

Startup Checklist

Your Complete Implementation Guide

A Step-by-Step Framework for Building Successful Startups

Must Have	Non-negotiables that prevent serious risk
Should Have	Strongly recommended for stability
Could Have	Long-term excellence and optimization

How to Use This Checklist

This checklist is designed for startup founders to guide you through the essential stages of building a business. Adapt these items based on your specific industry, location, and growth stage. Research shows that 50% of startups fail within five years, often due to preventable oversights in planning, validation, or execution. Use this framework to reduce risk and build a solid foundation.

Your Startup Readiness Score

Track your progress by checking off completed items. Calculate your score to understand your startup's readiness level.

Must Have Items

__ / 43

Critical Non-Negotiables

Should Have Items

__ / 25

Stability & Growth

Could Have Items

__ / 10

Long-Term Excellence

Total Completion


__ / 78


Overall Progress


Scoring Metrics & Readiness Levels

0-25% (0-19 items) - Early Stage  **Focus on Must Have items immediately**

26-50% (20-39 items) - Building Foundation  **Complete Must Haves, start Should Haves**

51-75% (40-58 items) - Launch Ready  **Strong foundation, refine growth items**

76-100% (59-78 items) - Scale Ready  **Excellent! Focus on optimization & scaling**

 **Pro Tip:** Aim for 100% of Must Have items before launch. Should Have items significantly improve stability. Could Have items enhance long-term competitiveness.

MUST HAVE: Non-Negotiables

1. Problem & Market Validation

[Must Have] [Foundation]

- One clear problem statement
- Target customer clearly defined
- Evidence the problem exists (20-30+ customer interviews)
- Users actively searching for solutions
- Willingness to pay validated
- Market size estimated (TAM, SAM, SOM)

2. Solution & Value Proposition

[Must Have] [Foundation]

- Clear value proposition in one sentence
- Solution directly solves core problem
- Differentiation from alternatives
- Measurable benefit for users
- Assumptions documented and prioritized

3. Product (MVP)

[Must Have] [Foundation]

- MVP scope defined
- Only essential features included
- MVP solves core use case
- Product usable by real users
- Feedback loop established
- Clear learning goals for MVP

4. Team & Ownership

[Must Have] [Foundation]

- Founder roles clearly defined
- Decision making authority assigned
- Equity split agreed and documented
- Founders agreement signed with vesting
- Skills gaps identified

5. Legal & Company Setup

[Must Have] [Foundation]

- Company legally registered
- IP ownership assigned to company
- Business bank account opened
- Basic accounting set up
- Required licenses obtained
- Data privacy basics covered

6. Go-To-Market Basics

[Must Have] [Building]

- Ideal customer profile defined
- First acquisition channel chosen
- Pricing model decided
- First 10 customers onboarded
- Customer feedback collected
- Basic support process in place

7. Financial Foundations

[Must Have] [Building]

- Startup costs estimated
- Monthly burn rate calculated
- Runway understood (months until out of money)
- Revenue model defined
- Break-even assumptions outlined

8. Culture & Leadership

[Must Have] [Building]

- Mission and vision written
- Core values defined
- Feedback culture established
- Founder coaching or peer group
- Hiring culture documented

9. Brand & Positioning

[Should Have] [Building]

- Company name finalized
- Domain secured
- Basic brand identity (logo, colors, typography)
- Simple website or landing page
- Clear messaging framework

10. Operations & Processes

[Should Have] [Building]

- Task and project management system
- Internal documentation started
- Hiring plan outlined
- Contractor agreements ready
- KPIs defined and tracked

11. Sales & Marketing

[Should Have] [Building]

- Marketing strategy documented (6-12 months)
- Content or outreach plan
- CRM or lead tracking system
- Onboarding flow defined
- Retention strategy considered

12. Fundraising Readiness

[Should Have] [Building]

- Pitch deck prepared (10-15 slides)
- Financial projections created (3 years)
- Cap table documented
- Data room assembled
- Target investors identified

13. Risk & Compliance

[Should Have] [Building]

- Legal risks reviewed
- Technical risks identified
- Data security measures in place
- Backup and recovery plan
- Insurance considered

COULD HAVE: Long-Term Excellence

14. Growth & Scaling

[Could Have] [Growth]

- Growth experiments planned
- Automation tools implemented
- Scalable architecture
- Advanced analytics
- Partnerships explored

15. Product & Customer Excellence

[Could Have] [Growth]

- UX improvements roadmap
- Customer success processes
- Feature roadmap defined
- User community built
- Advocacy or referral program

Your Next Steps

- Print or download this checklist
- Assess where you are currently
- Prioritize ruthlessly: Must Have items first
- Set weekly goals: 2-3 items per week
- Talk to customers constantly
- Join founder communities
- Review progress monthly