

A lean business plan template for startups and entrepreneurs



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Key Points

- Traditional business plans aren't always the best starting point for startups needing to validate concepts and get products to market quickly
- Traditional business plans are comprehensive and detailed documents that take months to prepare. This can be challenging for startups who haven't yet acquired the skills (financial, production, marketing and sales) necessary to demonstrate their business viability
- A lean business plan is a simple 1-2 page summary that highlights the fundamentals and doesn't require extensive financial forecasting or market research
- The lean approach allows for quick and cost-effective concept validation, focusing on customer problems and the solutions to them that present immediate market opportunities, allowing startups to establish their market presence quickly
- However, a lean business plan has its limitations and disadvantages
- For established companies looking to scale their business, secure funding and investors, and attract talented employees, a traditional business plan is necessary

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Writing a traditional business plan can be overwhelming and time-consuming for startups and entrepreneurs in the early stages of product or service development. You most likely haven't had the time to validate ideas, test assumptions, and acquire the necessary skills (e.g. financial, production, marketing, and sales) needed to ensure the viability of your business. At the same time, you need to have essential information regarding your value proposition readily available. Our [lean business plan](#) template helps you to find the middle ground:

- A one-page plan to help you kickstart your business
- It doesn't require extensive financial forecasting or long-term market research
- Uses customer needs and problems as the foundation to measure success
- Allows for quick and cost-effective concept validation
- Centred around taking small steps, consistent tracking, and frequent course corrections
- Focuses on the key factors that present immediate opportunities for a competitive advantage

While lenders and investors typically ask for a traditional business plan comprising a dozen or more

pages of a detailed analysis, a lean startup plan is a good place to start if you expect many aspects of your business to change. In addition, a lean business plan template will help you to create a concise document that outlines the fundamentals.

Key differences between a traditional and lean business plan

Depending on where you are in your business or product development, there are several [reasons not to write a business plan](#). One of the most important ones is that embarking on a new venture is a risky and explorative process: putting in the effort to complete the business plan process can convince you to commit more than you can risk should your exploration fail.

In addition, before a business plan can have any clout, some work is required to validate that your technology works, that a real market for your product exists, and that the price and returns you expect are reasonable.

On the other hand, if you want to attract investors and top-level talent, a business plan is essential. The table below outlines the key [differences between traditional vs lean startup business plans](#) and will indicate which is more appropriate in your case.

TRADITIONAL BUSINESS PLAN	LEAN BUSINESS PLAN
An extensive and detailed document, on average 20-30 pages	A simple 1-2 page summary that requires less time to prepare
Outlines the business goals and long-term strategies	Takes an agile and iterative approach to get a product to market quickly
Outlines the business goals and long-term strategies	Takes an agile and iterative approach to get a product to market quickly
Includes financial projections, market research and organisational structure	Focuses on rapid prototyping and testing ideas, gathering customer feedback and making adjustments
The goal is to create a comprehensive picture that will convince funders they will get a return on their investment	The goal is to validate business assumptions quickly and minimise the number of resources spent on unproven ideas
Consists of: 1. Executive summary 2. Company description 3. Market analysis 4. Business organisation 5. Product development plan 6. Sales and marketing plan 7. Financial plan and projections 8. Funding request 9. Appendix	Consists of: 1. Value proposition and a description of the problem the startup is solving 2. Description of the target market and the methods for reaching them 3. Description of the key partners, resources and activities needed to create value for the target market 4. Characteristics of the target audience for the product or service 5. Revenue streams 6. Establishing milestones and defining the key metrics for success

How to create a lean startup business plan

If you've decided that a lean business plan is the best way forward to kickstart your business, here's how to get started:

1. [Download our free lean business plan template](#) to lay the foundation for your course of action
2. Once you have developed your minimum viable product (an early version of your product with only the essential features), put it to the test. Use our [product testing survey template](#) to gain valuable insights regarding what needs to be modified or improved to [ensure the product fits the market it's designed for](#)
3. Review your results according to the metrics for success you established
4. Revise your plan accordingly. This may involve making changes to your assumptions, sales channels, marketing techniques, and even your target customers
5. Your MVP may need several iterations before you're ready to develop the final version. For each iteration, repeat steps 2-4 until you're satisfied with the results
6. Get set to launch and kickstart your business into motion!



Lean business plan

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The pros and cons of the lean business plan approach

Lean Business Plan Template

PROBLEM	SOLUTION	UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION	MARKET ADVANTAGE	CUSTOMER SEGMENTS
Can this help to solve a problem or pain point? What is the problem?	Creating possible solutions for each problem.	Single, clear, compelling message that describes the value and differentiator and worth paying attention to. What are you delivering to customers that will make a positive impact on their lives?	Outline all of strengths that make you stand out from the competition. What are the main risks?	Can your target audience and users? How are you reaching a specific audience ?
KEY METRICS & MILESTONES	KEY METRICS & MILESTONES	KEY METRICS & MILESTONES	KEY METRICS & MILESTONES	KEY METRICS & MILESTONES
What are the key metrics and milestones for your business?	What are the key metrics and milestones for your business?	What are the key metrics and milestones for your business?	What are the key metrics and milestones for your business?	What are the key metrics and milestones for your business?
COST STRUCTURE	COST STRUCTURE	COST STRUCTURE	COST STRUCTURE	COST STRUCTURE
What are the main costs of your business?	What are the main costs of your business?	What are the main costs of your business?	What are the main costs of your business?	What are the main costs of your business?
REVENUE STREAMS	REVENUE STREAMS	REVENUE STREAMS	REVENUE STREAMS	REVENUE STREAMS
What are the main revenue streams of your business?	What are the main revenue streams of your business?	What are the main revenue streams of your business?	What are the main revenue streams of your business?	What are the main revenue streams of your business?

In addition to being straightforward and quick to implement, the [lean business planning approach](#) is flexible and adaptable. This makes it easier to pivot if the original idea isn't as viable as you thought it would be – with considerably less lost in terms of resources than if you had gone the traditional business plan route.

More importantly, by prioritising speed to market, taking the lean business approach will help you to establish your presence quickly in a highly competitive environment.

On the other hand, this approach has its limitations:

- Because the focus is on rapid prototyping and testing, there's less emphasis on long-term planning and strategic thinking. This makes it challenging to develop a sustainable and scaleable business
- The lean approach requires less investment but also means that resources are more

limited. For more expensive or exclusive products, several iterations of the MVP could end up being costly

- With a detailed business plan, creating a roadmap for the business that you can share with others is easier. This is essential for attracting investors, partners, or employees
- There's a risk of pivoting too much due to the experimentation and iteration this model encourages. This can lead to confusion and a lack of direction

A final word on using a lean business plan template

Choosing between the traditional business plan model or the lean approach will ultimately depend on your needs. The traditional route would serve you best if you need a lot of upfront investment and strategic planning. However, the lean business planning approach is ideal if you want to validate your concept quickly and cost-effectively.

That being said, there's no reason why you can't do both. In our next post, we'll explain how to write a killer business plan, so if you're a fan of tradition, there will be a template for that too!

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