Business Launch Checklist for Start-tups

The practical checklist for launching a new business — covering the legal, financial, digital, and marketing foundations you need before you open.

STARTUP BUSINESS CHECKLIST

Business Launch Checklist for Startups

The period between deciding to start a business and being properly set up to run one is a minefield. There are things you need to do in the right order, things you can do later that feel urgent, and things that seem optional but matter more than they look.

This checklist is structured around the foundations a business needs before it can operate credibly and sustainably. It's relevant to most small businesses in the UK — adjust based on your sector and circumstances.

Legal and Financial Foundations

Business Structure

- [ ] Decide on business structure: sole trader, partnership, or limited company
- [ ] **If sole trader**: register for Self Assessment with HMRC (you must do this if you earn over £1,000 from self-employment in a tax year)
- [ ] **If limited company**: register with Companies House (gov.uk/register-a-company-online) — £12 online
- [ ] Obtain a business bank account (legally separate from personal accounts, required for limited companies)

- [ ] Register for VAT if your turnover will exceed the VAT threshold (currently £90,000) — or consider voluntary registration

Tax and Accounting

- [ ] Understand when your first tax return is due and what it covers
- [ ] Set up basic bookkeeping — spreadsheet at minimum, accounting software (Xero, QuickBooks, FreeAgent) recommended
- [ ] Open a separate account for tax (put aside 20–30% of revenue immediately)
- [ ] Find an accountant — even if you handle day-to-day bookkeeping yourself, a qualified accountant for the annual return pays for itself

Contracts and Protection

- [ ] Draft your standard Terms and Conditions (or commission a solicitor to draft them)
- [ ] Create a standard client contract or service agreement
- [ ] Consider what insurance you need:
- [ ] Public liability insurance (essential if you work with members of the public)
- [ ] Professional indemnity insurance (essential for advice-giving professions)
- [ ] Employers' liability insurance (legally required if you employ anyone)
- [ ] Equipment and business contents insurance

Digital Presence

Domain and Hosting

- [ ] Register your domain name (keep .co.uk and .com if possible)
- [ ] Set up business email on your domain (hello@yourbusiness.co.uk, not a personal Gmail)
- [ ] Choose and set up hosting

Website

- [ ] Define the minimum viable website: what pages do you absolutely need before launch?
- [ ] Build or commission the site with at minimum: Home, About, Services, Contact
- [ ] Add your address, phone number, and email to every page footer

- [ ] Set up Google Analytics
- [ ] Create and verify your Google Search Console account
- [ ] Submit a sitemap
- [ ] Ensure the site is mobile-friendly
- [ ] Add an SSL certificate (https://) — most hosts provide this free via Let's Encrypt

Google Business Profile

- [ ] Claim and verify your Google Business Profile
- [ ] Complete all fields including photos, opening hours, and categories
- [ ] Add your website URL

Social Media

- [ ] Claim your brand name on relevant platforms (even if you're not active immediately — prevent someone else claiming it)
- [ ] Set up the platforms you will actually maintain consistently
- [ ] Complete all profile fields including bio, website link, and contact information

---

Operations

Communication

- [ ] Business email address set up and working
- [ ] Professional email signature with name, role, business name, phone, and website
- [ ] Voicemail set up if you have a business phone number
- [ ] Decide how quickly you commit to responding to enquiries (and stick to it)

Financial Processes

- [ ] Create an invoice template (must include: your name/business name, address, customer details, invoice number, description of services, payment terms, bank details or payment method)
- [ ] Set payment terms: 14 or 30 days is standard
- [ ] Decide on your pricing and document it

- [ ] Set up a method for accepting payment (bank transfer, card via Stripe/Square/SumUp)

Processes and Tools

- [ ] Set up a simple project management system (Notion, Trello, or a spreadsheet) — even one person needs a system
- [ ] Create a client onboarding process: what happens when a new client confirms?
- [ ] Create templates for frequently repeated communication (welcome email, project kickoff, invoice cover email)

Brand and Marketing

Brand Basics

- [ ] Finalise your business name (check it's available: Companies House, trademark register, domain, social handles)
- [ ] Commission or create a logo — minimum viable version first, refine later
- [ ] Define 2–3 brand colours and a consistent typeface
- [ ] Create a simple brand guidelines document (even one page) so all your materials look consistent

Content Foundation

- [ ] Write your core brand messages: what you do, who you do it for, why it matters
- [ ] Write an "About" story that is genuine and specific
- [ ] Create a case study or portfolio piece from your first piece of work, however small
- [ ] Set up an email newsletter platform and create a sign-up form

Launch Announcement

- [ ] Identify everyone who should know about the launch: personal contacts, professional network, local business community
- [ ] Plan a launch announcement: social posts, an email, a local press release if relevant
- [ ] Set a launch date and work backwards from it

The Things That Can Wait

To avoid launch paralysis, these are things that can come after you've started:

- Perfect website copy (ship something honest, improve it)
- A comprehensive social media presence on every platform (pick one or two, do them well)
- Professional photography (phone photography is fine for launch)
- Printed materials (unless your business specifically requires them at launch)
- A complex brand identity (a clean wordmark gets you started)

---

30 Days After Launch

Once you've been trading for a month, review:

- [ ] How are enquiries finding you? Which channels are working?
- [ ] Is your pricing right? (Are you winning everything? You're probably too cheap. Winning nothing? Look at the pitch, not just the price.)
- [ ] What's taking more time than expected? What can be systemised?
- [ ] What feedback have your first customers given you?
- [ ] What's the one thing, fixed, that would make the biggest difference?