



PRINTING GUIDE

BUSINESS STARTUP GUIDE AND WORKBOOK

VETERAN'S STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS LLC



Printing

PRINTING

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. Scope: commercial print — business cards, flyers, brochures, banners, signage, direct mail. Garment printing is covered in the apparel and screen printing guides. Wherever there is a blank line, write in your own answer.

What this business actually is

WHAT THIS BUSINESS ACTUALLY IS

Every business in your town needs printed things and almost none of them want to think about it.

Business cards, flyers, banners, yard signs, vehicle lettering, brochures, forms, menus, event programmes, direct mail.

You are not selling ink on paper. You are selling the fact that it arrives on time, spelled correctly, and looks like the business meant it.

What this is not: a business that requires a press. Part 1 covers three models, and one of them needs no equipment at all.

Read this first

READ THIS FIRST



You can enter this trade three ways, and the difference is tens of thousands of dollars.

Most people assume printing means buying a printer. It does not. A print broker takes the order, sends it to a trade printer, and delivers it — no press, no finishing equipment, no floor space.

Start there, learn what your town actually buys, and buy equipment only for work you have already proven.

Honest gut check

HONEST GUT CHECK

- Are you detail-obsessed? A misspelled name on 2,000 business cards is your money, not theirs.
- Can you say no to a customer holding somebody else's logo? Part 2 explains why this matters more than you think.
- Can you sell to businesses? This is B2B. The buyer is an office manager, and you get in by being reliable, not clever.

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, and they count businesses with employees on a payroll, so a man working alone is largely not in them.

What is in your favour: margins on the core products are genuinely strong — 60 to 80 percent on business cards — and the broker model lets you start with almost no capital.

What is against you: national online printers are cheap, fast and good. You will not beat them on price for a standard product, and Part 6 is about not trying.

What separates the ones who last:

Not buying too much machine too soon. This is the defining capital mistake in the trade.

Repeat commercial accounts, not one-off jobs.

Getting the file right before you print. Reprints come out of your margin.

Knowing what to refuse. See Part 2.

Snapshot

SNAPSHOT

Money to start	Under \$2,000 as a broker · \$17,000 to \$76,000 with a press and finishing
Storefront needed	No. Home or small unit
Skill gate	File preparation — see Part 4
Licence	None specific. Business licence and sales tax permit
Time to first job	Two to four weeks as a broker
Margin	60 to 80% on business cards; varies by product

Part 1 — Making it a real business

PART 1 MAKING IT A REAL BUSINESS



Step 1. Pick your model — this sets your capital

STEP 1 PICK YOUR MODEL THIS SETS YOUR CAPITAL

Model A: Print broker. You sell, a trade printer produces, it ships to your customer. No equipment. Lowest capital, lowest risk, and you can start this month.

Model B: Trade printer. You print for other print shops on their specs. B2B, volume, no retail selling — but you need the equipment.

Model C: Direct to customer with your own equipment. Best margin, because you control the markup end to end. Highest capital.

Recommendation: start as a broker. Learn what your town buys, build the accounts, then buy equipment for the specific work you already have.

Most established shops run one model primarily, with some of the others.

Step 2. Sole proprietor or LLC

STEP 2 SOLE PROPRIETOR OR LLC

Filing fees \$35 to \$500 by state, about \$132 average. Most new print shop owners form an LLC. Registration and setup typically \$300 to \$800 all in.

Step 3. Get an EIN — it is free

STEP 3 GET AN EIN IT IS FREE

irs.gov, five minutes.

Step 4. Business bank account, separate from personal

STEP 4 BUSINESS BANK ACCOUNT SEPARATE FROM PERSONAL

Step 5. Sales tax permit and resale certificate — this one is the gate

STEP 5 SALES TAX PERMIT AND RESALE CERTIFICATE THIS O

You are selling physical goods, so you need to register. But there is a second reason and it is the more important one.

Trade printers sell only to verified resellers, and they verify you with your resale or sales tax certificate. Without it you cannot open an account, and without an account you cannot see their prices.

Get this before anything else.

Step 6. Insurance

STEP 6 INSURANCE

General liability, and property insurance on any equipment you own.

One specific warning from the trade: new owners routinely underinsure equipment. Make sure the policy covers full replacement cost of your printers, not their depreciated value.

I could not find reliable printer-specific premium figures, so get three quotes.

Step 7. Software

STEP 7 SOFTWARE

Adobe Creative Suite runs around \$53 to \$60 a month for one user. You need it. Customers send files in every format and you will spend real time fixing them — see Part 4.

Step 8. Understand what you owe

STEP 8 UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU OWE

Self-employment tax of 15.3% on net plus income tax. Quarterly if you expect to owe \$1,000 or more federally — April 15, June 15, September 15 and January 15. Set aside 25 to 30 percent of net.

Part 2 — The law you are now subject to

PART 2 THE LAW YOU ARE NOW SUBJECT TO

There is no printing licence. The legal exposure in this trade is intellectual property, and the common belief about it is wrong.

The belief

THE BELIEF

Most print shops believe a clause in their terms — the customer warrants they own the artwork and agrees to indemnify us — makes them safe.

It does not. It shifts cost, not liability.

What the law actually does

WHAT THE LAW ACTUALLY DOES

If you make the copies, you may have infringed, regardless of who supplied the file. An indemnification clause gives you a claim against your customer. It does not stop the rights holder suing you.

The standard applied to printers is whether you knew, or should have known, that the work was infringing. Because you personally receive the artwork, look at it, and can recognise a well-known logo or character, you are in a position where you should have known.

The landmark case is Kinko's, in 1991, which established the culpability of printers who knowingly infringe — or who suspect they are infringing. Kinko's lost.

Look at what the industry did next. Kinko's, and FedEx after acquiring them, moved the bulk of copying to customer-operated self-service machines. That was not a convenience decision. Aspects of copyright law provide a safe harbour when the customer performs the copying, and the largest player in the business

restructured around it.

There is a more favourable line of authority. In the 2010 Tiffany and eBay case, a court held a business could be liable for contributory infringement only where it had specific knowledge of the infringing goods — and eBay won. The distinction is between a platform that hosts and a shop that personally handles every job. You are the second one.

What actually reduces your exposure

WHAT ACTUALLY REDUCES YOUR EXPOSURE

One: refuse work you suspect. Standard trade terms include a clause stating the printer shall not be required to print any matter which, in his opinion, is or may be illegal, libellous, or an infringement of a third party's rights. Put that in your terms and use it.

Two: do not help with the design. An attorney's view is that the less involved you are in creating or editing artwork — no edits, no design assistance — the closer you sit to a passive role, and IP law carves out safe harbours for passive infringement. Doing the design yourself moves you from printer to author.

Three: get the warranty and indemnity in writing anyway. It does not immunise you, but it gives you a claim against the customer and shows you took the question seriously.

Standard warranty language covers: the customer owns the copyright or has express permission · no copyright notice has been removed · the material is not libellous or scandalous and invades nobody's privacy · the customer indemnifies you for all liability, damages and attorney fees.

One line worth quoting to customers, and it is in the standard terms: because material does not have to carry a copyright notice to be protected, the absence of a notice does not assure a right to reproduce it. People genuinely believe no © symbol means free.

The practical rules

THE PRACTICAL RULES

Say no to: cartoon and film characters · sports team logos and league marks · another company's logo without written authorisation from that company · celebrity photographs and likenesses · military service marks and insignia, which require a licensing agreement · song lyrics and book passages · anything a customer is cagey about the source of.

Say yes to: the customer's own logo · original artwork they created or commissioned · licensed stock they can show you a licence for · public domain material.

The script: "I can't print that one — it's somebody else's trademark and I'd be liable along with you. If you can get written permission from them I'll do it happily."

You will lose a few jobs to this. You will also not be the printer who gets a letter from a corporation's counsel.

This is a summary of general practice and published case commentary, not legal advice. Have an attorney review your terms once.

Part 3 — Trade printers, which are the whole broker model

PART 3 TRADE PRINTERS WHICH ARE THE WHOLE BROKER MODE

If you take one operational thing from this guide, take this.

What a trade printer is

WHAT A TRADE PRINTER IS

A wholesale printer that sells only to print resellers. They produce the job; you own the customer.

Critically: a trade printer does not contact your client without your permission. The relationship is yours.

Blind shipping — the feature that makes it work

BLIND SHIPPING THE FEATURE THAT MAKES IT WORK

Trade printers ship directly to your customer with packaging completely free of their branding, their pricing, or any indication that they printed it.

Your customer receives the job as though it came from you. That is what makes brokering a real business rather than an obvious middleman arrangement.

How to get an account

HOW TO GET AN ACCOUNT

- You need a resale or sales tax certificate. Trade-only printers are strict about this because it is how they verify you are a reseller and not a member of the public
- Membership is typically free, with applications approved quickly
- Upload the certificate, get verified, and you have access to wholesale pricing

This is why Step 5 comes before everything else.

Why I cannot publish trade prices, and what to do about it

WHY I CANNOT PUBLISH TRADE PRICES AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT

Trade printers gate their price lists behind the reseller account. They do not publish wholesale pricing publicly, precisely because it is trade-only.

So the honest answer is: I cannot give you the numbers, and you can get them yourself in about a day. Open two accounts, download the price lists, and you have your real cost basis for every product you will ever quote.

One illustrative figure from the trade press on the scale of the spread: a pamphlet retailing at around \$1 a copy has been described as costing as little as \$0.05 wholesale. Treat that as an indication that the spread is large, not as a price.

What to look for when choosing

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING

- Product range. The bigger houses cover business cards, flyers, brochures, booklets, postcards, rack cards, posters, presentation folders, labels, stickers, vinyl banners, retractable and X-frame banners, yard signs and coroplast, acrylic and aluminium signs, A-frames, flags, vehicle decals and magnets, window and static cling, trade show graphics, envelopes, door hangers, and direct mail
- Turnaround times, per product
- Blind shipping as standard
- Free shipping thresholds — one publishes free shipping over \$49
- Local pickup, if there is a facility near you. Some offer it free to brokers and it eliminates shipping time entirely
- G7 Master Printer qualification, which is a colour-calibration standard and a reasonable proxy for consistency
- Drop shipping and fulfilment if you want it

Open two, not one

OPEN TWO NOT ONE

One for everyday work and one for specialty.

Specialty trade printers handle die cutting, foil stamping, embossing, spiral binding and Pantone or metallic inks — work the low-cost volume houses often will not touch. That lets you say yes to the higher-value jobs you would otherwise have to pass up.

Note that even established commercial printers use trade printers when they lack a capability. Brokering is not a beginner's compromise — it is normal industry practice.

Part 4 — File preparation, which is the actual craft

PART 4 FILE PREPARATION WHICH IS THE ACTUAL CRAFT

This is the skill that separates a printer from somebody who owns a printer, and it is where reprints come from.

"Print-ready" means the final PDF is sized to the exact finished dimensions, built in CMYK, with proper bleed and safe margins, all fonts embedded or outlined, and images at full resolution.

The five things that cause most reprints

THE FIVE THINGS THAT CAUSE MOST REPRINTS

1. Resolution. 300 DPI at final size, minimum.

Screens display at 72 DPI. A 300 DPI image is only print-ready at the size it was placed — scaling it up does not add detail.

The classic failure: a photo pulled from a website at 72 DPI and 600 pixels wide, placed at 6 inches, prints at roughly 100 DPI — visibly blurry.

The fix: get the original from the photographer, buy high-resolution stock, or reduce the placed size until effective resolution reaches 300.

2. Colour mode. CMYK, not RGB.

Presses print process colour — cyan, magenta, yellow and black. An RGB file gets converted automatically at the printer, and that conversion may not match what the customer intended. Bright screen colours dull and shift.

Convert early and check. Keep total ink coverage under 300 percent.

Spot and Pantone colours require a dedicated ink channel. If the job runs as standard four-colour, convert spot colours to their CMYK equivalents before exporting.

3. Bleed. 0.125 inch — an eighth of an inch — on every side.

If artwork is meant to run to the edge, it must extend past the trim line. Bleed exists because cutting blades have tolerances. Without it, a slight shift during cutting leaves a white hairline on the edge.

Large format needs more — 0.25 inch or greater for banners and fabric.

4. Safe zone. Keep critical text and logos at least 0.125 inch inside the trim line.

For banners with grommets or pole pockets, keep vital text at least 2 inches from the edge — the hardware consumes that space.

5. Fonts embedded or outlined, so nothing shifts in production. And avoid type at 7pt or smaller.

The rest of the checklist

THE REST OF THE CHECKLIST

- Export as PDF/X-1a or a Press Quality preset. PDF/X-1a is the safest — it requires all colours to be CMYK and all fonts embedded
- Include crop marks with offset
- Black text should be 100% K only, not a rich black mix, especially small body text. Rich black is for large solid areas — something like C60 M40 Y40 K100
- Check all linked images are present. Missing links are a common failure
- Watch page order and gutter space on multi-page and folded pieces
- Test every QR code and URL. Nobody checks these and they are printed thousands of times
- Open the final PDF and look at it at 100 percent zoom or higher before it goes anywhere

Large format is different

LARGE FORMAT IS DIFFERENT

Prioritise vector artwork for logos and text. Vector scales without loss; raster does not.

If raster is unavoidable, 150 to 200 DPI at full size is acceptable — or design at 1:10 scale at 300 DPI and note the scale factor clearly.

The reason: at viewing distances beyond about five feet, the eye cannot distinguish 150 DPI from 300. A billboard does not need photographic resolution.

Flatten complex transparencies before export. Wide-format processing engines struggle with overlapping gradients, drop shadows and opacity masks. Rasterise those regions at 150 DPI CMYK.

One note on Canva

ONE NOTE ON CANVA

Many small business customers design in Canva. Tell them to use the “PDF Print” export, not “PDF Standard.” The print export embeds fonts, converts toward CMYK, and includes crop marks. This one sentence will save you and them a great deal of trouble.

Why this is a selling point, not a chore

WHY THIS IS A SELLING POINT NOT A CHORE

Reviewing a file against this checklist takes fifteen to thirty minutes and prevents the reprint that would have cost you the whole job’s margin.

Offer it free, every time. “Send me the file and I’ll check it before it goes to print — no charge.” Most files have something small wrong with them, the customer has no idea, and being the person who catches it is why they come back.

Part 5 — Finding out whether your town supports this

PART 5 FINDING OUT WHETHER YOUR TOWN SUPPORTS THIS



Two afternoons of work gives you the whole picture. Do these five things in order.

Step 1. Survey ten local businesses. Walk in and ask what they print most often, how often, and who does it now. Ten conversations tells you the actual product mix in your town — and it is rarely what you would guess.

Step 2. Price 1,000 standard business cards three ways — two local shops and one national online printer. That is your local benchmark and your price ceiling in one exercise.

Step 3. Count the print shops and note what they do not do. Wide format. Same-day. Delivery. Design help. Small runs. The gaps are your opening.

Step 4. List the recurring buyers. Real estate offices, restaurants with changing menus, churches with weekly bulletins, schools, funeral homes, contractors needing yard signs, event venues, nonprofits with annual fundraisers, political campaigns in season.

Step 5. Work out what the nationals cannot do in your town. Same-day turnaround. Delivery. Somebody who answers the phone. Small runs. Fixing a broken file for free.

Print shops in town: _____ · What none of them do: _____ · 1,000 cards locally: _____ · Online: _____ · Top three recurring buyers I could reach: _____

The pattern that tends to hold in smaller markets, and you should test it rather than trust it: nobody competes on same-day. National online printers take three to seven days plus shipping. A local who can turn a banner around in a day tends to own the urgent work — and urgent jobs are the ones nobody price-shops.

A note on why there is no named town here: I would rather show you the method than hand you a worked example whose findings I could not verify. Do the five steps above in your own town and the answer will be better than anything I could have written.

The counterintuitive part: do not try to beat the national online printers on standard products. They are cheaper than your cost. Compete on speed, delivery, small runs, and being a person who answers the phone.

Part 6 — Getting your first customer

PART 6 GETTING YOUR FIRST CUSTOMER

- Get the resale certificate and open two trade printer accounts.
- Walk ten businesses and ask what they print. That is market research and first sales calls at once.
- Do two jobs at a reduced rate for businesses you know. Not free — say the real number.
- Get on the vendor list at one institution — a school, a church, a municipality.

What to actually say

WHAT TO ACTUALLY SAY

Walking into a business: “I run a print shop here in town. I’m not trying to sell you anything today — I just want to know what you print most and who does it now, so I know whether I can be useful.” A sales call disguised as research, and it gets answered honestly.

When they say they use a national online printer: “They’re good and they’re cheap. What they can’t do is get you something by Friday. Next time you’re in a hurry, try me.” Do not attack the incumbent. Position against their weakness.

When you get the first order: “Send me the file and I’ll check it before it goes to print — no charge.”

When a file is genuinely unusable: “This is 72 dpi, so it’ll print blurry at that size. Do you have the original from whoever designed it?” Explaining why builds trust. Printing it badly loses the customer.

When somebody wants a rush: charge for it, clearly and without apology. “I can do that by tomorrow — there’s a rush charge because it goes ahead of other work.”

The commercial account, which is the real business

THE COMMERCIAL ACCOUNT WHICH IS THE REAL BUSINESS

One restaurant reprinting menus quarterly, one real estate office ordering cards for new agents, one church printing a weekly bulletin — that is recurring revenue with no selling per order.

Ask every satisfied customer: “Is this something you’ll need again on a schedule? I can put it on a standing order and just check with you before each run.”

Part 7 — Pricing

PART 7 PRICING

The formula

THE FORMULA

Material cost + equipment cost per unit + your time + overhead (packaging, delivery, fees) + profit margin = your price

As a broker your material cost is the trade printer’s invoice, which simplifies it considerably.

The one margin figure I can verify

THE ONE MARGIN FIGURE I CAN VERIFY

Product	Your cost	Retail	Margin
Business cards, 500	\$15 to \$25	\$50 to \$150	60 to 80%

That single line explains why the trade works. A product costing tens of dollars, retailing for hundreds, bought repeatedly by every business in town.

For everything else, build the table yourself from your trade printer’s price list. Take your ten highest-volume products, note the wholesale cost, check local and online retail, and set your price. That is an afternoon’s work and it is the most valuable document in your business.

Product: _____ Cost: _____ Local retail: _____ My price: _____

What to expect

WHAT TO EXPECT

Reported revenue progression:

Stage	Monthly revenue
Solo operator, year one	\$3,000 to \$12,000
Adding help, year two	\$10,000 to \$30,000
Full operation, year three plus	\$30,000 to \$100,000+

Treat these as a shape, not a promise. They describe a business that grew; most do not follow that curve.

The tiers

THE TIERS

Tier	Approach
Low	Match national online pricing. You cannot. Their cost is below your cost
Mid	Local market rate, with speed, delivery and file checking included
Premium	Same-day, account management, design service, standing orders

Recommendation: mid, sold on speed and service.

Quote the job, not the components. Itemising paper, ink and labour invites negotiation on every line.

Charge for rush work, always. It is the one thing the nationals cannot provide and customers pay for it without complaint.

Take a deposit on large runs. You are buying production with your own money.

Part 8 — What it costs if you do buy equipment

PART 8 WHAT IT COSTS IF YOU DO BUY EQUIPMENT

Typical market ranges, not quotes. Read Part 1 first — you may not need any of this.

Item	Roughly
Entry-level production printer	\$1,500 to \$12,000
Quality digital printer	\$5,000 to \$15,000
Commercial digital press, entry	\$10,000 to \$25,000
Commercial digital press, mid-range	\$25,000 to \$50,000

Item	Roughly
Paper cutter	\$500 to \$3,000
Folding machine	\$1,000 to \$8,000
Binding equipment	\$1,000 to \$6,000
Vinyl cutter	\$1,000 to \$3,000
Laminator	\$500 to \$3,000
Initial paper, ink and substrate stock	\$1,000 to \$5,000

A full digital printing setup with finishing runs \$17,000 to \$76,000.

One caution: at least one published source states you need \$300,000 to \$400,000 to start in digital printing. That describes a full production plant, not a small shop, and it sits far outside everything else published. Do not budget from it.

The rule that matters most

THE RULE THAT MATTERS MOST

Many new owners buy too much machine too soon.

You do not need a \$40,000 press to start. A quality digital printer and a cutter handle most early jobs, and brokering handles everything else.

Buy a machine when you have recurring work that pays for it. The equipment does not create the customers.

Part 9 — Money help for veterans

PART 9 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.

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.

Veteran-owned status is worth registering if you want institutional work. Municipalities, school districts and state agencies buy print constantly, the purchasing is documented, and veteran-owned status can matter in ways it does not in private sales.

And a specific warning. You will be asked to print unit crests, division patches, regimental insignia and service marks. Military service marks and insignia are protected and require a licensing agreement to reproduce commercially. Knowing the unit does not give you the right to print its crest. See the apparel guide in this series for the licensing route — the same rules apply on paper as on fabric.

Part 10 — The three places people get stuck, and how to get past them

PART 10 THE THREE PLACES PEOPLE GET STUCK AND HOW TO

1. Buying equipment before having the work

1 BUYING EQUIPMENT BEFORE HAVING THE WORK

The press is the exciting purchase and it feels like the business. Then \$30,000 sits in the garage running at a fraction of capacity, and the payment arrives whether or not the phone rings.

The fix: broker first. Every job you broker teaches you what your town actually buys. Buy a machine when you have recurring work that pays for it.

2. Believing the indemnification clause protects them

2 BELIEVING THE INDEMNIFICATION CLAUSE PROTECTS THEM

A customer sends a file with a well-known logo on it. Your terms say they warrant they own it and will indemnify you. So you print it.

The clause gives you a claim against the customer. It does not stop the rights holder suing you — and the standard is whether you knew or should have known.

The fix: refuse what you suspect, keep the right-to-refuse clause in your terms, do not help with the design, and have an attorney review your terms once.

3. Competing with the national online printers

3 COMPETING WITH THE NATIONAL ONLINE PRINTERS

They are cheaper than your cost on standard products, and no amount of efficiency changes that. Trying to match them means working for nothing on the jobs you win.

The fix: compete where they cannot. Same-day. Delivery. Small runs. Fixing a broken file for free. Somebody who answers the phone.

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

Part 11 — Your first 90 days

PART 11 YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Days	What you do
1 to 10	LLC, EIN, bank account, sales tax permit and resale certificate — this comes first.
11 to 20	Open two trade printer accounts. Download the price lists and build your product cost table.
21 to 30	Walk ten local businesses. Ask what they print and who does it now. Price 1,000 cards three ways.
31 to 40	Have an attorney review your terms — warranty, indemnity and right-to-refuse clauses.
41 to 55	Two jobs at a reduced rate. Check the files properly. Deliver early.
56 to 70	Convert one customer to a standing order. Approach one institution.
71 to 90	Review what you brokered. Only now consider whether any of it justifies equipment.

The one number to track

THE ONE NUMBER TO TRACK

Repeat orders as a percentage of total orders.

Not revenue, and not job count. How much of your work came from somebody who had ordered before.

This trade lives or dies on recurring commercial accounts. A shop full of one-off jobs has to sell every single order. A shop with twenty standing accounts wakes up to work already on the calendar.

Under 40 percent after six months and you are running an order desk, not a business. The fix is to ask every customer the standing-order question, every time.

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

After the first year, add: average order value. Growing that means selling bigger jobs to the same accounts — far cheaper than finding new ones.

Where this goes if it works

WHERE THIS GOES IF IT WORKS

A broker with twenty standing accounts. No equipment, no premises, no employees. You sell, check files and deliver. Genuinely good income for low overhead.

Broker plus one machine. You bring in-house the one product you sell most — usually business cards or small-format digital — and broker everything else. Best margin per hour of anything in this trade.

A full shop. Press, finishing, staff. Higher revenue, real overhead, and you become a production manager.

A niche. Political printing in season, restaurant menus, real estate, event graphics. Specialists get called; generalists get searched for.

The one-page version, if you read nothing else

THE ONE-PAGE VERSION IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE

- Start as a broker. No press, no floor space, and you can begin this month.
- Get the resale certificate first — trade printers verify you with it and gate their prices behind it.
- Trade printers blind-ship to your customer with no trace of who printed it.
- Open two accounts — one everyday, one specialty for die cutting, foil and embossing.
- The indemnification clause shifts cost, not liability. The standard is whether you knew or should have known.
- Refuse what you suspect, and do not help with the design. Both reduce your exposure.
- Print-ready means 300 DPI at final size, CMYK, 0.125" bleed, safe zone, fonts embedded, PDF/X-1a.
- Check every customer file free. Fifteen minutes, and it is why they come back.
- Business cards cost \$15 to \$25 and retail \$50 to \$150. Build the same table for your top ten products.
- Do not fight the national printers on price. Win on same-day, delivery and small runs.

A last word

A LAST WORD

The equipment is not the business. The accounts are.

Get the certificate, open two trade printer accounts, walk ten businesses and ask what they print. You can be taking orders inside a month with almost nothing invested, and you will know within a quarter whether it is worth buying a machine.

This guide is a starting framework, not legal, tax or financial advice. IP law is fact-specific — have an attorney review your terms. Costs, margins and revenue figures are estimates from public sources, not quotes. Trade printer pricing is not published publicly and must be obtained through a reseller account. © 2026 Veteran's Strategic Solutions LLC. All rights reserved.

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

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
☐	Trade printers sell only to verified resellers, and they verify you with your resale or sales tax certificate. Without it you cannot open an account, and without an account you cannot see their prices.
☐	General liability, and property insurance on any equipment you own.
☐	Self-employment tax of 15.3% on net plus income tax. Quarterly if you expect to owe \$1,000 or more federally — April 15, June 15, September 15 and January 15. Set aside 25 to 30 percent of net.
☐	There is no printing licence. The legal exposure in this trade is intellectual property, and the common belief about it is wrong.
☐	Say yes to: the customer's own logo · original artwork they created or commissioned · licensed stock they can show you a licence for · public domain material.
☐	You need a resale or sales tax certificate. Trade-only printers are strict about this because it is how they verify you are a reseller and not a member of the public
☐	Export as PDF/X-1a or a Press Quality preset. PDF/X-1a is the safest — it requires all colours to be CMYK and all fonts embedded
☐	Flatten complex transparencies before export. Wide-format processing engines struggle with overlapping gradients, drop shadows and opacity masks. Rasterise those regions at 150 DPI CMYK.
☐	Many small business customers design in Canva. Tell them to use the “PDF Print” export, not “PDF Standard.” The print export embeds fonts, converts toward CMYK, and includes crop marks. This one sentence will save you and them a great deal of trouble.
☐	This guide is a starting framework, not legal, tax or financial advice. IP law is fact-specific — have an attorney review your terms. Costs, margins and revenue figures are estimates from public sources, not quotes. Trade printer pricing is not published publicly and must be obtained through a reseller account. © 2026 Veteran's Strategic Solutions LLC. All rights reserved.
☐	Agency or authority contacted: _____
☐	Written confirmation or permit saved at: _____
☐	Review date: _____ Renewal or recheck date: _____

Launch Readiness

Printing Guide



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

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