



## Points to consider when starting your own business

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Covid-19 was not kind to many businesses. It brought about lockdowns which had massive impacts on the economy and many businesses, especially small businesses. If you had just started a business then it was a particularly difficult time as even well-established small businesses battled. So you might be thinking having your own business is not such a good idea. Perhaps you are giving up the idea of being an entrepreneur and are looking for a job. Well, being employed is not such a stable option either. Retrenchments seem to never cease. And that will probably be a trend that continues. If you really do want to have your own business, my suggestion is don't give up. In fact now could be a really good time to start your own business. Or if you are employed perhaps you want to start a side hustle which could turn into something bigger should you decide to leave your job or lose your job unexpectedly in the future.

There are challenges to starting your own business. The first one is that there is no course of study that can teach you how to run your own business. You learn as you go along. No matter what you have studied, you learn from experience and making mistakes. And that takes time. Having a successful business almost always takes a lot of time. If you are building something from scratch, you will not be an overnight success. Nor a one-year success. It takes many years to build a good business. Many years of loss, of heartache, of blood, sweat and tears, and quite a bit of money upfront to keep going in the initial stages. However, once you have paid your dues, and survived through the trenches, and got something going, the rewards are immense. Plenty of people are put off from having their own business because of the work and challenges upfront. Lots of people abandon their businesses when the going gets tough and go back to employment because it seems like the business will take forever to get going. If you can stick it out though, you are in for some considerable benefits. As your own boss you get to decide your schedule, you get to live your own values, the only person who can retrench you is you, and you do get, to some extent, to write your own salary cheque eventually.

So if you think that having a business is for you, and you are prepared to tough out the difficult times, then read on for some guidelines on what to think about when starting a business.

1. Decide what products / services you want to offer. These need to be what people want. If no one is prepared to pay for what you offer, you don't have the makings of any business, much less a good one.
2. Decide on your target customers. Who needs your products or services? Who can afford to pay you for your products or services?
3. Choose a business structure. In South Africa you mostly only have two choices, sole proprietorship or a company. If you are unsure of what you should go for, then get some professional advice.

4. Map your finances. Know what you have to start off your business with. If you need funding then work out what you need. Work out start up costs and normal monthly running costs. You will also need to get an idea of what revenue will be like monthly, which in the beginning is going to be very much an estimate. Calculate your break-even point. Related to finances is understanding when you need to pay taxes, and what rates you will pay. Do not forget about taxes.
5. Understand the risk and the opportunities. Do a basic SWOT analysis before you begin. Write down, brainstorm with others, and do research to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your business idea.
6. Start with getting the basics in place. One of the biggest mistakes is people start too big. Start with one product or service and once that is up and running successfully you can add on others.
7. Select your vendors and suppliers. Who do you need to help you produce your product/service? Research and interview and get references. Your vendors and suppliers could make or break your business.
8. Consider who you need on your team. What positions do you need to fill? What skills and competencies does your business need, and will you provide them, or will you hire for them? Don't start by hiring lots of permanent full-time staff. Start with contracts and freelancers and associates until you have an idea of what your income is likely to be.
9. Time the launch of your business right. This can make the difference between a business that works and one that folds. Timing is important. What is going on in the market at the moment? What is happening amongst consumers?
10. Get yourself an advisor, coach or mentor. Or better yet, get a few of them. The learnings from those who have been through the process are invaluable.
11. Then start writing a business plan. Templates of business plans can be found all over the internet. You don't have to make this a perfect plan unless you are looking for funding, in which case your business plan will be very important.
12. A marketing plan is critical. Without sales and marketing there is no business. You most likely will have to have a website. It shows customers what you can do and is digital proof that you do exist. Think about how you want to draw potential customers to your website and how you want to engage with them. Consider other marketing approaches such as a social media strategy. Create a logo and start building a brand that will stand out. Develop a powerful message as to what your business offers. Speak up about your business whenever you can.

If you run your own business, and particularly if you are new to running your own business, then make sure you surround yourself with people who are also business owners. Not only will you have people supporting you rather than telling you to quit, but you will be able to share stories and ideas with like-minded people in the same circumstances as yourself. And let's face it, the best people to help you with running your own business successfully are those who have already done it successfully. Understand your own strengths and weaknesses. There are no entitlements. No one gets lucky. You are going to have to work hard for what you accomplish.

Here's to your success.