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A Standard Business Plan Outline

by [Tim Berry](#)

What information needs to be in your business plan? What is the order of information that will make the most sense to lenders and investors? You can answer these questions with the business plan outlines provided below.

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What are the standard elements of a business plan? If you do need a standard business plan to seek funding — as opposed to a plan-as-you-go approach for running your business, which I describe below — there are predictable contents of a standard business plan outline.

For example, a [business plan](#) normally starts with an Executive Summary, which should be concise and interesting. People almost always expect to see sections covering the Company, the Market, the Product, the Management Team, Strategy, Implementation, and Financial Analysis. The precise business plan format can vary.

Is the order important? If you have the main components, the order doesn't matter that much, but here's the sequence I suggest for a business plan. I have provided two outlines, one simple and the other more detailed

Simple business plan outline

1. **Executive Summary:** Write this last. It's just a page or two of highlights.
2. **Company Description:** Legal establishment, history, start-up plans, etc.
3. **Product or Service:** Describe what you're selling. Focus on customer benefits.
4. **Market Analysis:** You need to know your market, customer needs, where they are, how to reach them, etc.
5. **Strategy and Implementation:** Be specific. Include management responsibilities with dates and budgets. Make sure you can track results
6. **Web Plan Summary:** For e-commerce, include discussion of website, development costs, operations, sales and marketing strategies.
7. **Management Team:** Describe the organization and the key management team members.
8. **Financial Analysis:** Make sure to include at the very least your projected Profit and Loss and Cash Flow tables.

Build your plan, then organize it. I don't recommend developing the plan in the same order you present it as a finished document. For example, although the Executive Summary obviously comes as the first section of a business plan, I recommend writing it after everything else is done. It will appear first, but you write it last.

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Standard tables and charts

There are also some business tables and charts that are normally expected in a standard business plan.

Cash flow is the single most important numerical analysis in a plan, and should never be missing. Most plans will also have **Sales Forecast** and **Profit and Loss** statements. I believe they should also have separate **Personnel** listings, projected **Balance Sheet**, projected **Business Ratios**, and **Market Analysis** tables.

I also believe that every plan should include bar charts and pie charts to illustrate the numbers.

Expanded business plan outline

Here's an expanded full business plan outline, with details you might want to include in your own business plan.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Mission
- 1.3 Keys to Success

2.0 Company Summary

- 2.1 Company Ownership
- 2.2 Company History (for ongoing companies) or Start-up Plan (for new companies)
- 2.3 Company Locations and Facilities

3.0 Products and Services

- 3.1 Product and Service Description
- 3.2 Competitive Comparison
- 3.3 Sales Literature
- 3.4 Sourcing and Fulfillment
- 3.5 Technology
- 3.6 Future Products and Services

4.0 Market Analysis Summary

- 4.1 Market Segmentation
- 4.2 Target Market Segment Strategy
 - 4.2.1 Market Needs
 - 4.2.2 Market Trends
 - 4.2.3 Market Growth
- 4.3 Industry Analysis
 - 4.3.1 Industry Participants
 - 4.3.2 Distribution Patterns
 - 4.3.3 Competition and Buying Patterns
 - 4.3.4 Main Competitors

5.0 Strategy and Implementation Summary

- 5.1 Strategy Pyramids
- 5.2 Value Proposition
- 5.3 Competitive Edge
- 5.4 Marketing Strategy
 - 5.4.1 Positioning Statements
 - 5.4.2 Pricing Strategy

- 5.4.3 Promotion Strategy
- 5.4.4 Distribution Patterns
- 5.4.5 Marketing Programs
- 5.5 Sales Strategy
 - 5.5.1 Sales Forecast
 - 5.5.2 Sales Programs
- 5.6 Strategic Alliances
- 5.7 Milestones

- 6.0 Web Plan Summary**
 - 6.1 Website Marketing Strategy
 - 6.2 Development Requirements

- 7.0 Management Summary**
 - 7.1 Organizational Structure
 - 7.2 Management Team
 - 7.3 Management Team Gaps
 - 7.4 Personnel Plan

- 8.0 Financial Plan**
 - 8.1 Important Assumptions
 - 8.2 Key Financial Indicators
 - 8.3 Break-even Analysis
 - 8.4 Projected Profit and Loss
 - 8.5 Projected Cash Flow
 - 8.6 Projected Balance Sheet
 - 8.7 Business Ratios
 - 8.8 Long-term Plan

Business plan outline advice

Size your business plan to fit your business. Remember that your business plan should be only as big as what you need to run your business. While everybody should have planning to help run a business, not everyone needs to develop a complete formal business plan suitable for submitting to a potential investor, or bank, or venture contest. So don't include outline points just because they are on a big list somewhere, or on this list, unless you're developing a standard business plan that you'll be showing to somebody else who expects a standard business plan.

Consider plan-as-you-go business planning. I've done a lot of work on this idea lately, resulting in my new "Plan As You Go" business planning, which is now a book published by Entrepreneur Press, available through [Amazon.com](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), and [Borders](#), and bundled as an eBook with [Business Plan Pro](#). I've also added a short video here to the right, illustrating how the outline could be simpler with a new approach.

More business planning resources

Sometimes an outline just isn't enough to write your business plan. Do you want to view sample business plans from real businesses? Would seeing a business plan template that banks prefer be useful to you? These valuable resources can help.

[Sample business plans](#) – Over 500 free sample business plans from various industries

[Business plan template](#) – This fill-in-the-blank business plan template is in the format preferred by the SBA and banks

[Start a business](#) – An easy to follow six-step process for starting a new business

[Business Plan Pro](#) – My company's step-by-step software makes it fast and easy to create a business plan, regardless of your business planning experience

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