

How to write a business plan:

Your template in 10 steps

The following 10 steps will guide you throughout the creative process and serve as your table of contents in the final version:

1. [Executive summary](#)
2. [Company description](#)
3. [Market research and potential](#)
4. [Competitive analysis](#)
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6. [Marketing and sales strategy](#)
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1. Executive summary

Even though it appears first in the plan, write your executive summary last so you can condense essential ideas from the other nine sections.

For now, leave it as a placeholder.

The executive summary lays out all the vital information about your business within a relatively short space; typically, one page or less.

It's a high-level look at everything and summarizes the other sections of your plan.

How to write an executive summary?

- For [target customers]
- Who are dissatisfied with [current solutions]
- Our [product or service] solves [key customer problems]
- Unlike [competing product], we have [differentiating key features]

Example of an executive summary

Market research indicates an increasing number of wealthy consumers in Cleveland are interested in landscape architecture based on sustainable design.

However, high-end firms in the area are scarce.

Currently, only two exist—neither of which focuses on eco-friendly planning nor are certified by green organizations.

Landscapers Inc. provides a premium, sustainable service for customers with disposable incomes, large yards, and a love of nature.

2. Company description

(1) Mission statement

A mission statement is your business' reason for existing. More than just what you do or what you sell ... it's about why.

Think about what motivates you, what causes and experiences led you to start the business, the problems you solve, the wider social issues you care about, and more.

(2) Company history

Don't worry about making your company history a dense narrative. Instead, write it like you would a profile:

- Founding date and milestones
- Location or location(s)
- Leadership and number of employees
- Flagship products or services

Then, translate that list into one or two paragraphs.

(3) Business objectives

Business objectives give you a north star.

These goals must be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. Or, they must be tied to key results: metrics and numbers.

Example of a company description

Landscape Inc.'s mission is to change the face of our city through sustainable landscaping and help you create the outdoor living space of your dreams.

Founded in 2019 by sisters Sherry and Shelly Smith, we have over 25 years of combined landscape-architecture experience. Our four employees work in teams of two and have already completed ten projects for some of Cleveland's most influential business and community leaders.

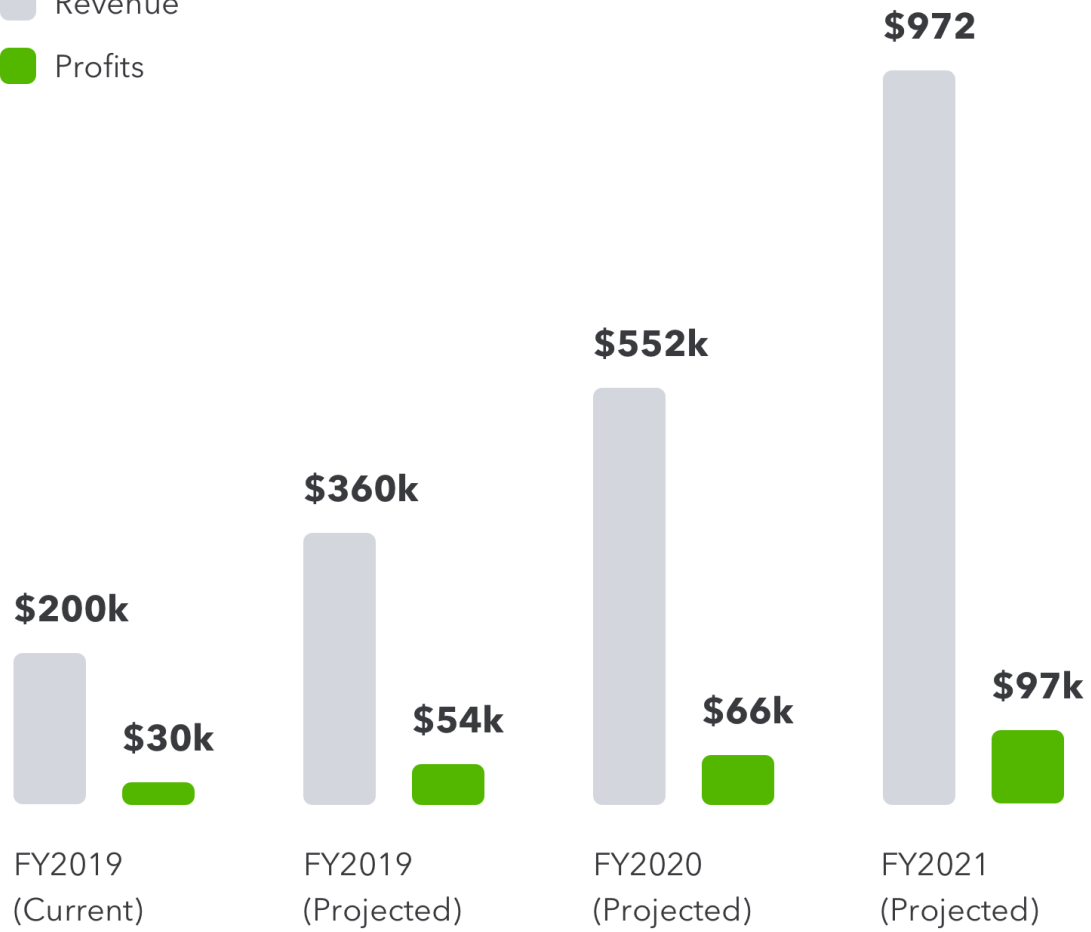
Our objectives over the next three years are to:

1. Solidify a glowing reputation as a service-based business that always exceeds customer's expectations and honors the environment
2. Complete at least 18 projects during year one, 24 in year two, and 36 in year three generated through word-of-mouth, referrals, and home shows
3. Increase revenue from \$360,000 in FY2019 to \$972,000 in FY2021 based upon the financials of ten completed projects in the last nine months

Landscape Inc. growth objectives

Revenue

Profits

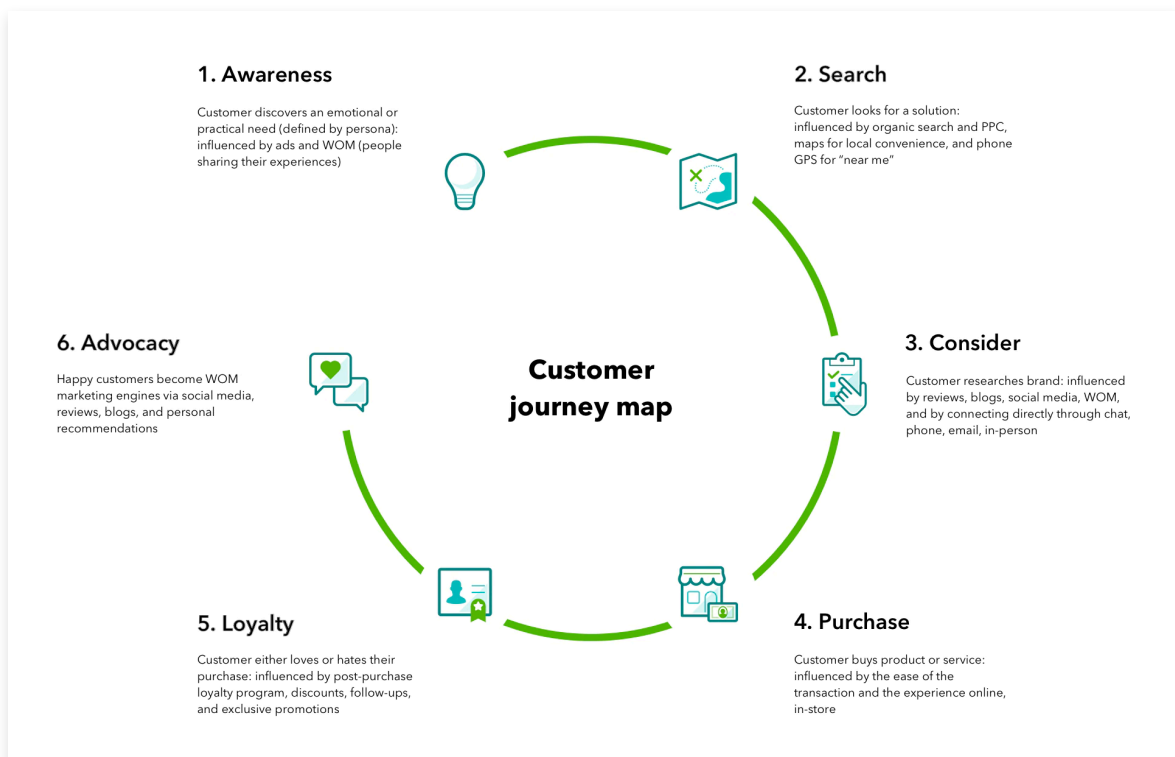


3. Market research and potential

Target markets (personas) identify demographic information:

- Location
- Income
- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Profession
- Hobbies
- Etc.

You can get even more targeted by [mapping your customer's journey](#):



Example of market research and potential

Landscapers Inc.'s ideal customer is a wealthy baby boomer or a member of Gen X between the ages of 35 and 65 with a high disposable income. He or she—though primarily, she—is a homeowner. They're a working professional or recently retired.

In love with the outdoors, they want to enjoy the beauty and serenity of nature their own backyard—but don't have the time or skill to do it for themselves.

Market research shows the opportunity for Landscape Inc. has never been better:

- In the US, total revenue for landscaping services increased from \$69.8 billion in 2013 to \$99 billion in 2019
- Among landscaping contractors, designing and building is the second fastest growing service offering
- What's more, landscape design and construction is the number one "new service" existing companies plan to add over the next year

In Cleveland, leading indicators for interest in green, eco-friendly, and sustainable landscaping have all increased exponentially over the last five years:

- Online search volume for those terms is up 467%
- Ten new community organizations have been formed
- 73 high-profile projects have been covered by local media
- And, currently, 13% of Cleveland's residents have a household income of \$125,000 or more (compared to the US average of 5%)

4. Competitive analysis

Example of competitive analysis

Within Cleveland's residential landscaping market, there are only two high-end architectural competitors: (1) Yard Makers and (2) Design Your Landscape.

All other businesses focus solely on either industrial projects or residential maintenance.

Yard Makers

- Average cost per project: \$12,000
- Ongoing maintenance fee: \$200 per month
- Google My Business: 3.1 stars from 163 reviews
- Environmental certifications: None
- Primary marketing channels: Google Ads

Design Your Landscape

- Average cost per project: \$35,000
- Ongoing maintenance fee: \$500 per month
- Google My Business: 3.7 stars from 57 reviews
- Environmental certifications: None
- Primary marketing channels: Home shows

5. Product or service

When describing benefits, focus on:

- Unique features
- Translating features into benefits
- Emotional and practical payoffs to your customers
- Intellectual property rights or any patents that protect differentiation

For the production process, answer how you:

- Create your products or service?
- Source raw materials or components?
- Assemble them through manufacturing?
- Maintain quality control and quality assurance?
- Receive and deliver them (supply-chain logistics)?
- Manage your daily operations: bookkeeping and inventory?

Within the product lifecycle portion, map elements like:

- Time between purchases
- Upsells, cross-sells, and down-sells
- Future plans for research and development

Example of product or service description

Landscaping Inc.'s service—our competitive advantage—is differentiated by three core features.

First, throughout their careers, Sherry and Shelly Smith have worked at and with Cleveland's three leading industrial-landscaping firms. This gives us unique access to the residents who are most likely to use our service.

Second, we're the only firm certified-green by the Cleveland Homeowners Association, the National Preservation Society, and Business Leaders for Greener Cleveland.

Third, of our ten completed projects—from 2018 and 2019—seven have rated us a 5 out of 5 on Google My Business and our price-points for those projects place us within a healthy middle ground between our two other competitors.

- Average cost per project: \$20,000
- Ongoing maintenance fee: \$250 per month
- Google My Business: 5 stars from 7 reviews
- Environmental certifications: Three (see Appendix)
- Primary marketing channels: Word of mouth, referrals, and home shows

6. Marketing and sales strategy

Your marketing plan can be the difference between selling so much that growth explodes or getting no business at all.

Growth strategies here are a critical part of your business plan. You should briefly reiterate topics such as your:

- Value proposition
- Ideal target markets
- Existing customer segments

Then, add your:

- Launch plan to attract new business
- Growth tactics for established businesses to expand
- Retention strategies like customer loyalty or referral programs
- Advertising and promotion channels: i.e., search engines, social media, print, television, YouTube, word of mouth, etc.

Example of marketing and sales strategy

Landscapers Inc.'s marketing and sales strategy will leverage—in order of importance:

- Word of mouth
- Referrals
- Reviews and ratings
- Local Google Ads
- Social media
- Home shows
- Direct mail

Reputation is the number one purchase influencer in high-end landscape design. As such, channels 1-4 will continue to be our top priority.

Our social media strategy will surround YouTube videos of the design process as well as multiple Instagram accounts and Pinterest boards showcasing professional photography. Lastly, our direct mail campaigns will send carbon-neutral, glossy brochures to houses in wealthy neighborhoods.

7. Business financials

Be sure to include:

- Income statements
- Profit and loss statements
- Cash flow statements
- Balance sheets

Other figures:

- How much of your revenue you retain as your net income
- Your ratio of liquidity to debt repayment ability
- How often you collect on your invoices

Ideally, provide at least three years' worth of reporting. Make sure your figures are accurate and don't provide any profit or loss projections before carefully going over your past statements for justification.

Example of business financials

- For new businesses: [Start up budget template](#)
- For existing businesses: [Income statement template](#)

8. Organization and management

Identify your team members and explain why they can either turn your business idea into a reality or continue to grow it. This section of your business plan should show off your management team superstars. Highlight expertise and qualifications throughout.

Example of organization and management

Sherry Smith, Co-founder and CEO

- Education
- Professional background
- Awards and honors
- Notable clients

Shelly Smith, Co-founder and Chief design officer

- Education
- Professional background
- Awards and honors
- Notable clients

Landscape Inc.'s creative crews

- Number of employees
- Cumulative years of experience
- Awards and honors
- Notable clients

9. Funding request

Example of a funding request

Landscape Inc. has already purchased all necessary permits, software, and equipment to serve our existing customers.

Once scaled to \$972,000 in annual revenue—over the next three years and at a 10% profit margin—our *primary* ongoing annual expenses (not including taxes) will total:

Payroll (labor)	\$612,360
Legal counsel	\$6,124
Accounting services (CPA, etc.)	\$9,623
Equipment maintenance	\$8,748
Rent and physical overhead	\$201,204
Insurance	\$17,496
Fees	\$19,245
Total ongoing annual expenses	\$874,000

While already profitable, we are requesting \$100,000 in the form of either a business loan or in exchange for equity to purchase equipment necessary to outfit two additional creative crews.

10. Appendix of official documents

Finally, assemble a well-organized appendix for anything and everything (1) investors will need to conduct due diligence and (2) you or your employees will need easy access to moving forward:

- Deeds, local permits, and legal documents
- Business registries and professional licenses
- Patents and intellectual properties
- Industry associations and memberships
- State and federal identification numbers or codes
- Key customer contracts and purchase orders

As you include documents in the appendix, create a miniature table of contents and footnotes throughout the rest of the plan linking to or calling attention to them.