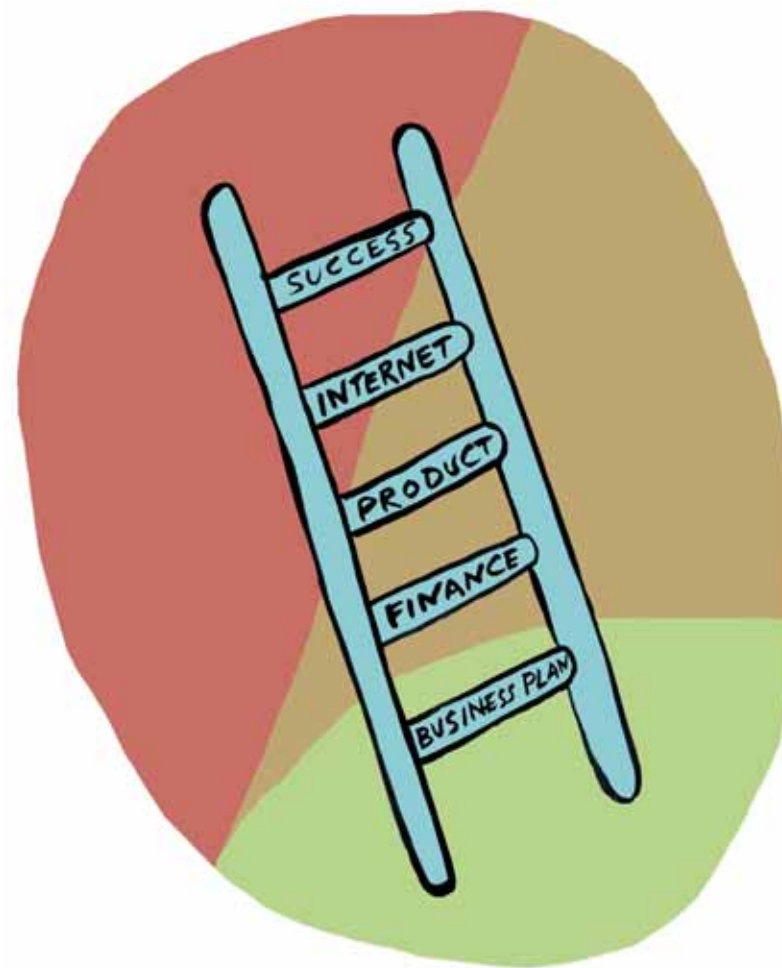


Using the Internet to...

# Start your own business



# Using the Internet to **Start your own business**

by Anne Collins and Anne Gannon, Dublin City Public Libraries.

Lifesteps offers you a range of online and printed guides. Written by staff from Irish public libraries, each guide contains easy to follow, step by step explanations of how to use the Internet to achieve a specific goal or 'life step'.

Lifesteps is an initiative of Irish public libraries, managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government through the Information Society Fund.

For updates, news on the project and for a full listing of all the guides, log on to [www.lifesteps.ie](http://www.lifesteps.ie)

You can contact the Lifesteps team at [lifesteps@librarycouncil.ie](mailto:lifesteps@librarycouncil.ie)

ISBN: 1873512260

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# Introduction

If you are someone who...

- would like to work for yourself
- thinks you have what it takes to become an **entrepreneur**
- would like to know what is involved in starting a business
- has recently set up a business and needs more help

...you can find useful information on the **Internet**.

In this beginner's guide to how the Internet can help you achieve your goal of working for yourself/starting your own business, we direct you to suggested websites that provide the information and advice you are likely to need.

## Background

Working for yourself is a big step to take and running your own business successfully requires energy, commitment, long hours and hard work.

Nevertheless, if you have the right skills and temperament you can gain huge satisfaction from starting and growing your own business.

Getting the right information at the right time is recognised as one of the vital ingredients needed to set up and run a successful business. There are many sources of information and advice to support you and much of this is freely available on the Internet. In this beginners guide we aim to direct you to the appropriate websites likely to help answer the many questions you may have. Questions such as:

- Do I have what it takes to run my own business?
- What is a **Business Plan**, why do I need one and how do I write one?
- How much money will I need and where can I get it?
- Are there any organisations that can help?
- How do I **register my business**?

You can access all the websites from your own computer at home, at an Internet cafe or in your local public library.

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## Need to Know

A basic familiarity with the Internet and personal computing is required.

## Need to Have

A good business idea and access to the Internet.

## Related Guides

- 'Internet Basics' covers the need to know requirements for this guide.

## Step-by-Step Guide

We have selected **five main websites** which we suggest will benefit you and a further sixteen websites which may interest you. For each of the main websites we will

- give the **web address**, which is the form of words you type into the **address bar** on the Internet screen. For example, the web address for the Life Steps website is [www.lifesteps.ie](http://www.lifesteps.ie);
- name the organisation or company responsible for the information available on the website;
- draw your attention to some information available on the website that might be useful to you and pass on any useful tips.

The websites we refer to in this guide are of three types:

- Government run websites where all or most of the information and **printouts** are freely available;
- Commercially run websites from private businesses that use their website to advertise their products or services but who also provide substantial information **online** free of charge;
- Websites of **trade organisations** where some information is freely available and some is restricted to members of the organisation.

First we take a close look at five websites that we found particularly useful, starting with the main Government website for Irish business:

[www.basis.ie](http://www.basis.ie)

BASIS stands for Business Access to State Information and Services. This Government website aims to bring together all the information you need to start and run a business in the Republic of Ireland. The first page looks like this:



The Basis website has excellent links to Government agencies and to other useful websites and is particularly good on the legal aspects of setting up a business. Simply **click on** the section that interests you and follow the links given in the text. For example, clicking on

- **Funding** and then
- **Early Stage Business Support** will bring you to this page:



Take note of the **Associated Links** section on the right of the screen. This will bring you directly to websites outside BASIS that are relevant to the topic you have chosen. For example:

- The second bullet point brings you directly to website of the Revenue Commissioners;
- The fourth directs you to Enterprise Ireland Local Offices.

**Useful Tip!** This website has a section where you can print out commonly used forms from a wide range of Government agencies. **Scroll** down through the first page of the website to reveal the link.



[www.startingabusinessinireland.com](http://www.startingabusinessinireland.com)

This website is produced by the Irish business and legal publisher Oak Tree Press and aims to provide information, advice and resources for anyone starting or running their own business. The first page looks like this:



As you can see the screen is divided into three panels:

- The centre panel gives items of interest to entrepreneurs, for example information on a series of Start Your Own Business courses
- The panel on the right of the screen gives links to other Oak Tree Press websites such as the [online bookshop](#) The Success Store
- The panel on the left of the screen headed 'Planning Your Start-up' has a series of [buttons](#) that lead to detailed information on the stages of starting a business.

**Useful Tip!** Click on the button marked '**Assistance**' for a comprehensive and up-to-date [directory](#) of sources of assistance, advice and funding available to small businesses in Ireland. For example, from the alphabetical list in the directory:

- Click on the term '**Incubator**' and you will get a list of organisations that provide incubation or start-up space and support facilities for new businesses;
- Click on the term '**Marketing**' for a list of organisations committed to helping small businesses succeed at marketing.



Downloads or printouts available from the website:

- Return to the first page by clicking on the '**Home**' button to the left of the screen
- **Scroll** down the webpage until you see the word '**Downloads**', then
- Click on the **link** and follow the instructions to download a copy of *Starting Your Own Business: A Workbook*\* free of charge (**pdf format**)



(\*Commissioned in 1997 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, written by Ron Immink and Brian O'Kane and published by Oak Tree Press.)

[www.cro.ie](http://www.cro.ie)

This is the website of the Companies Registration Office, which is the **statutory authority** for registering new companies in the Republic of Ireland. The Office also registers business names.



You can find information on any company registered in Ireland on this website. Basic information such as company name and address of **registered office** is available free using the **search facility** on the site, more detailed information and copies of documents can be ordered online for a fee.

The site contains information leaflets that you can print out or download, for example:

- 'Six things that every company director should know about company registration';
- 'Filing an annual return in the CRO';
- 'Business Name Registration'.

**Useful Tip!** You can save time and money by registering as a CRO customer, getting your individual CRO ID and PIN number and filing your **annual returns** directly online.

[www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)

This is the website of the Revenue Commissioners and deals with all aspects of taxation.



Check out the Revenue On-Line Service at the top right of the screen. Once you register as an online customer you can:

- Calculate your tax liability;
- File tax returns;
- Make payments;
- Obtain details of your Revenue Account.

To the left of the screen there is a list headed '**Information...**'

Clicking on the words ...'**for Businesses**' will bring you to the following page:



From here you have direct links to all the information you are likely to need about tax issues for running a business, self employment and employing other people, for example '**Registering for tax**' links you directly to the correct forms which you can then print out.

**Useful Tip!** There are also a series of guides that you can read from the screen or print out (PDF format), for example 'PAYE/PRSI for Small Employers' is a 31 page guide that explains the system in detail.

This website can also be read in Irish, French, German or Spanish. Click on '**As Gaeilge**' or '**Other Languages**' from the **toolbar** across top of screen.

[www.entemp.ie](http://www.entemp.ie)

This is the website of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Government department that has direct responsibility for the business community in the Republic of Ireland. The first page looks like this:



Notice the link to **'Start Your Own Business'** directly under **'Enterprise, Science and Technology'** – this will bring you to more detailed information on starting your own business – including direct links to what they suggest are the four main websites for this area:

- Enterprise Ireland;
- Individual Enterprise Boards;
- BASIS;
- Startingabusinessinireland.

## Some other suggested websites are:

### Government agencies

[www.oasis.gov.ie](http://www.oasis.gov.ie) The Oasis website is the main Irish Government website for information on any major life event including starting a business and has direct links to the BASIS website we looked at earlier in the guide.

[www.enterprise-ireland.com](http://www.enterprise-ireland.com) Enterprise Ireland is the Government agency responsible for the development of Irish industry from within the country. It is especially useful for businesses that produce for the export **market**.

[www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) The Health and Safety Authority is the national body with responsibility for securing health and safety at work. To check what your responsibilities as an employer are:

- Click on '**FAQ's**' (frequently asked questions) and then
- Click on '**Your responsibilities**'

Publications available from the Health & Safety Authority to order or download include '**Safe to Work – A guide to preparing a Safety Statement for Small Business**' (a nominal cost applies).

[www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie) FÁS is Ireland's national training and employment authority. The first page of the FÁS website is divided into three panels: **Jobseekers**, **Employers** and **Training**.

The section for employers is further divided into:

- Search for staff;
- List a vacancy;
- Apprenticeships;
- About Work Permits;
- Services to business.

[www.empower.ie](http://www.empower.ie) This website is managed by Ireland's 35 City and County Enterprise Boards and is intended to help Irish businesses create and develop an online presence (a website and e-mail facilities for conducting part or all of their business online) in a simple and cost effective way. A full list of Enterprise Boards is also accessible from the website of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment at [www.entemp.ie/enterprise/local/cebcontact.htm](http://www.entemp.ie/enterprise/local/cebcontact.htm)

[www.dublincity.ie/living\\_in\\_the\\_city/libraries/find\\_your\\_library/business\\_information\\_centre.asp](http://www.dublincity.ie/living_in_the_city/libraries/find_your_library/business_information_centre.asp) The Business Information Centre, run by Dublin City Public Libraries, is a reference service specialising in company and market information. It is a key information resource for those setting up a business.

### **Commercial companies**

[www.aib.ie](http://www.aib.ie) The Allied Irish Bank website has a direct link from the front page to a 'Starting Your Business' section. There is also a link to an AIB publication 'A Practical Guide to Starting Your Own Business' (downloadable in pdf format).

[www.bankofireland.ie](http://www.bankofireland.ie) The Bank of Ireland website has a direct link from the front page to three relevant sections:

- 'Starting Your Business'
- 'Running Your Business'
- 'Growing Your Business'

all of which contain useful information.

[www.oaktreepress.com](http://www.oaktreepress.com) The home site and online shopping venue for the business publishers Oak Tree Press, this site is also known as The Success Store. This site is very up-to-date and often contains 'hotlinks' to current business courses and items of interest.

[www.planware.org](http://www.planware.org) This company sells business **software**. Some information and software is available free from the website. Click on **Irish Enterprise**. See also the 'Business Plan' section.

[www.omahonydonnelly.ie](http://www.omahonydonnelly.ie) This commercial website is produced by the business advice company O'Mahony Donnelly Ltd. From the first page, click on '**Starting a Business in Ireland**' from the list on the left of the screen.

[www.pwc.ie](http://www.pwc.ie) This commercial website is produced by the legal, business and financial services company Price Waterhouse Coopers Ltd. It is useful for up-to-date business related information.

### **Trade organisations/Charitable trusts**

[www.ibec.ie](http://www.ibec.ie) The Irish Business and Employers Confederation is an umbrella body for **sectoral groups** in the Irish business world.

[www.isme.ie](http://www.isme.ie) The Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association provides a monthly newsletter and several publications.

[www.sfa.ie](http://www.sfa.ie) The Small Firms Association is a subscription only association.

[www.liffey-trust.com](http://www.liffey-trust.com) The Liffey Trust is a charitable trust that exists to support entrepreneurs. The Trust runs a business park, delivers courses and gives advice. Their online guide to preparing a Business Plan is simply written.

## Worked Example

### The Business Plan – Help is available online.

You hear a lot of talk about writing a Business Plan and you may be unsure how to go about this. Do not worry - there is plenty of help available. Most business start-up courses will include a section on writing a Business Plan and there are also some excellent books available in bookshops and libraries. In this section of the guide we direct you to some websites that discuss the purpose of a Business Plan and give you examples of plans which you can adapt to suit your own business.

### Business Plans in detail

[www.startingabusinessinireland.com](http://www.startingabusinessinireland.com) This website contains detailed information and advice on why and how to write a Business Plan.



### From the home page:

- Click on '**Business Plans**', the second last item on the left of the screen



Alternatively:

- Click on '**Assistance**' near the top of the same list and scroll down the screen until you find the alphabetical list 'by category'.
- Click on the third item, '**Business Plans**' to go to a list of organisations which can help you develop a Business Plan. Choose the one you think best suits your needs.

### Sample Business Plan:

Available to download from [www.enterprise-ireland.com](http://www.enterprise-ireland.com)



From this front or home page:

- Click on '**Start a business**' and a new page opens
- Click on the '**Advice**' section from the list on the left of the screen, and when the new page appears ...





- Click on '**Business Plan**' to go to an area of the website where you can download or print out a Business Plan **Template** in either PDF format or as a word document.
- Click on the words '**Business Plan Template**' and you can read on screen or print out in the usual way.



Other sample **Business Plans** are available from:

[www.planware.org](http://www.planware.org) The website of a commercial company that sells business software and **shareware**. They also have a substantial amount of information and software available free from the site. From the home page,

- Click on '**Business Plan Guide**' on the top right of the screen.

**See also:**

[www.aib.ie](http://www.aib.ie)

[www.liffey-trust.ie](http://www.liffey-trust.ie)

[www.dbic.ie](http://www.dbic.ie)

[www.omahonydonnelly.ie](http://www.omahonydonnelly.ie)

[www.pwc.ie](http://www.pwc.ie)

Simply follow the links or search the sites using the term 'Business Plan'.

# Glossary

- Address bar:** The long, narrow window at the top of the browser, which shows the web address (URL) of the site you are currently viewing. In Internet Explorer, the word 'Address' appears just to the left of the window. The address bar is automatically filled when you visit a web page. Alternatively, you can type in the address of a web page you wish to visit, and click the 'Go' button at the right-hand end of the window, to view that web page.
- Annual returns:** The information that you are legally obliged to send every year to a Government agency, for example the Companies Registration Office or the Revenue Commissioners.
- Bullet points:** Circles or arrows used to draw your attention to a list of items or ideas.
- Buttons:** Words that are displayed on the screen to look as if they could be pressed – indicating that clicking on them will lead to more information.
- Business plan:** A written guide to the aims of a business with details of how those aims will be achieved.
- Click on:** To select an object or phrase on the screen by moving the mouse pointer to the object's position and quickly pressing and releasing the button on the left of the mouse.
- Directory:** An alphabetical or classified list, often of names and addresses.
- Download:** The process of copying a computer file from the Internet onto your own PC is called downloading. A file such as a music (MP3) file or a document is made available to the Internet by storing it on a server. To download the file, you usually click on a link to it, or else right-click and choose 'Save target as' (in Internet Explorer) or 'Save link as' (Mozilla Firefox). A box pops up asking you where on your

hard disk you want to store the file; you choose the location for storage, click the button and the file is copied onto your hard disk (or downloaded).

**Entrepreneur:**

A risk-taker who has the skills and initiative to establish a business.

**FAQs:  
(Frequently Asked  
Questions)**

A FAQ is a list of questions and their answers, which are commonly asked. These are published on the website of a product or service, so that the same question is not asked of the supplier, over and over again. A good example of a FAQ, which focuses on Web security, is at <http://www.w3.org/Security/Faq/www-security-faq.html>

**Home page:**

The main or introductory page of a website.

**Incubator:**

A controlled environment – in a business start-up context this refers to office or workshop space in a business park that usually includes some business support services.

**Internet:**

A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.

**Internet café:**

Place where you pay to use an Internet-connected computer.

**Link:**

A link, or hyperlink, is a part of a web page that, if clicked with a mouse, opens a different web page. Links are usually shown in blue and underlined on a web page.

**Market:**

The opportunity to buy or sell goods and services, or the level of demand for those goods and services.

**Marketing:**

The commercial processes involved in promoting, selling and distributing a product or service.

**Online:**

A word used as shorthand for 'on the Internet' or 'connected to the Internet'.

- PDF format: (Portable Document Format)** A PDF is a type of computer file (in the same way that an MP3 or a Microsoft Word file is a type of file), which is commonly used on the Internet for presenting documents. PDFs are excellent for printing out – a printed PDF generally looks much better than a printed (HTML) Web page. PDFs are thus mainly used for material which the user is expected to print out (such as Government forms, brochures, reports), rather than material which is meant to be viewed online. PDFs require a specific piece of software, a PDF viewer, to be viewed and printed out. By far the most common PDF viewer is Adobe Acrobat, which is available for free online.
- Printouts:** Refers to anything printed out by a computer.
- Register a business:** A company registered under the Companies Acts 1963-2001 becomes a body corporate – it is a separate and distinct legal person. However, simply registering a business name does not result in the creation of a separate legal entity.
- Registered office:** The address that is registered as the official address of a company under the Companies Registration Act.
- Scroll:** Scrolling is the process of moving what you see on the screen upwards or downwards. This lets you view a web page, a document or some other computer material which is longer than what can be shown on a single screen-full. Scrolling is achieved using scroll-bars on the right hand side of the window that you are using to view the material. You can also scroll using the up and down arrow keys, the page-up and page-down keys and a mouse with a scroll-wheel.
- Search facility:** Software that allows you to search for information on the Internet using key words.

- Sectoral groups:** Groups or organisations that represent the interests of different types of business enterprises. For example Financial Services Ireland represents the financial services sector and the Irish Software Association represents the software sector.
- Shareware:** Software that you can try out before you have to pay for it.
- Software:** A term meaning computer programs or instructions that tell a computer what to do.
- Statutory authority:** Government Department or agency that has responsibility for this area.
- Template:** System that helps you arrange information on a computer screen.
- Toolbar:** Bars usually running along the top of the application allowing the user to carry out functions, for example menu bar, title bar, formatting toolbar.
- Trade organisations:** Groups that draw their membership from within a particular trade or area of business.
- Web address:** A unique address that allows you to access a website. You type a particular form of words into the address bar on the Internet screen, for example, the web address for the Life Steps website is [www.lifesteps.ie](http://www.lifesteps.ie)
- Web sites:** A website is a collection of web pages that displays information on a particular topic. Common types of websites include company websites (information about the company), online shops (where you buy goods and services and pay by credit card) and personal websites (where individuals share their interests). A website may consist of just one page of information, but will usually contain several pages, all linked together. All the pages in a website usually share the same 'domain' name. For example, all the pages in the large online shop Amazon have an address (URL) that starts with 'www.amazon.com'.