



How to start a clothing brand: the 9-step plan

by the Simply Business Editorial Team

About Simply Business

We're one of the UK's largest business insurance providers. Since we started life in 2005, we've helped three million small businesses and self-employed people find the protection that's right for them, from builders to bakers and personal trainers (we cover landlords, too).

How does it work?

Answer a few questions about your business and we'll show you quotes from a range of insurers. After you buy, our Northampton-based team will be with you through every step of your cover, whether you have questions about your policy or you need to make a claim.

How to start a clothing business

It can be an all-consuming process but with that first sample run and customer sale comes great satisfaction. Use our nine-step plan for starting a clothing business.

When starting a clothing line, the to-do's can seem overwhelming. Here are our top nine bases to cover.



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Decide on your niche

Starting a clothing business is a very personal journey. You're probably a creative person, with something different to offer in a fast-moving industry. It's likely that you've spotted a [gap in the market](#), or have a unique design in mind for a specific customer group.

Whatever your inspiration for starting up, it's important to define your niche from the out-set. Are you looking for information on how to start a fitness clothing brand or a sports clothing line, for example? Maybe you're planning to build a fanbase for one specific item, like the world-famous Fred Perry shirt.

Or it could be a particular style that you have in mind for your clothing line – like the pared back, design-focused children's products sold by lifestyle brand Scandiborn, or menswear that nods to your own unique heritage?

It could also be a clothing business that's born out of a particular need or ethos, from cruelty-free clothing to premature baby accessories.

Know your niche, and bear it in mind. Even if you branch out and introduce lots of other designs as time goes by, your original idea gives you heritage, a guiding principle, and a reason to be remembered.



Build your budget or business plan

If this is really just a shoestring idea, and you're testing your designs on a small scale, you might not need a full-on [business plan](#) to get started. Watch out though, if your idea takes off you'll want to scale pretty quickly, so it makes sense to keep even a rough plan in the background.

Bear in mind, the fashion industry is notoriously difficult to predict. Plans will need to be flexible and there are no guarantees, so you'll need to be up for the challenge.

Creating a budget...

For the first few months at least, it pays to keep things simple. Starting with one design which you love, know how to manufacture (or buy) and have had great feedback on may be much easier than launching with a lengthy product catalogue.

It helps to have a fixed figure in mind, and decide how you're going to spend your funding, along with what you want to achieve. Try to allow room for flexibility – you may not know the price of specific materials yet, for example, or manufacturing costs – but having that original budget in mind will help you make the decisions that drive your first sales.

Your budget will also depend on whether you plan to design and make the clothes yourself (or with a manufacturer), or buy clothes from designers at wholesale price. Either way, start small. Invest in smaller designers and/or basic equipment to start off with and as demand grows, you can review your key outgoings.

[Read our guide on how to budget and download a free budget template.](#)

... and/or a clothing line business plan

If you need a business plan – perhaps to secure funding or other support – start off by nailing the basics. You'll need to give an overview of your business, including an executive summary, and a clear outline of how your clothing line is going to start, grow and prepare to scale.

You'll also need to include the analysis you've done, to understand your target market and any competitors. Remember, this does need to be data-oriented, concrete and preferably something you've done with external sources. It can't just be your personal view of what's wrong with the current market options (although there's a place for this too!).

Your plan should also outline who's involved in your business and what they do, whether it's just you, or you're working with anyone else. You'll need to leave room for the product(s), of course, and talk about any plans you have for branding, sales and marketing, as well as operations.

Finally, whoever's reading your plan will be most concerned with one thing, and that's the money. You'll need to finish off with a solid section clearly outlining your business' current financial position (even if this is very initial), priorities for growth, and how their investment will help things to fly.



Organise your business

Even if you're not writing a full-on business plan, the same principles apply when organising your startup. You may be planning just to buy a sewing machine and get straight to work, but even this is a time and resource commitment.

If you're investing effort and have goals for the future, put down in writing how your business will take shape, including plans and ideas for:

Your location(s)

Are you [working from your bedroom](#) but aiming to move into a small studio? Remember, certain rules apply for [online businesses](#), or [market stall traders](#).

How it works

Is it going to be you selling pieces on a stall for now? Or are you going to be an online retailer? Could Facebook Marketplace or Instagram be a good place to start? If so, check out our guide on [how to sell on Facebook Marketplace](#) and [how to sell on Instagram](#) before you get started.

Maybe you're even planning to open a bricks and mortar shop. Whatever option you go for, most businesses will need to [get set up with HMRC](#) for tax purposes, and factor in time to sort out any [licenses or permits](#) (especially if you're planning to trade on the street or at a market).

You'll also need to research the rules you must follow before [selling clothes online](#), buying from or selling abroad, or [storing personal details from your customers, fanbase or even your suppliers](#).

Who's running things?

Even if it's just you managing the business, are there any other key people involved who you're going to rely on? For example, a designer, accountant, people to help you with setting up a stall, storage etc?

Your product catalogue

This might just be one hero product, or you could have a long list of items. Be aware of your product list and think about how you plan to manufacture, stock and store pieces, along with particular packaging needs.

Sales and marketing

We'll cover this in more detail below, but it's a good idea to think through your [marketing plans](#) and how you're going to create some buzz around your clothes and designs.

You'll want to think about how you might use social media and whether you need a [business website](#), blog or printed marketing materials.

Insurance

You might just be planning to sell items online, straight from your sewing machine, but if you're investing time and funds, it's worth protecting your small business from the outset, ideally with a tailored [business insurance](#) or [clothing/fashion shop insurance](#) policy.

This can include things like [online retailer insurance](#), [product liability insurance](#), and [stock cover](#).

Funding

You'll need some idea of what money you already have, to get your business up and running, and where you can look for additional support. From government-backed Start Up Loans to crowdfunding, our [small business finance guide](#) is a great place to start.

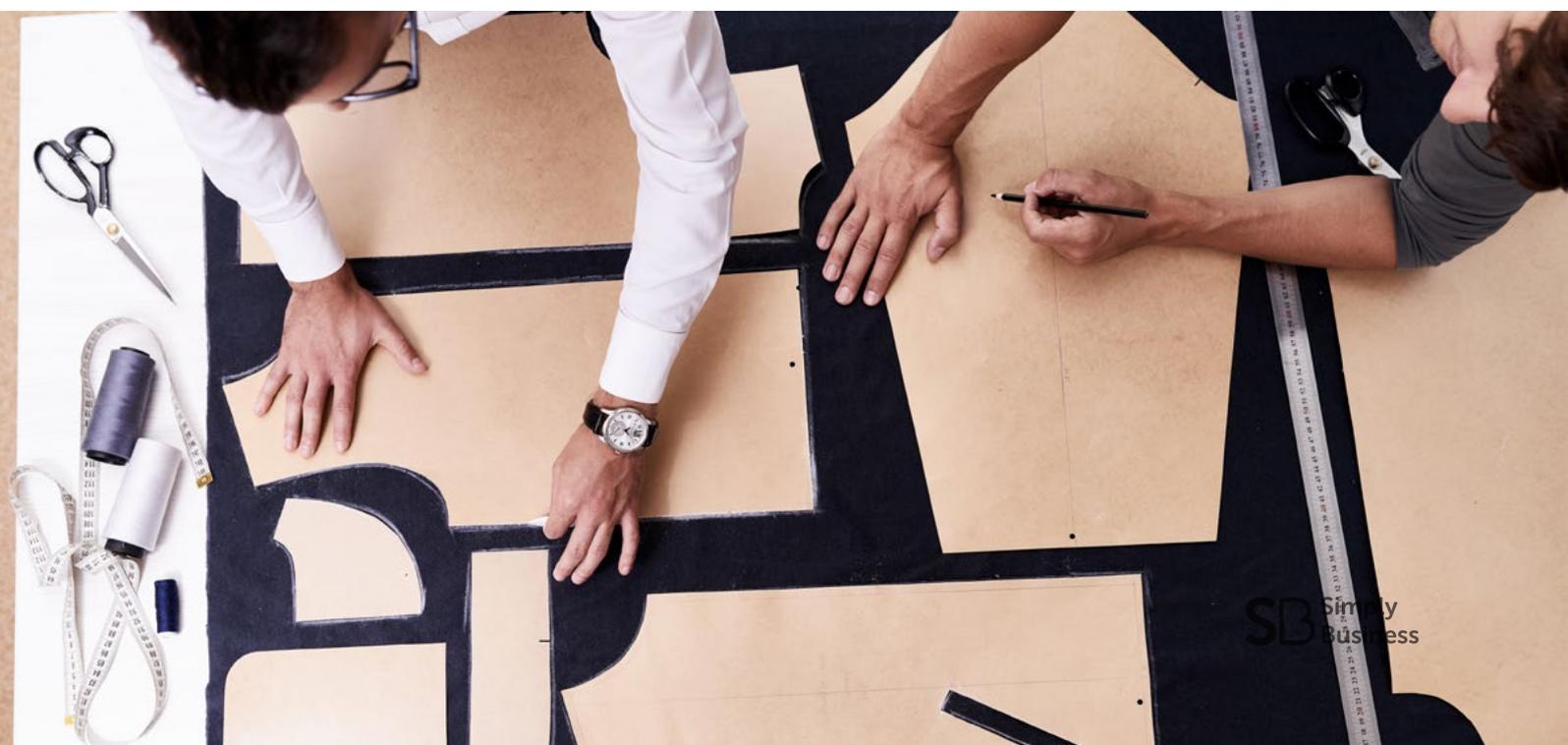
When it comes to managing your finances, you might find it helpful to read our guide on the [best business bank accounts](#) and [best accounting software for small businesses](#).

Create your designs

For any clothing business, one of the most exciting stages is product development. Even if you only have a design concept for one product in these early days, start getting it on paper or screen, as a sketch. Once you're ready, turn rough ideas into nailed down digital sketches. Programmes like Adobe Illustrator can do a lot of the hard work for you.

Sketches done, you'll need to think about your 'tech pack', which is the essential information you'll give to your manufacturer. It'll need to include your product's details and technical specifications, from design and measurements to materials and any extra accessories or features.

From there, you'll need to get started on pattern making and grading, ahead of sourcing your manufacturer.



Create your brand

As a fashion or clothing pro, you're likely to be creative. And this will stand you in good stead for developing a brand for your startup clothing company. Read our [essential tips to create a brand](#) that works for your business.

Pick a [brand name that appeals to your target audience](#). For instance, you might choose a brand name based on the age of your target audience, like Fish & Kids. And if your store features your own unique designs, you could always use your name as your brand's name (just like Tommy Hilfiger and Hugo Boss).



Start manufacturing

Go back to your design work and get everything together. It's time to take your product to the manufacturers. This is the point where you'll be sourcing the person (or team) that's going to take your designs and make them a reality.

Of course, if you're intending to make everything yourself for now, or with your own hand-picked team, you can skip this step! This also applies if you're simply looking to buy ready-made products wholesale, and sell them on.

To start your search for the right manufacturer, ask around amongst any contacts you have and get a feel for your priorities. Is it artisan craftsmanship you're looking to source, or a commercial supplier with an emphasis on speed and dependability? Manufacturing is a crucial part of any clothing business, no matter the size, so spend time finding, speaking to and vetting a good list of potentials.

Once you've decided, it's time to have a sample made. Get your chosen manufacturer to run a small batch of your designs and maybe test them against those from another manufacturer. Factor in time to discuss adjustments and improvements, before you pull the trigger on a full product run.

Along with your own aims and reasons for starting a clothing line, think about your potential customer. Who are you looking to sell to? Are they likely to prefer a certain look and feel? Are you designing for people who care a lot about the overall experience of buying from your brand (from website or shop floor to label, packaging and email newsletter), or is there a risk of alienating people with fancy packaging or a millennial look and feel?

Whatever you decide, base your brand on your instincts and a bit of research. As far as your budget allows, factor in cash for packaging and your customer communications, and above all, try to be consistent. It's no good using beautiful packaging one month and a battered jiffy bag the next.

Test your product

Looking to use up those sample run designs? Taking them to market can be a great way to test your product without committing to the full product run. Market trading spaces, school fairs and online platforms like Facebook Marketplace can be great places to start, taking notes and asking your customers all the time for their feedback on the product, and anything else they're looking for.

You'll find that the [market research](#) stage never quite ends, as you'll forever be adding new products to your line, and working out what sells and what's less popular.

Feedback is an important form of business currency and a way to fast-track your growth, so take it on board and refine your fantastic products.



Take it to market

You've tested out your product, it's selling and you're ready to order your first full product run. It's time to get serious about selling your product, and you'll have a few decisions to make before boxing up that first garment.

Take the time to consider how you'll:

- price your products
- market your brand
- create an online clothing store, if this is your plan
- organise any deals or promotions
- package up your products
- ship your products (if working on an order basis)
- deal with any returns or customer issues
- plan ahead with your manufacturer for new seasons and busy periods

This may all be in your business plan, but it's a good idea to refine the details before you go into full-scale production.

Scale up

You've done it. Your clothing company is launched, you've made your first sales and you're ironing out the creases. Scaling may well be on your mind as an ambitious business owner, with plans for new products or bigger orders.

Take some time to reflect on how your business is going, before committing to any big next steps. In fact, it pays to keep things small and simple for your first couple of seasons, getting to know the reality of production and fulfilment before taking on the next challenge. Your business plan may reflect your growth timeline, but again, be flexible.

Your first job may well be to [hire your first employee](#), to help you with all of the above, giving you some much-needed breathing room to take stock of the clothing business you've created.



Still deciding if a clothing brand is the right self-employed business for you?

You could consider one of these other options, which can be relatively quick and easy to get off the ground:

- [cake and baking business](#)
- [candle making](#)
- [dog walking business](#)
- [cleaning business](#)
- [courier business](#)

General guides on starting your own business

- [how to become a freelancer](#)
- [how to start a business](#)
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