

QUICK GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED WITH PLAN CANVAS

PAINT THE PICTURE FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

STOP WRITING PLANS THAT CAN'T HELP YOU MANAGE.

START MANAGING PLANS THAT GET YOU RESULTS.

PLAN
CANVAS

SUMMARY

Please read Before Beginning.

Included in this Quick Guide are the following sections/topics:

1. Before Beginning
2. Defining Users
3. Getting Started
4. Build Your Long Term Strategic Plan
5. Check Point and Next Steps
6. Build You 12-Month Business Plan
7. Now That You Have Plans

A suggested order of plan development and execution is as follows:

1. Start by documenting and managing Action Items in Plan Canvas
2. Describe your business under Organization
3. Develop and begin tracking against a long term Strategic Plan
4. Develop a 12-month Business Plan
5. Continuously track progress and adjust plans accordingly

BEFORE BEGINNING

A football coach would never go into a game without a plan. Suppose that on the first play of the game, a key player is injured. What does the coach do?

- a. Sticks to the plan even though many plays were drawn up with the now injured player in mind?
“The plan is the plan, and that’s it!”
- b. Throws the game plan away? “Let’s just get out there, play hard, and see what happens!”
- c. Adjust the plan.

Option a) is as foolish as entering the game without a plan. Option b) is good when an individual play falls apart. The players have to rely on instinct and experience, call an audible, or make things up as the play unfolds. But that doesn’t invalidate the plan.

The correct answer is c. The coach adjusts the plan. In fact, the plan is continually executed and adjusted all the way down to the last second of the game.

That's exactly how we should approach business.

Plan Canvas is a Strategy Execution Management (SEM) software. That means we put an emphasis on building simplistic, no-nonsense plans that get straight to the point. As such, it is detailed enough for most small business and startup plans. But if your plans need to be much more complex, you may consider developing the details outside of Plan Canvas, then using Plan Canvas as the single repository for management/summary level information that points to details elsewhere.

Regardless, and more to the Plan Canvas point, maximum benefit is achieved when you to continuously manage the plan, right up until you exit the business – just as a coach will continuously manage the game plan right up until the end of the game.

DEFINING USERS

You can define up to 4 users within Plan Canvas under the User option. These are individuals who will actually review or make modifications to your plans, results, and activities.

You may also add an unlimited number of Ad Hoc Users. These individuals receive assignments, email and calendar notifications from Plan Canvas, but don't otherwise actually interact with the software.

GETTING STARTED

There are 2 excellent options to get started in Plan Canvas:

1. With Action Items

2. With a description of your business Organization.

Action Items – Right now you probably have a laundry list of things to do written in a notebook, on numerous sticky notes, buried in your email, or in your head. Start recording those Action Items within Plan Canvas for the following primary reasons:

- Get organized with a single place to see all outstanding and active Action Items
- Easily make assignments to yourself, other Users, or Ad Hoc Users
- Improve accountability with Plan Canvas' automated email and calendar notifications
- Maintain visibility of everything due via the Dashboard, the Action Item display window, and Progress Reports

An Action Item is more than a "To Do" list. It includes who is responsible, when it is due, the current status (Not Started, Started Closed), and any additional notes or outcomes you would like to record. When the Action Item is complete, change the status to "Closed".

You may then "Archive" it so that it no longer displays on any of your Plan Canvas windows or reports.

Organization – Simply describe your business or organization within the Organization area of Plan Canvas. You aren't doing any planning here, just talking about things.

Here you may define the vision, mission and purpose of the business or organization, draft an elevator pitch, and discuss any legal, licensing, or certifications that have to be considered in operating it.

If you have multiple Business Units (organizations, teams, etc.) that will have plans of their own, define them. Similarly, identify and describe any physical locations/Facilities for your business.

Next describe the Products and services you will offer. Why would anyone ever want or need it, and how does it satisfy their want or need? Try to think at an emotional level and from the customer's perspective here.

Then describe the Markets for your products and services. Define it in your terms. What is the size, what are the trends, and who are the competitors in the market? What are they doing? Avoid stating "My market includes everyone." Get more specific. Identify as many unique markets as makes sense for your business. Later, when developing plans, you will combine Products with Markets.

Finally, start thinking about how you will define "success". What kinds of things will you measure? These "things" are called Key Performance Indicators or KPIs. Plan Canvas comes preloaded with more than 50 typical KPIs in 6 categories. Explore them all, then determine if you need or want to define your own and simply add them in.

BUILD YOUR LONG TERM STRATEGY PLAN

Within Organization, when you define your Vision, you also have opportunity to describe Today's Reality. The purpose of a strategic plan is to close the gap between vision and reality over time.

Once you have defined vision, mission, and purpose, there are only 3 other major components to the strategic plan: goals, objectives, and initiatives.

Goals – Define the long term Goals of your business or organization. Think of goals as more like a destination than a journey. They are largely not measurable beyond asking "Are we there yet?"

Goals come in 4 categories:

1. Financial
2. Customer
3. Employee
4. Social Responsibility

Identify at least one but not more than three goals per category.

Objectives – Measure progress toward Goals by identifying measurable Objectives. Think of them as mile-markers or stopping points on the journey to your destination (goals). This is where you will use the KPIs you considered under Organization. Remember, strategic plans address the long-term, so try to identify long-term objectives here. What do you want to accomplish, by when?

Initiatives – Goals and objectives are accomplished in 2 ways. Over the course of time, your business operations get you there. But much of the time, they can only be enabled or accomplished by doing things that go above and beyond your day-to-day business operations. These are internal projects called Initiatives. "Develop a web site" is a simple example of an initiative. It's more than an Action Item because it includes several steps (actions). It is a project with a defined end date. It is assigned to a specific person to be accountable for it, and it may include some "mini" objectives or milestones of its own.

If you are a start-up, you may have many initiatives defined that are active all at the same time. If your business is up and running, try not to have more than three initiatives going on at any given time because they take focus and resources (time and money) away from your day-to-day business operation.

Be sure that each initiative directly supports at least one strategic Objective and Prioritize your initiatives. Always remember this: It may be a smart thing to do, but it isn't necessarily the smartest thing to do right now.

CHECK POINT AND NEXT STEPS

At this point, you should be actively using Plan Canvas to manage:

- Action Items
- Strategic Objectives
- Strategic Initiatives

Next steps depend on how you answer this question: Are you developing detailed financial plans/models or are you developing summary versions only?

If you are developing detailed financial plans, do it outside of Plan Canvas. Use various templates you find or build in Excel, or rely on other financial planning tools.

An example of an inexpensive, easy to use software is [POINDEXTER](#). Plan Canvas is not affiliated with Poindexter in any way. We just find it a good, intuitive alternative to planning with Excel spreadsheets.

As you develop detailed financial plans or if you are only developing summary level financial plans, you are now ready to build your Business Plan within Plan Canvas.

BUILD YOUR 12-MONTH BUSINESS PLAN

While the strategic plan is designed to close the gap between vision and reality over the long-haul, the Business Plan is more tactical in nature and defines how you will manage the business in the next/current 12-month financial cycle.

It includes 4 major sections, or sub-plans:

1. Product, Sales, and Marketing Plan
2. Operations Plan
3. Staffing Plan
4. Financial Plan

As you develop your detailed or financial plan summary, you should be answering 1 big question that generates several others:

How much money do I have to have left over after all revenue and costs have been taken into consideration?

If you start with that end-state in mind, you can work your way backwards to make several assumptions and answer several more questions that you will document in Plan Canvas.

Product, Sales, and Marketing Plan – You can begin to build your Product, Sales, and Marketing Plan in one of 2 ways:

1. Start with the Financial Plan end-state in mind: “In order to take home that amount of money, I need to sell this amount of product and services.”
2. Start with Sales end-state in mind: “I can reasonably sell this much product, at this rate, generating that much revenue.”

Either beginning approach is fine, but realistically, you will be using both to perform checks and balances as you develop your plans because part of the purpose is to determine: Is this realistic? Can it be done?

Dream big, but be wise.

Within this section of Plan Canvas, you will discuss which Products and Services you will provide to which Markets, as well as discuss things like your thoughts on pricing, sales and promotional channels. You will also identify your sales pipeline and set your Objectives for sales and marketing. If you are conducting deep financial modeling outside of Plan Canvas, some of the objectives will be driven from that work.

Operations Plan – Here you record things such as your thoughts and methods on quality, product development, and inventory control. For most small businesses, Plan Canvas satisfies the needs of a simplistic operations plan. If you have a more complex business operating model, such as a manufacturing facility, for example, Plan Canvas should be used as a central repository for management summaries of your more detailed plans.

Identify at least one objective within this section of the Business Plan.

Staffing Plan – Plan for the number of staff that is required to support your financial, sales, and operating objectives. Compare that to your current staff to identify hiring or staff reduction / realignment needs.

In this section of the Business Plan you can also document things like specific training you will have your employees complete (at what cost), and any bonus/incentives or non-monetary employee retention plans you may have in mind.

Identify at least one objective within this section of the Business Plan.

Financial Plan – Whether you developed a detailed Financial Plan outside of Plan Canvas or not, document additional information in this section of the Business Plan. Here, you will want to capture things like any comparative analysis you have done with competitors or peer businesses (or the industry in general).

You should also keep a list of any major assumptions you have made in putting your financial plan together, then conduct a risk analysis against those assumptions, documenting the risk’ impact, likelihood, and your plan to avoid it or minimize its impact.

All Sections – Your plans and measurable objectives within each sub-plan impacts the others, so make sure they are all consistently in-synch.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE PLANS

The real power in planning comes from tracking progress against your plans and making adjustments to the plans accordingly. Once you've built your plans, continuously track and modify. The following is an example schedule of review frequency:

- Weekly – Review Action Items, Strategic Initiatives, Client Projects
- Monthly – Review Business Plan Objectives
- Every 6 Months – Review Strategic Objectives
- Yearly – Create New 12-month Business Plan

At any time, on-demand, you can generate Strategic and Business Plans as well as business and client project progress reports from Plan Canvas.

