

QuickLabs

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Tune up Your Business Plan with QuickBooks

Do you have a business plan? If you don't, even if you're a sole proprietor, you should.

Business plans can be a good barometer for the health of your finances as a way to gauge whether or not you're on the right path. If you don't have a business path (or if yours is less than organized or polished), you can use QuickBooks' tools to create or fine-tune one. We'll show you how to use these tools to get the job done quickly and easily.

The game plan

To get started, select *Company > Planning & Budgeting > Use Business Plan Tool* and you'll see what's displayed in **Figure 1**. QuickBooks' business plan tool uses a convention that other Intuit products use frequently: a lengthy wizard that walks you through the entire process. This tool supplies information and asks questions about what's needed on each screen. You fill in the answers (or select from options) and the business plan wizard works in the background to place the data in the correct place.

The first topic you'll be asked about is your company. If you're a new business, you'll have to estimate in some areas, like the percentage of your sales that will come through credit. In other cases, you'll be better able to answer in concrete terms. For example, what will your customer payment terms be? When do you want your business plan and financial projection to start?

What's coming in?

Your income is up next, and this will take some figure-pulling (and maybe some hair-pulling). You can either fill in a spreadsheet manually, adding up to 20 categories, or

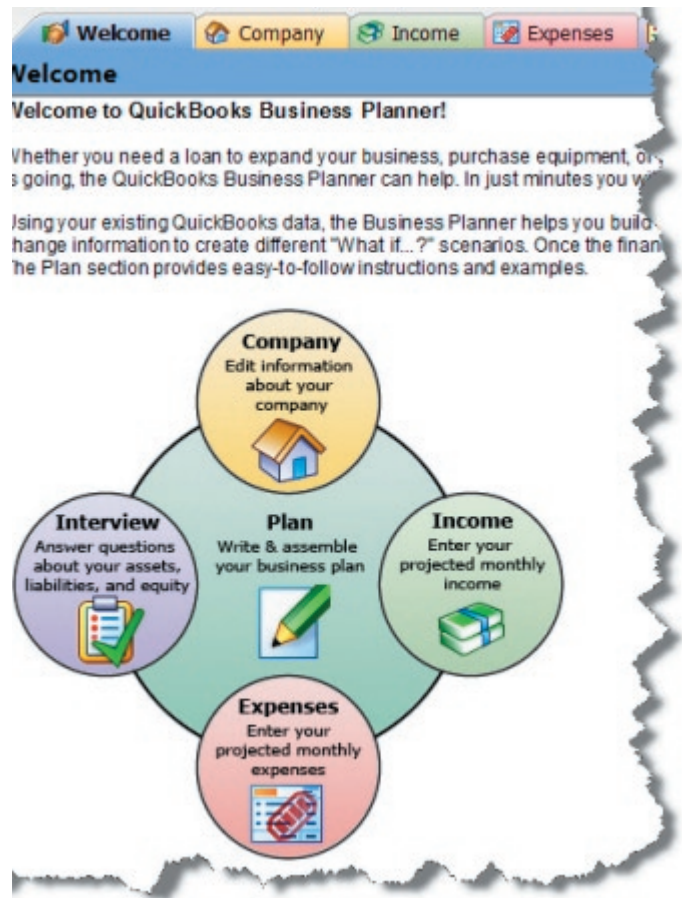


Figure 1: QuickBooks walks you through the process of creating a business plan with an easy-to-use interface.



QuickLabs is the number one QuickBooks affiliate site on the internet. QuickLabs is owned and operated by Darryl Abrahms. He is a recognized expert in QuickBooks and has been a QuickBooks consultant since 1993. He is a charter member of Intuit's QuickBooks Professional Advisors program and has been a Certified QuickBooks Professional Advisor since 1999.

use the Income Projection Wizard, as pictured in **Figure 2**. If you've already been working with your data in QuickBooks, the latter is certainly recommended. These numbers will be scrutinized very carefully, perhaps put under the microscope more than any other element of your business plan. Make sure you can back them up.

If you're projecting manually, be prepared to calculate the Cost of Goods Sold (COGS). This number contains three pieces:

- Material: What percentage of each dollar pays for the cost of product(s)? If you're a service company, enter the associated materials costs.
- Labor: What percentage of each dollar is tied to the employee costs associated with goods production?

- Other: What percentage of each dollar goes into other costs?

Business expenses and more

You have the same two choices when you're entering your expenses. You can enter them manually or use the Expenses Projection Wizard. If you do the latter, your projections can be based on either the last 12 months of history or an average from the last 12 months.

In the Interview section, you'll need to have numbers available, including:

- Beginning account balances
- Assets you own or need to buy
- Cash available to invest (if applicable)
- Amortization and depreciation

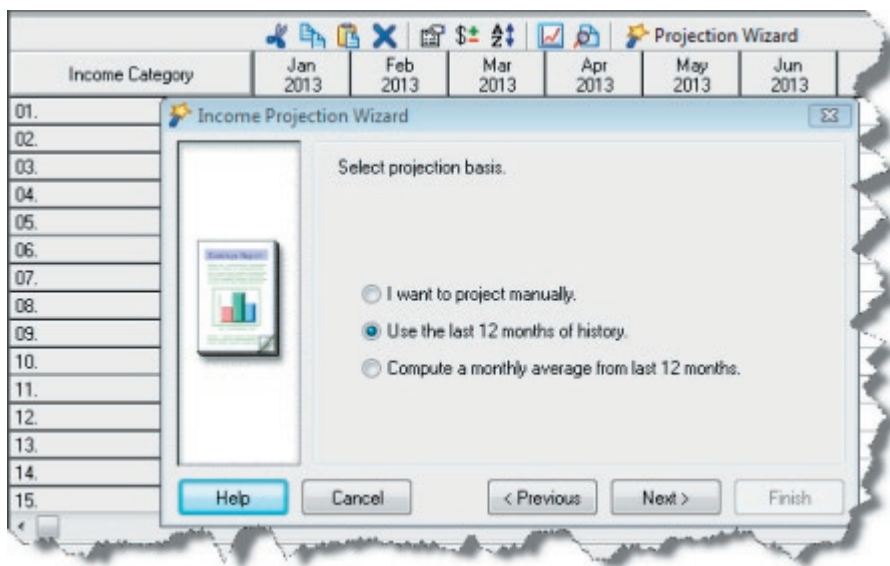


Figure 2: The QuickBooks Income Projection Wizard.

	Description	Account Type	Balance
1	Checking	Bank	14,960
2	Savings	Bank	16,507
3	Accounts Receivable	Accounts Receivable	20,885
4	Cash on Hand	Other Current Asset	1,062
5	Undeposited Funds	Other Current Asset	5,055

Figure 3: The business planning tool pulls in existing data from QuickBooks.

As in other areas of the business planning tool, existing data in QuickBooks will be automatically filled, such in **Figure 3**.

You'll also answer questions here about inventory (i.e., fixed or variable, minimum balance), vendor financing, lines of credit, and your total credit limit.

Writing your plan

Now it's time to write, but don't panic thinking you'll face a blank screen. The Plan section is divided into three sections, and you can toggle between them. You can view the actual plan outline tree, which is a window that provides tips and examples, as well as a text entry window, as shown in **Figure 4**.

Though this is primarily a text-based section including information about things like your company background, products and services, and the

competition, you'll supply some numbers, too, and the rationale for arriving at them.

Put your plan into action

Once you've completed all of the sections, you simply preview and print your plan. QuickBooks assembles it with all of the text, tables, graphs, and charts in the right place, and presents you with a professional business plan that you can take to the bank, or simply revisit from time to time to make sure you're on course.

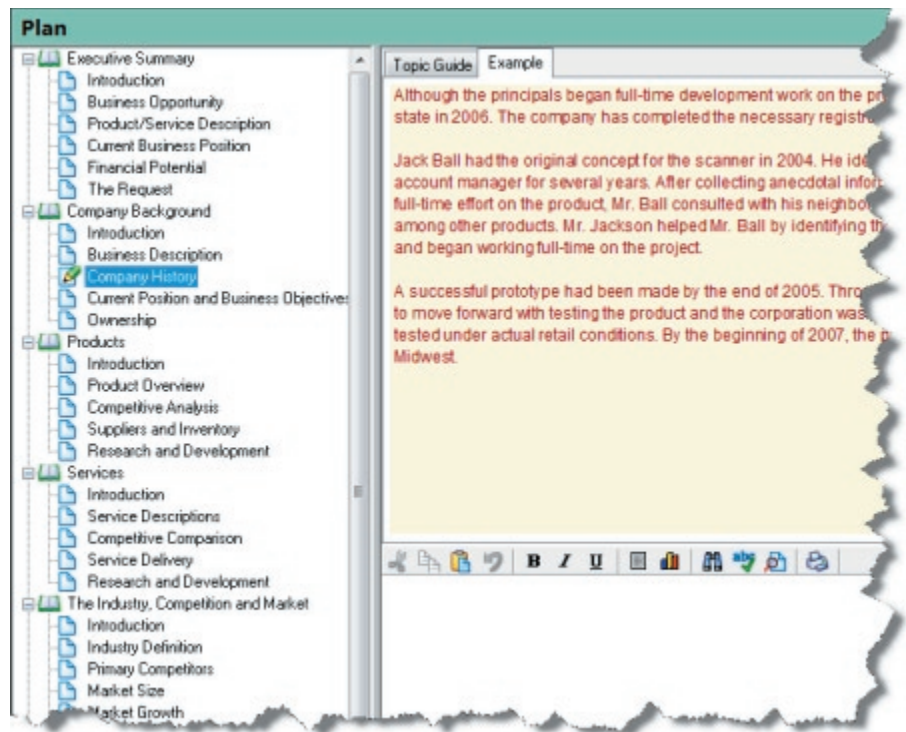


Figure 4: The Plan section is divided into three main sections.

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

Elements of a Good Business Plan

Now that you know how to set up a business plan in QuickBooks, it's important to ensure that you are covering your bases. A comprehensive business plan is a must when you're applying for a loan or venture capital, or if you're going to take on business partners. Also, a solid plan makes it much easier to gauge your progress and make strategic decisions if you've laid out a clear road map. If you have already set up a business plan in QuickBooks, perhaps it's time to dust it off and see if it needs a tune-up. According to the Small Business Administration, a business plan should always be a work-in-progress, subject to regular tweaking.

Consider Several Elements

A good business plan should consist of several related elements. Here are the most important:

- **Executive Summary.** Write this last, as it encapsulates who your company is and where you're headed.
- **Market Analysis.** What is your target market, and who is your competition?
- **Company Description and Organization.** What does your business do? Who does what?
- **Marketing and Sales Strategies.** How are you marketing and selling your products and services?
- **Service/Product Line.** What are you selling? What else do you plan to sell?
- **Financials.** Break out Excel. These will range from simple tables to full-blown spreadsheets (balance sheet, break-even analysis, cash flow, etc.).
- **Funding Requirements.** How much money will you need? How will you use it?

To be useful (and to increase your chances of obtaining funding, if that's your goal), be brutally honest and specific. Not good with grammar and spelling? Ask someone who is to edit it.

Business plans are lengthy documents, but don't put your potential readers to sleep. Be concise.

Don't Go It Alone

Knowing the framework your business plan should follow may not be enough: You should lean on the experts.

The Small Business Administration has a good site that provides resources for starting and maintaining a business. One of the topics covered is [business plan creation](#).

You may also want to consult with us and/or your attorney as you're designing or redesigning your business plan. We can be of particular help with making your financials as effective as possible.

PC software is also available that simplifies the process tremendously and helps ensure that your lengthy document is thorough and well-designed. [Business Plan Pro](#) (\$99.95 and \$199.95) is the best. It walks you step by step through the process using a wizard that asks questions and drops your answers into the appropriate section of the plan. More than 500 sample plans provide guidance, and you can import and export data. When you're done, Business Plan Pro produces a business plan containing text, graphics, and financial data that you can take to the bank (or simply continue to tweak for your own use).

A Good Roadmap

Goals are, by nature, attainable and measurable. Your business plan should not only serve as an attractive prospect for funding, but a guide for you as you continue to hone the framework of your business. Visit it often, and solicit input from your key employees. Keep it tuned up, so it's ready at a moment's notice should a potential investor or banker want to see it.



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