are'**

(i.e. how are you and the team going to work? What structures will you follow? Will it be an emphasis on independent or team work? What regulations will be in place to ensure harmony and the safety of yourself and others? What policies will be in place should things go wrong?)

The answers to these two points will form the core values i.e. the rights and wrongs of working in your startup.

For example, Adobe sets its values as Genuine, Exceptional, Innovative, Involved.

LinkedIn has Relationships matter, Members first, Be open, honest and constructive, Demand excellence, Take intelligent risks and Act like an owner.

## TASK #3 - TARGET AUDIENCE

The Lesson - Know, and Understand Your Target Audience

You've got your great idea. You have set out your vision and your values. Next problem. Who are you going to sell this to?

**Do some research.** You need to know your target market. In fact, you need to know if there is a target market for your idea at all. (If there isn't, consider revising point #1 again...)

Checklist.

- ☐ Check for similar services / products in the market. Note their price ranges and selling strategies. Pay close attention to what they offer.
- ☐ Take note of all the companies who provide a similar service / product to you (if there are any). Is the competition in this market high or low?
- ☐ Start to narrow down to a group of users who will buy / use your service / product. Focus on things like gender, age, location, job, income, situation, environment, retail habits etc.

This is your target market, and this is who you need to sell your startup to.

If you are entering a brand new market, you are stepping into uncharted territory, and may need to do some ground research like surveys, questionnaires, free sign ups, demos etc, to gauge some market feedback.

## **TASK #4 - BRAND IDENTITY**

The Lesson - Develop Your Startup's Branding.

A huge task, and one that cannot easily be summed up in a little email checklist. However, the importance of your brand cannot be understated. Your brand will help you target, gain work, beat completion and sell. It will draw customers and clientele towards you who believe and trust what you do.

Your brand has to relate to your vision (Task 1) and values (Task 2).

1. Start with a brainstorm and build a mood board to keep the design focused on the goal, and the audience.
2. Consider your tone
3. Think about your visual language
4. Make it clean and considered. Less is more!
5. Make it something that can become identifiable (famous example is Apple)
6. Make it eye catching
7. Make it unique (try not to copy. You will always get busted eventually, look at AirBnb's questionable new logo.)
8. Keep it simple
9. Convey your message!

**“Determine who you are and what your brand is, and what you’re not. The rest of it is just a lot of noise”**

**- Geoffrey Zakarian**

**\*Note\*** If the brand design is not your thing, you could always pay someone to do it for you. Services like Fiverr and 99 Designs allow you to get someone with experience to produce you the perfect logo and more.

### **Further Resources**

If you are designing your own brand identity, check out these guides for some branding inspiration!

**\* <https://creativemarket.com/blog/designing-a-brand-identity>**

**\* <https://99designs.co.uk/blog/logo-branding-en-gb/how-to-create-a-brand-style-guide/>**

**\* <https://medium.com/@tubikstudio/6-creative-stages-of-branding-design-step-by-step-guide-be557fd329fd>**

**\* <https://www.fastprint.co.uk/blog/the-ultimate-guide-to-logo-design.html>**

**\* <https://99designs.co.uk/blog/logo-branding/how-to-design-logo/>**

## TASK #5 - MARKETING / SOCIAL MEDIA

Marketing is so vital it is hard to describe.

It will basically make or break your startup.

If you can make yourself seen and heard over the crowd, you have a great chance of getting your work out there.

First things first, **social media**.

This one shouldn't be too difficult to nail down, as there are probably very few platforms and channels that wouldn't be suitable for you.

\*Breathes a sigh of relief\*

Checklist

- ☐ Sign up for your startup's social media accounts. Start with Facebook and Instagram, and go from there. You could set up a Twitter feed, Tumblr account, Vimeo account, YouTube channel, LinkedIn profile, Pinterest page... Just make sure your target audience is active on the platforms you choose.
- ☐ Add all the relevant details. Photos are a must. Make the bio snappy and eye catching.
- ☐ Follow similar accounts, and follow relevant people and businesses from your local area.
- ☐ Start posting. Try to make the posts personal, and

human. Highlight the process behind what you do, and allow potential customers and clients to see the real you.

- ❑ Avoid spamming!

### **Next is your startup's website (should you want / need one).**

Don't build a shit one. Please, its the age of technology, and those websites that used to pass off 5-10 years ago ain't cutting it now.

See the website as an extension of your startups brand and portfolio, and aim for a very high quality outcome.

#### Checklist

- ❑ Sign up for your website name (i.e. startupnewbie.com)
- ❑ Install wordpress or similar. Or use Squarespace to make the job easier!
- ❑ Work on the looks and aesthetics. Makes sure fonts are readable. Make sure images load. Get your logo and brand on show.
- ❑ Get it running smoothly behind the scenes. Fast page load times is vital, especially on google search listings. Compress images before uploading on websites like <http://compress-jpeg.com/>
- ❑ Work on the SEO. On Wordpress, plugins like Yoast SEO are a great tool to use. (see next page)
- ❑ And for the love of god, make it mobile friendly. This really matters!

## SEO Further Resources

SEO is difficult to get your head around, with some many factors affecting how your site will place on search engines (i.e. how high it will show up in the google search for example).

Search engines are basically trying to determine if your website best answers the question or query a user may have. To help your website get 'found' you want to work on your SEO (Search Engine Optimisation).

I have a few resources here you can use to run checks over your website and improve its SEO.

\* **<https://neilpatel.com/seo-analyzer/>** (you will also get a huge free cheat sheet document once you sign up for your results)

\* **<http://www.siteline.com/>** (helps find duplicate content)

\* **<https://gtmetrix.com/>** (will perform speed tests and show you how to improve your rating)

\* **<https://www.seoquake.com/index.html>** (great plug in full of stats and data, and you can run it on other web pages too to see how they rank)

\* **<https://www.google.com/webmasters>** (sign your website up to this to gain access to analytics)

\* **<https://www.google.co.uk/business/>** (puts your business on google so people can find you!)

## **TASK #6 - MONEY, MONEY , MONEY.**

### The Lesson - Get To Grips With The Figures

Calculating figures of any form is a chore, and mind numbingly dull. Maths is horrible (and hard). And that is before we even get to spreadsheets....

Unfortunately, it is also essential.

You need to determine a rough 'bottom line'. This is an indicator for what your startup needs to earn to survive, month to month.

#### Checklist

- ☐ Add up your overheads (premises / rent, utilities, any other monthly bills etc.)
- ☐ Add up wages per month
- ☐ Add expenses and business purchases (trips away, new tools or software etc.)
- ☐ Add in everything else of relevance.

See that number, that looks frighteningly high? That is your rough bottom line. I know, it is a little hard to look at.

If you multiply it by 12 you will get your yearly bottom line, and probably have a heart attack.

But that is now the target. And the challenge becomes earning that every single month.



## TASK #7 - EVALUATION

The Lesson - Evaluate And Highlight What Areas You Are Short On

It is time to look within. This one will require a bit of honesty.

You cannot do everything yourself. To do so, you either have to remove some processes and focus on the ones you really need to, or want to.

There is so much to learn, so much to stay on top of, eventually you will need either more bodies, or more expertise.

So in a lot of cases, you have to expand, and add people around you who can provide the missing links.

Checklist

- ☐ Look at yourself (and other members if you have them). Are relevant and important skills missing in your startup? Write down what each member's role and 'job' is, and what they bring to the team.
- ☐ Does your team cover every required aspect of your idea and process? What is missing?
- ☐ Can the missing skills be taught to existing members (or yourself)? Training could be an initially expense cost, but could bring long term benefit.
- ☐ If a new team member is required, can you afford to do so? (Check rough bottom line against projected income)

A lot of this depends on your startup's area of work.

If you are going to become a writer / blogger, and work on your personal brand, you can manage on your own. You can just seek help, advice of those who have done it before, when you need it.

If you are starting a company that does tech based projects, you will find it difficult to work on the projects as well as market, promote, manage, meet clients, deal with emails etc on your own.

And it is nice to have tea break with somebody aside yourself!

## TASK #8 - SET SOME GOALS

The Lesson - Define Your Goals, And Set Some Progress Points To Achieve Them

This one is important, because this provides the direction and destination for your startup, both short term and long term.

So, it is time to set some long term goals. But in order to make these reachable, lets break them down into smaller, achievable goals.

I call these **Progress Points**.

Answer These Questions

- ☐ What is one of your startup's long term goals?
- ☐ What monthly progress point could you get done to work towards this yearly goal?
- ☐ What weekly progress points could you work on to reach your monthly goals?
- ☐ What daily progress points could you get done to help you reach your weekly goals?

All of a sudden, shit is getting done! And now momentum is building. Momentum, is the key to success.

If you are unsure of what goals you should set in the early days, here is a few examples...

- Set up the Legal Entity of your business
- Set up your business bank account
- Set some sales targets, even if this is just getting the first sale.
- Set up the startup's website.
- Finish the first prototype of a project.
- Getting the first 100 subscribers to the app.
- Earn a mention on a blog, or website, or magazine
- Create and expand a professional network
- Hire key members of staff

Whatever goals you set, try to keep them realistic, and reachable. It can be all too easy to shoot high - "lets make £1,000,000 this month!" - but this goal will remain unachieved and this can lower your moral and confidence.

You can always aim big, but aim to get big in small, manageable steps.

## THE STARTUP JOURNEY

You did it!

You have reached the end, of the very start.

I know it is a little overwhelming. So take this course on as a project in itself. Don't rush this! I know that the lightbulb moment of deciding to start a business is so exciting that it can be hard not to try and get everything out there as fast as possible to show the world.

But trust me, commit however many weeks and months it takes to nail this down.

Working through this is some of the most important work you will undertake, and the outcomes will be some of the most useful and beneficial to you, and your startup.

Tackle these 8 steps, and you are well on your way to creating a solid foundation for your startup to build and grow upon.

With a stable base that supports you and your startup, the possibilities are endless. The hardest part is staying afloat, but with all the correct pieces in place, you will have given yourself the best possible chance.

Congratulations, and welcome aboard your startup journey.

