**Start Up Hardware & Software Checklist**

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| **Hardware** | **Consider** | **Plan & Budget** |
| **Cell Phone** |  |  |
| While there are very cheap, basic phones available on the market, functionality and fitness for purpose are the key determinants as to what you will need.  A smart phone has practically become the minimum standard for life in the 21st century. The internet and computing capacity coupled with communication technology, such as, WhatsApp and Skype allow you to literally run a business from the palm of your hand. | * Costs vs benefits – the latest, greatest Apple or Android device comes at a crippling price tag. First write a checklist of your actual needs for the business, (calls, messaging, 24 hour contact-ability, email, social media marketing, basic accounting etc.) then check which devices can manage these tasks satisfactorily. Often older or previous generation phones offer adequate capacity at half the price. * Storage – if you are going to be active with social media promotions requiring photographs & videos, and/or managing your financial data with the phone then 16 gigabytes may be insufficient. * Robustness – the higher end the device, the least hardy. * Insurance and repair costs – water damage or a cracked screen may cost you dearly * Data storage such as back up to the Cloud. If your phone is stolen – how will this impact your business? * Look for free or small business recommended Apps to run your business * Pre-paid or contract deals – do the sums and check how much it will actually cost. Check these costs are affordable in terms of your business plan | Type of phone/s Required?  How many?  Cost?  Payment plan: |
| **Computers** |  |  |
| What do you need now and in the short term and is a computer a necessary tool?  While there is a lot one can do on a smartphone, (e.g. banking, basic accounting, social media communication) ease of use, business requirements & data storage may require an early investment in a computer.  Refurbished computers are often available at a fraction of the cost, but it is important to bear in mind your needs in terms of software (older machines may not support new software) and whether or not any guarantees are available.  Use your social and business network when seeking a computer because many people and organisations upgrade regularly and they are happy to donate old computers.  Tablets generally use smart phone operating systems, unlike computers & notebooks. They do not have the QWERTY keyboard making them smaller & more lightweight. Tablets are useful for sales reps on the road or for client presentations. | **Desktop vs. Notebook / Laptop vs. Tablet**   * Is mobility important? Desktops are larger in size & often more powerful but notebooks or tablets are compact and great for use on-the-go. (Is the user a sales rep on the road or an accountant?) * How many users? (be realistic in your assessment – who will need to use a computer, for what purpose, how often and factor in potential security requirements ) * Best fit for purpose – e.g. graphic designers require large screens and high end functionality hence a desktop would be more practical. Whereas, most small business owners may need to work after hours and so a notebook would be more versatile. It is also possible to link a laptop to a larger screen if needed. * The nature and physical environment of the business - Desktops are more robust than notebooks but they do take up space and are more complicated to assemble. Desktops generally have more user-friendly keyboards and are ergonomically better. * Maintenance & longevity - Most desktop components are easy to remove & upgrade, whereas, generally only the memory and hard drive can be upgraded with notebooks. * Suppliers often offer new computers as bundles with pre-loaded software & various accessories. Ensure that you are comparing like with like. Also consider brand reputation. * Data connectivity and costs whether ADSL, Fibre, iBurst, 3G & 4G etc. | Required Y/N?  When required?  How many?  Cost?  Payment plan: |
| **Point of sale cash register or credit card machine** |  |  |
| If you are running a shop, a restaurant or a service business such as a hair dresser, where there will be frequent financial transactions, then you may need a till &/or credit card system.  Many POS systems now integrate with your computer network  Always make it easy for the customer to pay you! | * Check the bank charges that will apply for credit card payments and cash deposits * Compare bank credit card machines with smart phone Apps * Security – cash on premises is a target for internal & external theft * Be clear what you need the cash register to do – the more sophisticated, the higher the cost. However, the reports generated may assist greatly with basic financial management & stock control. | Required Y/N?  When required?  How many?  Cost?  Payment plan: |
| **Server** |  |  |
| A server is dedicated to managing, storing and processing data. A network server is the storehouse of data and programmes shared by users in a business network. If your business will generate or need to store huge amounts of data or more than 3 users are networked, then a server may be necessary.  Benefits of a server:   * File and network security * Improved reliability * Centralised data storage and access to shared resources * Improved virus management * Centralised backup | * Costs * Ease of use & technical setup / repair * Cloud storage options * How many users * Data saving & file naming protocols * Data access and security (Protection of Private Information Act) * Networking of printers | Required Y/N?  When required?  How many?  Cost?  Payment plan: |
| **Telephony** |  |  |
| While a startup business can do much on a cell phone, a proper telephony system may be required for a professional services firm or a growing business.  Hosted VoIP solutions are well suited to small business. They do not require investment in expensive PBX boxes and are not as technically demanding.  Skype is an accepted & very practical means of communication, especially for meetings or long distance calls. Skype technology has improved dramatically and has the added benefit of allowing for video stream. Skype for business give small business owners a unified communications platform. UC is the convergence of phone, conferencing and messaging into one solution. | * What are the actual needs of the business and is a traditional telephony system really the answer? * Investment in telephony requires a concomitant investment in personnel to use the system. * If professional image is not a requirement, is cell phone & VOIP technology a real alternative? * What do your customers expect? - A landline number and a real person answering the phone is still reassuring to many customers. * Projected call in & call out numbers | Required Y/N?  When required?  How many?  Cost?  Payment plan: |
| **Software** | **Consider** | **Plan & Budget** |
| **Microsoft Office** |  |  |
| Word, Excel & PowerPoint along with Outlook are generally seen as the norm in business software. Unless, of course, you’re an Apple fan! Office may be the gold standard, but it comes at a pretty price. |  | If you have a computer then you need the software to operate it. If you are not technologically minded, then MS Office is perhaps worth the cost. |
| **Word** is the ‘norm’ for word processing or document production, whether it is a letter or a report or a sales pitch.  **Excel** is a spreadsheet application and many basic business financial and stock control forms/controls can be managed with this.  **PowerPoin**t is a visual slide- based application for presenting ideas, presentations and pitches.  **Outlook** is an application which allows for easy and logical management of email communication, contacts and calendar/task planning. | * A very practical alternative is OpenOffice which is a free office suite that can be downloaded. However, support is based on the internet community and it is not quite as user-friendly as the Microsoft option. Google Docs and Zoho are similar online suites but with a more limited functionality. * What is the nature of the business and what would your customers expect? For example, email is considered an essential communication tool. Online email accounts such as Gmail, Hotmail & Yahoo are free but they are not considered to be professional nor particularly user-friendly. |  |
| **Accounting Software** |  |  |
| When a spreadsheet is insufficient to manage the accounting needs of the business, (whether Excel or Lotus) then accounting software allows you to record, process, manipulate, manage & report on financial transactions and the overall financial health of the business. | * Does your business really need all the bells and whistles? What exactly do you need to do with the software and is it worth the cost? * Technical difficulty of using the software and support offered * Is the software compatible with other elements of your business? | Required Y/N?  When required?  How many licences required?  Cost of licence & staff training?  Payment plan |
| **Internet Browser** |  |  |
| Internet Explorer, Chrome, Safari, Firefox etc are all well supported web browsers. | The standard issue internet browser is dependent on whether you are an Apple fan or not. Chrome is the most popular browser and Apple Safari is second. Personal preference is really the determinant. |  |