



MUSIC AND DJ GUIDE

BUSINESS STARTUP GUIDE AND WORKBOOK

VETERAN'S STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS LLC



Music and DJ

MUSIC AND DJ

A start guide for getting your own business off the ground

A START GUIDE FOR GETTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS OFF THE GR

Veteran's Strategic Solutions LLC — Business Model Series

Before you read this

BEFORE YOU READ THIS



This guide works anywhere in the United States. Dollar figures are estimates from public sources, not quotes. Wherever there is a blank line, write in your own answer.

What this business actually is

WHAT THIS BUSINESS ACTUALLY IS

Somebody is having the most important day of their life, or their company's one party of the year, and the thing most likely to ruin it is the music stopping.

You are being hired to make sure that does not happen — and, secondarily, to play good songs.

What this is not: being a musician, or being a club DJ. A mobile DJ is running an event. Reading a room, managing a timeline, making announcements, and moving a hundred and fifty people from cocktails to dinner to dancing without anybody noticing you doing it.

Read this first

READ THIS FIRST



The skill that gets you hired is not song selection. It is reliability and nerve.

Anybody can build a playlist. What a bride's mother is buying is somebody who turns up three hours early, has a spare of everything, knows what to do when the power trips, and can hold a microphone in front of two hundred people without freezing.

That is the actual product, and it is why a competent DJ who shows up early beats a better DJ who does not.

Honest gut check

HONEST GUT CHECK

- Can you talk to two hundred people on a microphone without your voice shaking? You will do this at every wedding.
- Can you work while everybody else is celebrating? Every Friday, Saturday and holiday for the rest of your working life.
- Can you stay calm when the timeline collapses? The food is late, the speeches run forty minutes over, and somebody has to fix it in real time. That somebody is you.

What the odds actually are

WHAT THE ODDS ACTUALLY ARE

About three out of four new businesses make it through their first year. About half are still running at five years. About one in three make it to ten.

Two honest caveats. Those numbers barely move by trade — federal data shows only a few points between the best and worst industries. And they count businesses with employees on a payroll, so a man working alone is largely not in them.

What is in your favour: no licence, moderate startup, and every event is paid in advance or on the day. Cash flow in this business is genuinely good.

What is against you: it is weekends only, which caps how many events you can physically do, and the market is crowded with part-timers undercutting on price.

What separates the ones who last:

Reliability. The whole reputation is built on turning up and nothing breaking.

Weddings. They pay roughly double everything else.

Referral relationships. Photographers, planners and venues send more work than any advertisement.

Backup gear. One equipment failure at one wedding can end your reputation in a small market.

Snapshot

SNAPSHOT

Money to start	\$2,700 to \$11,000 basic · up to \$27,000 with full lighting
Storefront needed	None. A vehicle and a garage
Skill gate	Technical basics are easy. Running a room is not
Licence	No DJ licence in any state. Business registration only
Time to first paid gig	Four to ten weeks
Per event	\$450 to \$1,000 parties · \$900 to \$2,800+ weddings

Part 1 — Making it a real business

PART 1 MAKING IT A REAL BUSINESS



Step 1. Sole proprietor or LLC

STEP 1 SOLE PROPRIETOR OR LLC

Filing fees \$35 to \$500 by state, about \$132 average, plus annual fees from nothing to \$800. Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.

Form the LLC. You are putting heavy speakers on stands above people's heads and running cable across floors they walk on.

Step 2. Check for a local business licence

STEP 2 CHECK FOR A LOCAL BUSINESS LICENCE

Most cities require one. Ask your city clerk. Also ask whether amplified sound outdoors requires a permit — I could not establish how common that is, and it varies by town.

Step 3. Get an EIN — it is free

STEP 3 GET AN EIN IT IS FREE

irs.gov, five minutes. Do not pay a service.

Step 4. Open a business bank account

STEP 4 OPEN A BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNT

Separate from personal, from day one.

Step 5. Insurance, which is not optional in practice

STEP 5 INSURANCE WHICH IS NOT OPTIONAL IN PRACTICE

General liability. A guest trips on your cable or a speaker stand goes over. Many venues will not let you set up without a certificate of insurance naming them as additional insured — this is routine and your insurer issues it on request.

Equipment coverage. Your gear is the business, it lives in a vehicle, and it gets loaded in the dark.

Commercial auto if you use a vehicle for the business.

Get the certificate before your first booking. "I'll have it next week" loses the venue.

Step 6. Understand what you owe

STEP 6 UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU OWE

Self-employment tax of 15.3% on net business income plus income tax. Quarterly if you expect to owe \$1,000 or more federally — April 15, June 15, September 15 and January 15, moving to the next business day when one falls on a weekend or holiday. Set aside 25 to 30 percent of net.

One thing specific to this business: you will be paid in deposits and cash on the day, in irregular amounts. Log every booking when you take the deposit, not at year end.

Part 2 — The law you are now subject to

PART 2 THE LAW YOU ARE NOW SUBJECT TO

There is no “DJ licence” in the United States. What people mean by the term is a public performance licence — permission to play copyrighted music in public, issued by the performing rights organisations that collect royalties for songwriters.

The definition that decides everything

THE DEFINITION THAT DECIDES EVERYTHING

Under US copyright law, a performance is public when it happens “in a place open to the public or at any place where a substantial number of persons outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances is gathered.”

Read that carefully, because two things people assume are wrong:

Charging admission is not the test. Neither is “invitation only.” The test is the relationship between the people in the room.

What that means for a mobile DJ

WHAT THAT MEANS FOR A MOBILE DJ

A wedding reception is a gathering of a family and its social acquaintances. So is a birthday party, an anniversary, a retirement dinner among colleagues and friends. Those are private performances.

ASCAP’s own stated position, quoted from the organisation: ASCAP does not license DJs. It is the venue, establishment, or promoter of an event that is responsible for public performance licensing, not the performer — and private events such as weddings are exempt from licensing.

SESAC states the parallel rule for rented rooms: US copyright law and subsequent case law assign responsibility for authorising copyrighted music played in rented or leased areas — banquet rooms, reception halls, ballrooms — to the owner or operator of the establishment.

So for the ordinary work of a mobile DJ — weddings and private parties — the licensing obligation is not yours.

Where it is genuinely different

WHERE IT IS GENUINELY DIFFERENT

Corporate events. A company party is a substantial number of persons outside a normal circle of family and social acquaintances. Guidance in the corporate events industry is that the event owner needs its own licence — if it is a company’s event, the company is responsible, though a third party can obtain the licence on its behalf.

There is a real conflict in the published guidance here. Some corporate-event sources state that a venue’s own blanket licence does not extend to a private third-party event held there, and that the organiser needs its own. Others say the venue covers it. Both positions are published by people who do this for a living.

Public and ticketed events. A festival, a concert, a public street party, anything open to the general public. Licence required, and the organiser or venue holds the obligation.

If you host your own event — a pop-up, a fundraiser, anything you organise and promote yourself in a space not already covered — you are the promoter, and the obligation is yours.

Live streaming. Streaming a reception to relatives who could not attend has been described as crossing into public performance — even with a password. Worth raising with a client who asks for it.

What to actually do

WHAT TO ACTUALLY DO

- For weddings and private parties, proceed. This is the settled case and the organisations themselves say so.
- For a corporate or public event, ask the client in writing who holds the public performance licence. Put the question in your contract if you like. You are not the responsible party in either published reading — but the client should know the question exists.
- If there is no venue and no organiser holding a licence — a backyard, a field, a private property — the private-event analysis still applies to a wedding or family party. It is the nature of the gathering, not the presence of a venue, that decides.
- Never use pirated music. Buy your music or use a licensed DJ subscription pool.
- Consumer streaming subscriptions do not cover paid public playback. A personal music subscription covers private listening. Multiple sources are consistent on this and it catches new DJs constantly.

Volume ordinances. Many towns have noise limits with a time cut-off. Know the local rule before an outdoor event, because the person who gets stopped is you, in front of the client.

This is a summary of general practice and published positions, not legal advice. If you build a business around corporate or public events, get an answer specific to your situation.

Part 3 — What you actually sell

PART 3 WHAT YOU ACTUALLY SELL

The core

THE CORE

Four to six hours of music, a sound system, a microphone, and somebody running the room.

What people pay extra for

WHAT PEOPLE PAY EXTRA FOR

- Ceremony sound — a second small system and lapel microphones, often at a different location
- Uplighting — coloured lights around the room. High margin, low effort, photographs well
- Dance floor lighting
- Extra hours

- A second setup for a cocktail hour in another space
- Photo booth, if you want a second product
- Fog, haze or cold sparks. Check venue rules — many prohibit them and some trigger fire alarms

The equipment you actually need

THE EQUIPMENT YOU ACTUALLY NEED

Prices are typical market ranges, not quotes.

The core rig

Item	Roughly
DJ controller	\$300 to \$1,500
Laptop with DJ software	\$600 to \$1,500
Powered PA speakers, pair	\$400 to \$1,500
Speaker stands	\$80 to \$200
Subwoofer	\$300 to \$900
Wireless handheld microphones, two	\$150 to \$500
Wired microphone — more reliable, for your own announcements	\$50 to \$150
Microphone stand	\$30 to \$80
Cables, adapters, power strips	\$150 to \$400
Extension cords, including 100 ft for outdoor and rain plans	\$80 to \$200
Road cases or bags	\$200 to \$600
Hand truck or cart	\$100 to \$300
DJ facade or table with your own tablecloth	\$150 to \$600
Basic dance floor lighting	\$200 to \$800
Uplighting, set of 8 to 12 wireless	\$500 to \$1,500
Gaffer tape	\$20 — and see below

The second system, and it is the recommendation that separates professionals

Bring two sound systems: a small battery-powered PA for the ceremony and cocktail hour, and the main rig for the reception. Venues recommend this specifically, because it eliminates downtime between the ceremony and the reception — you are not tearing down and rebuilding while guests stand around.

Battery-powered PA speaker: \$300 to \$700. Lavalier or lapel microphone with receiver for the officiant: \$100 to \$400.

On backups. Have a spare of everything that can stop the music — a second controller or laptop, a spare speaker, spare cables, a spare microphone. For every cable, carry a backup.

On tape. One wedding venue’s published DJ guidelines say “bring tape” three times in a row. Every cable run across a floor guests walk on gets taped down. It is your liability, it is thirty seconds, and venues notice immediately who does it and who does not.

What to do when you are asked for something you cannot do

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE ASKED FOR SOMETHING YOU CANNOT

A live band, string quartet or specific musician. Say so and refer. Build relationships with two or three local musicians — they will send you receptions when the client wants live music for the ceremony only.

Production beyond your capability — a large staged event with truss, video walls and a technical crew. Know your ceiling and say so. Taking a job you cannot deliver is how a reputation dies in a small market.

A cultural event you do not know. If you have never worked a quinceañera, a Desi wedding, a Polish reception or a Nigerian wedding, the music is only part of it — there are traditions, sequences and expectations you will not know. Either learn it properly from somebody who does, or refer it on. Getting it wrong at somebody’s cultural event is unforgivable and entirely avoidable.

Dates you are already booked. Refer to another DJ. They will refer back, and the DJ community in most towns runs on this.

Part 4 — Finding out whether your town supports this

PART 4 FINDING OUT WHETHER YOUR TOWN SUPPORTS THIS



One evening of work tells you whether the market is there and what it pays.

Step 1. Search your town plus “wedding DJ” and count the operators. Note who has real websites, real reviews and real photographs versus a phone number and a name.

Step 2. Get three quotes as a customer. Email three of them describing a wedding — date, venue, guest count, hours — and ask for pricing. You will get real numbers in your actual market, which beats any published range.

Step 3. Read the one-star reviews of every DJ in town. The complaints in this trade are consistent:

- “Showed up late”
- “Played the wrong song for the first dance”
- “Wouldn’t take requests” or “played nothing we asked for”
- “Talked too much on the microphone”
- “Equipment failed”

Only one of those is about music taste. The rest are reliability and judgement — which tells you what to compete on.

Step 4. Call three venues and ask two questions. Do they have a preferred vendor list, and what does it take to get on it. A venue list is worth more than any advertising, because the venue is the first vendor a couple books and the one they trust.

Step 5. Count the weddings. Ask a venue how many they host a year. Multiply across the venues in your county. That is your addressable market, and you can get it in an afternoon.

Worked example

WORKED EXAMPLE

Run the same market test using your own town’s venues, event calendar, customer base, and competitors.

Part 5 — Getting your first customer

PART 5 GETTING YOUR FIRST CUSTOMER

- Do two events at a reduced rate — a friend’s party, a church function, a unit event. Not free. Say the real number: “My rate is \$900. This one’s \$400 because I’m building a portfolio — I’d ask for photos and a written review.”
- Get photographs and video of yourself working. A packed dance floor is the only marketing that matters.
- Get on one venue’s preferred list.
- Meet two wedding photographers. They work every wedding you want, they see who is good, and couples ask them for recommendations constantly.

What to actually say

WHAT TO ACTUALLY SAY

Calling a venue: “I’m a DJ working in the area. I’m not asking to be on your preferred list today — I’d just like to know what it takes to get there, so I can work toward it.” That question gets answered honestly almost every time, and it starts a relationship instead of asking for a favour.

To a photographer: “We’re going to end up at the same weddings. If you ever need a DJ recommendation I’d like to be one of them, and I’ll send you work too.”

When a couple asks your price: never quote before you know the details. “Depends on hours, whether you need ceremony sound, and the venue — give me those three and I’ll send you a real number tomorrow.”

When they say another DJ is cheaper: “He might be right for you. I’d ask him three things — does he carry liability insurance, does he bring backup equipment, and does he give you a written contract.” All three are true, most cheap DJs fail at least one, and you have not criticised anybody.

At the consultation, ask the question nobody else asks: “What would make this a disaster for you?” The answer — an empty dance floor, a drunk uncle on the microphone, the wrong song for a first dance — tells you exactly what to protect against, and asking it is itself reassuring.

Running the event, which is the actual craft

RUNNING THE EVENT WHICH IS THE ACTUAL CRAFT

Get the planning sheet done weeks ahead, not the night before. What you need from the couple:

- The order of events, even without exact minutes
- Must-play list, and the do-not-play list — the second matters as much as the first. Songs tied to an ex, family trouble, or a bad memory
- Formal introduction names, in order, with phonetic spelling. Nobody wants a grand entrance with mispronounced names
- Every key song confirmed: first dance, parent dances, cake cutting, last dance
- Family dynamics. Divorced parents, who walks with whom, who should not be announced together. Ask directly — it is not nosy, it is the job
- Announcement preferences. How much you speak, and where they want silence
- Load-in access, power availability, where the booth goes

On the day

Arrive hours before the couple. Find the planner or function manager, confirm where the booth goes, and get the agenda from them as well as from your sheet.

Set up, then sound check everything — speakers, every microphone, the ceremony system. Do it before guests arrive, not as they walk in.

Then, before the doors open:

- Look at your setup from every guest angle. It should be tidy. Cables dressed, tablecloth on, no boxes visible
- Tape down every cable run
- Find the lighting controls and learn how to change them for dinner and for dancing
- Turn off the house music
- Pull every key song into a ready folder — and have a backup version of each. The wrong edit of a first dance song is a disaster you can prevent in five minutes
- Photograph your setup from all angles. Proof of condition, and useful later for marketing
- Be tested, dressed and ready thirty minutes before guests arrive

During

A reception runs in a standard order: guest arrival and background music · grand entrance and introductions · first dance · welcome and blessing · dinner · toasts and speeches · parent dances · cake

cutting · open dancing · last dance and exit.

Your job through all of it:

- Check volume from around the room, not from behind the booth. A room full of people absorbs sound. What is loud at your table is quiet at the back
- Visually confirm the people involved are actually in the room before you announce anything. Do not call the father of the bride to the floor when he is outside on the phone
- Adjust the lighting for each phase
- Keep the announcements short. “Talked too much on the microphone” is one of the most common complaints about DJs
- Read the floor. If it empties, you changed something. Go back to what was working
- When the timeline slips, find the person in charge, recommend, and let them decide: “We’re thirty minutes behind. I’d suggest we cut the cake now and keep ninety minutes of dancing. Your call.” Calm and specific makes you the person they rely on for the rest of the night

Part 6 — Pricing

PART 6 PRICING

Published ranges vary by market and the sources for them are thin — the state-by-state figures I found came from one publisher scaling a single formula. Treat these as a rough signal and price against the three local quotes from Part 4.

Tier	What it looks like	Typical
Low	Four hours, basic sound, no lighting. Parties, school dances, small corporate	\$450 to \$750
Mid	Six hours, ceremony sound, basic lighting, planning consultation, written timeline	\$900 to \$1,800
Premium	Full day, uplighting, dance floor lighting, second system, MC service, backup rig	\$1,800 to \$2,800+

Corporate events sit between low and mid in most markets.

Weddings run about double general party rates. That held in every market I checked and it is the most important pricing fact in this business.

The recommendation

THE RECOMMENDATION

Build the business on weddings at the mid tier and take parties to fill gaps.

Worked example — why the cheap bookings cost you the year

WORKED EXAMPLE WHY THE CHEAP BOOKINGS COST YOU THE YE

Illustrative arithmetic. Run it on your own numbers.

You have roughly forty workable weekend dates a year once you account for holidays you want off and dates nobody books.

Option A — volume at the bottom. Thirty-five events a year at \$600. Revenue \$21,000. You worked thirty-five weekends.

Option B — weddings at mid. Twenty-five weddings at \$1,400. Revenue \$35,000. You worked twenty-five weekends and had ten free.

Now subtract costs, which are roughly the same either way: insurance, music subscription, fuel, equipment replacement and repair — call it \$4,000 to \$6,000 a year in both cases.

Option A nets around \$16,000 for thirty-five weekends. Option B nets around \$30,000 for twenty-five.

Nearly double the money for ten fewer weekends. And here is the part that compounds: the Option B DJ has twenty-five weddings of photographs, reviews and venue relationships. The Option A DJ has thirty-five parties nobody photographed.

The cheap bookings do not just pay less. They fill the calendar that the good bookings needed.

How to structure it

HOW TO STRUCTURE IT

Package, do not itemise. “Six hours, ceremony sound, uplighting, planning meeting and a written timeline — \$1,400” is a product. An hourly rate invites negotiation.

Be clear whether setup and teardown count toward the booked hours. Couples ask, and the honest answer is a selling point.

Take a non-refundable deposit and the balance before the event. You are holding a Saturday you cannot sell twice.

Written contract, every time. Date, hours, venue, what you provide, what you need from them — power, a table, cover if outdoors — cancellation terms, travel fee, and an overtime rate.

Set the overtime rate in advance. At eleven at night, half-drunk and having a wonderful time, they will ask for another hour. Have a number ready and in the contract.

Part 7 — Money help for veterans

PART 7 MONEY HELP FOR VETERANS

VR&E, Chapter 31 — what is actually true.

The self-employment track is widely advertised as VA funding to start a business. The regulation requires that your service-connected disabilities be severe enough that self-employment is the only reasonably feasible career path for you. It is not a track you simply choose. In 2021, 162 veterans were in it out of more than 80,000 using VR&E overall.

The long-term services track is different and far more commonly used. It covers vocational school, technical certificates and trade programs with no tuition cap, and can cover tools, equipment and certification exam fees.

The catch: VR&E is an employment program, not an education program. If a counselor determines you can reasonably obtain suitable work with the training you already have, it gets denied. Anything funded must sit inside an approved individualised employment plan developed with your counselor.

Apply with VA Form 28-1900 and put the question to your counselor. Do not plan around a yes.

Free and reliable to everyone, no rating required: Small Business Development Centers, SCORE mentoring, Veterans Business Outreach Centers.

Two things specific to this business.

Public speaking is the barrier for most new DJs and it may not be one for you. Holding a microphone in front of two hundred people, giving clear instructions to a room, staying composed when the plan changes — that is a formation and a briefing, and you have done it. Most people entering this trade are terrified of exactly that part.

The installation market is real and under-served. Unit balls and dining-ins, retirements, promotions, hail-and-farewells, spouse club events, MWR functions, and the weddings of people who are only in town for eighteen months. These have budgets, they recur annually, and the people booking them would rather work with somebody who knows what a dining-in is.

Note: a formal military function with a wide guest list may fall on the public side of the performance definition. Ask who holds the licence, as in Part 2.

Part 8 — The three places people get stuck, and how to get past them

PART 8 THE THREE PLACES PEOPLE GET STUCK AND HOW TO G

1. No backup, and no plan for failure

1 NO BACKUP AND NO PLAN FOR FAILURE

Everything works fine for eleven events. On the twelfth, a speaker dies at nine o'clock at a wedding, and there is no second speaker in the van.

That is not bad luck. That is a business with no redundancy, and in a small town it is the story people tell about you for years.

The fix: a spare of everything that can stop the music. Buy the backup before the upgrade. And have a plan for a power failure and a venue that cannot give you the outlets you need.

2. Pricing at the bottom to win bookings

2 PRICING AT THE BOTTOM TO WIN BOOKINGS

\$400 a wedding feels like a reasonable way to build a portfolio. It fills your Saturdays with the clients who value the DJ least, it signals inexperience whether or not you are, and you can never raise it with those clients or their friends.

And as the worked example shows, the cheap bookings occupy the dates the good ones needed.

The fix: hold a real rate and discount specific early bookings in exchange for photographs and a written review — a trade, not a price. Say the real number out loud every time.

3. Waiting for couples to find you

3 WAITING FOR COUPLES TO FIND YOU

You build a website and a listing and wait, and eighteen months later you have done four events, all for people you already knew.

Couples do not compare DJs the way they compare products. They ask their venue and their photographer.

The fix: get on one venue's preferred list and build relationships with two photographers before you spend a dollar on advertising. That is the entire marketing strategy in this trade and most new DJs never do it.

None of these are reasons not to start. They are the three potholes in the road, and every one of them is avoidable if you know it is coming.

Part 9 — Your first 90 days

PART 9 YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Days	What you do
1 to 14	Market check — three quotes, three venue calls, read the reviews. Count the weddings in your county.
15 to 25	LLC, EIN, bank account. Insurance quotes and a certificate in hand.
26 to 40	Buy the core rig, used where sensible. Buy the backup before the extras.
41 to 55	Practise on the actual equipment. Set up and tear down until it takes thirty minutes. Write your contract and your planning sheet.
56 to 70	Two reduced-rate events. Photographs, video, written reviews.
71 to 90	One venue preferred list, two photographers, and every unit or organisation function you can reach.

The one number to track

THE ONE NUMBER TO TRACK

Bookings on the calendar, twelve months out.

Not revenue this month, not enquiries. How many Saturdays are already sold.

Weddings book six to eighteen months ahead. Your calendar today is telling you what next summer looks like, and it is the only early warning you get.

Check it the first of every month. If the number twelve months out is not growing, the problem is referral relationships, not your DJing — and you have months to fix it rather than discovering the gap in June.

Month 3: ___ · Month 6: ___ · Month 12: ___

After the first year, add: percentage of bookings from venue and vendor referral. Above half and you have a business. Below a quarter and you are still buying attention rather than earning it.

Where this goes if it works

WHERE THIS GOES IF IT WORKS

Solo, weddings, twenty-five weekends a year. No employees, no premises, and a genuinely good second income or a modest full-time one.

A second rig and a second DJ. You book two weddings on the same Saturday. This is how the weekend ceiling gets broken, and it turns you into a manager of other people's reliability.

A specialty. Cultural weddings you know properly, corporate and installation events, or the high-production end. Specialists get referred; generalists get searched for.

Add products. Photo booth, uplighting as a standalone rental, ceremony sound for couples using a band. Same customer, same day, more revenue.

The one-page version, if you read nothing else

THE ONE-PAGE VERSION IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE

- There is no DJ licence in any state. Business registration and a local licence only.
- A wedding is a private performance and is exempt — ASCAP states it does not license DJs and that the venue, establishment or promoter is responsible.
- Corporate and public events are different. Ask in writing who holds the public performance licence.
- Consumer streaming subscriptions do not cover paid public playback. Buy your music or use a DJ pool.
- Bring two sound systems — a small one for the ceremony, the main rig for the reception. No downtime between them.
- Buy the backup before the upgrade, and carry a spare of every cable.
- Tape down every cable run. Venues notice immediately.
- Get the planning sheet done weeks ahead — order of events, do-not-play list, phonetic name spellings, family dynamics.
- Be tested, dressed and ready thirty minutes before guests arrive.
- Weddings pay double parties, and cheap bookings occupy the dates the good ones needed.

A last word

A LAST WORD

The most common complaints about DJs are showing up late, talking too much, and equipment failing. Not one of them is about music.

Turn up early. Bring a spare. Say less than you want to. Tape down the cables.

This guide is a starting framework, not legal, tax, insurance or financial advice. Music licensing law is complex and published guidance conflicts in places, particularly for corporate and third-party events at licensed venues — the positions summarised here are drawn from the performing rights organisations' own published statements and industry sources as of August 2026, and are not a substitute for advice on your own situation. Local business licence, amplified sound and noise ordinance requirements vary by city. Tax figures reflect federal rules current as of August 2026. Equipment costs, pricing ranges and the worked examples are estimates and illustrations gathered from public sources, not quotes.

Startup Checklist

STARTUP CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to turn the guide into a sequence of actions for your own market and circumstances.

Done	Startup action	Owner	Target date
☐	Choose the business structure you will use.		
☐	Get an EIN and open a separate business bank account.		
☐	Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.		
☐	Confirm insurance needs before accepting work or inventory.		
☐	Complete the local market test described in the core guide.		
☐	Build the startup budget and record actual costs.		
☐	Set pricing using your own costs and required margin.		
☐	Prepare customer terms, estimate and invoice forms.		
☐	Launch outreach and record every lead and result.		

Equipment and Budget Worksheet

EQUIPMENT AND BUDGET WORKSHEET

List only the tools, equipment, supplies, software and services required for the version of the business you plan to launch.

Item	Required or optional	Estimated cost	Actual cost	Supplier or source

Budget summary	Amount
Startup total	
Monthly fixed costs	
Working cash reserve	
Total funding needed	

Pricing and Estimate Template

PRICING AND ESTIMATE TEMPLATE

Complete the cost fields with your own numbers. Use the pricing guidance in the core guide for the business-specific method.

Estimate field	Details or calculation	Amount
Customer and project		
Materials or inventory		
Labor hours and rate		
Equipment or venue		
Travel or delivery		
Subcontractors		
Overhead allocation		
Contingency or risk allowance		
Subtotal		
Applicable tax		
Estimated total		
Deposit and payment schedule		
Estimate expiration date		

INVOICE TEMPLATE

Invoice number	Invoice date	Due date	Project or job

Payment method and terms: _____

Job Log and Lead Tracker

JOB LOG AND LEAD TRACKER

Record every inquiry, estimate, job and follow-up so the business can be managed from actual results.

Date	Lead or customer	Source	Need or job	Estimate	Status	Next action

Period	Leads	Estimates sent	Jobs won	Revenue	Follow-ups due

Compliance and Safety Page

COMPLIANCE AND SAFETY PAGE

Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.

Review	Requirement or safety point from the core guide
☐	What is in your favour: no licence, moderate startup, and every event is paid in advance or on the day. Cash flow in this business is genuinely good.
☐	Filing fees \$35 to \$500 by state, about \$132 average, plus annual fees from nothing to \$800. Check licensing, zoning, and tax rules for your own city and state before starting.
☐	Most cities require one. Ask your city clerk. Also ask whether amplified sound outdoors requires a permit — I could not establish how common that is, and it varies by town.
☐	General liability. A guest trips on your cable or a speaker stand goes over. Many venues will not let you set up without a certificate of insurance naming them as additional insured — this is routine and your insurer issues it on request.
☐	Self-employment tax of 15.3% on net business income plus income tax. Quarterly if you expect to owe \$1,000 or more federally — April 15, June 15, September 15 and January 15, moving to the next business day when one falls on a weekend or holiday. Set aside 25 to 30 percent of net.
☐	There is no “DJ licence” in the United States. What people mean by the term is a public performance licence — permission to play copyrighted music in public, issued by the performing rights organisations that collect royalties for songwriters.
☐	ASCAP’s own stated position, quoted from the organisation: ASCAP does not license DJs. It is the venue, establishment, or promoter of an event that is responsible for public performance licensing, not the performer — and private events such as weddings are exempt from licensing.
☐	Corporate events. A company party is a substantial number of persons outside a normal circle of family and social acquaintances. Guidance in the corporate events industry is that the event owner needs its own licence — if it is a company’s event, the company is responsible, though a third party can obtain the licence on its behalf.
☐	There is a real conflict in the published guidance here. Some corporate-event sources state that a venue’s own blanket licence does not extend to a private third-party event held there, and that the organiser needs its own. Others say the venue covers it. Both positions are published by people who do this for a living.
☐	Public and ticketed events. A festival, a concert, a public street party, anything open to the general public. Licence required, and the organiser or venue holds the obligation.
☐	Agency or authority contacted: _____
☐	Written confirmation or permit saved at: _____
☐	Review date: _____ Renewal or recheck date: _____

Launch Readiness

Music and DJ Guide



Use the worksheets in this guide to record your own numbers, decisions and results.

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