

Start an online business in 6 steps — Printable checklist

Step 1 — Research your business idea

- Identify your revenue model (products, services, affiliate, or dropshipping)
- Validate demand with keyword research (target: 1,000–50,000 searches/mo)
- Run a 5-question survey with 20+ potential customers
- Confirm there's a path to profitability (estimate margins)

Step 2 — Choose a niche and size up competition

- Define your specific niche (not just "pet products" — "organic dog supplements")
- Complete the 5-competitor gap analysis table
- Subscribe to 3 competitor email lists
- Identify 3 keywords you could realistically rank for within 6–12 months

Step 3 — Name your business and choose a structure

- Run domain name availability check
- Search USPTO for trademark conflicts
- Secure matching social media handles
- Choose legal structure (LLC recommended for most)
- File with your state (\$50–\$500)
- Get your free EIN at [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) (~10 min, free)
- Open a dedicated business bank account
- Check for required licenses/permits at [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov)

Step 4 — Fund your business and write a business plan

- Choose a funding path (bootstrap / loan / investors / grant)
- Complete lean business plan using the 10-section outline above
- Set a 12-month financial projection
- If seeking a loan: research SBA loan programs at [sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov)

Step 5 — Build your website or store

- Register domain (\$10–\$20/yr for .com; \$5–\$50/yr for alternatives)
- Choose and launch a website/store platform
- Design site with brand colors, logo, and fonts
- Add all essential pages (Home, About, Products, Contact, FAQ, Blog, Privacy Policy)
- Connect to Google Search Console (free)
- Write keyword-optimized product descriptions (use template above)
- Add high-quality product photos (multiple angles, in-use shots)

- Set up payment processing (confirm rates: typically 2.4%–3.5% + \$0.10–\$0.30/transaction)
- Enable SSL certificate
- Test full checkout flow on both mobile and desktop

Step 6 — Market and grow

- Pick your primary 2 marketing channels
- Publish at least 3 pieces of SEO-optimized content before launch
- Build and segment your email list from day one
- Set up Google Business Profile (free, if applicable)
- Ask your first 10 customers for reviews
- Track core KPIs: traffic, conversion rate, customer acquisition cost, average order value