# Building a Useful Business

From customer evidence and a clear offer to dependable daily operations

Working book edition 0.1 I November 3, 2026 I David Tom Publishing

A complete general working book for US readers, with sixteen connected chapters, two fictional teaching cases, explained calculations and twelve reusable BD worksheets. It expands the shorter Build a Useful Business guide, edition 0.2, while preserving that guide as a separate edition under its original title.

Read the chapters in order for the full route, or use the chapter map to return to a particular decision. The original BD worksheet prompt sets are unchanged. Carry an existing completed worksheet forward rather than copying the same business record into several competing masters.

All named people, businesses, interviews, customer counts, prices, transactions, records and outcomes in the cases are invented. Later operating simulations do not create real evidence of paid demand for the earlier exploratory cases. Monetary examples use US dollars and identify their assumptions and exclusions.

The book is educational organizational material. It supplies no legal agreements, tax forms, entity recommendation, personalized financial recommendation or professional approval. Keep completed records private and use actual official sources, agreements and appropriate advisers for decisions dependent on specific requirements.

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# 01 — A useful business begins with a bounded promise

A business idea often arrives as a noun: a shop, a consulting practice, an app, a line of notebooks. The noun makes the idea easy to picture, but it leaves the difficult questions unanswered. Who is trying to do what? What result would justify the expense and effort of changing their current approach? What must happen behind the scenes for the promised result to be delivered again? A useful business starts becoming visible when those questions can be answered in ordinary sentences. The purpose of this book is to help you build those sentences into a model, test its weak points and operate a modest promise with care.

The SBA describes a business plan as a way to think through key elements and guide starting and managing a business. [R2] The working model in this book serves that organizing purpose; it is not a prediction that events will follow the plan. Keep it concise enough to revise and complete enough to expose the assumptions on which the next decision depends.

This is an expanded working book, connected to DTP's shorter Build a Useful Business guide, edition 0.2. The earlier guide remains available under its own title and version. Its twelve BD worksheets are retained here with their original prompt sets, so a reader who has already completed one does not need to start a competing record. The new material explains the judgments between those prompts: how to choose an evidence question, compare alternatives, understand the difference between a favorable calculation and a dependable operation, and decide whether to continue. You can use the book before a launch, during a small experiment or while improving work already underway.

Two original fictional cases will accompany the discussion. Rowan is exploring a service that formats customer-approved information into a readable event flyer. Mara is exploring a printed organizer called Index & Keep. Every person, conversation, price, order, document, count and outcome in these cases is invented for teaching. Some chapters supply a later operating simulation so that we can examine records and delivery. Those supplied facts do not convert the earlier exploratory scenarios into real customer research, and none reports an actual DTP business experiment. Your own observations will need their own sources and dates.

The cases contrast two kinds of dependency. Rowan cannot begin a sensible production estimate without knowing whether the customer's text and images are ready and permitted for use. Mara must consider physical supplies, printing, assembly, shipping and the possibility of paying for materials that have not yet become sold units. Both need a clear offer, but the same checklist will not settle their economics. A service can accumulate unpaid coordination time. A product can accumulate unsold supplies. The point is not that either model is inherently better. The point is that the task, the resources and the sequence of events have to be visible together.

A bounded promise states the result and the limits that make it credible. Rowan's first practice offer is one print-ready, one-page PDF flyer from approved inputs, with one revision round. It does not promise attendance, copywriting, printing, distribution or urgent work. Mara's first practice offer is a defined printed organizer pack, with a specified page set and delivery description. It does not promise to transform a household or guarantee that records will never be lost. An attractive promise becomes misleading when the reader has to infer crucial exclusions. Specificity helps a prospective customer decide, and it helps the person doing the work recognize when a request has become a different job.

Useful does not mean useful to everyone. A free template may suit an experienced organizer who has time to work with it. Rowan might have something more relevant for a person with approved content but little time to format it. Mara's printed pack may be unhelpful to someone who already maintains a workable digital system. Treating these differences as design information is more productive than calling every nonbuyer resistant. Your ability to identify a poor fit is part of the quality of an offer. It prevents persuasive language from becoming a substitute for suitability and keeps early effort focused on a task you can actually investigate.

Start with a small operating boundary as well as a customer boundary. Write the time, money and attention available for the next stage, what you cannot risk, and which activities are outside the present experiment. A person with five spare hours and a small cash limit needs a different test from a team with dedicated facilities. Constraints do not make the work less serious; hidden constraints make the plan less trustworthy. A useful first boundary might be a simulated ordering exercise using invented information, with no charges and no collection of sensitive records. Another might be a privately built prototype that will be inspected before anyone relies on it.

Try this opening exercise before choosing software or a logo. Write: “For this kind of person, at this moment, I propose this specific result, using these inputs, within these limits.” Then write the strongest reason that person might prefer an existing alternative. Finally, identify one part of your sentence that is still an assumption. If Rowan says, “Busy volunteers will pay for a flyer,” the unknown is not solved by a polished mockup. It could involve the price, the timing, access to a budget, the value of the problem or several of these. BD-01 and BD-02 let you preserve that uncertainty while choosing a useful next question.

# 02 — Understand the task before recruiting support for the idea

An investigation can accidentally become a campaign for agreement. A creator explains an idea enthusiastically, the listener offers encouragement, and the creator records validation. Everyone may have been sincere, yet the conclusion is stronger than the observation. Encouragement is evidence that someone responded favorably in that conversation. It is not automatically evidence of a recent problem, an available budget, purchasing authority or willingness to replace an existing approach. Before asking whether people like your solution, learn how the relevant task currently unfolds and what makes it difficult, acceptable or unnecessary.

The U.S. Small Business Administration describes market research as a way to understand customers and competitive analysis as a way to understand businesses competing for them. Its guidance identifies questions such as demand, market size, location, saturation and pricing. Those are useful categories for investigation, not a requirement to produce a false precision estimate before you have a workable question. [R1] A new operator may begin with a narrowly defined task and a modest collection of carefully labeled information. The record becomes valuable through its relevance and honesty, rather than through a large number that cannot be traced to a source.

Ask about a recent occurrence when that is appropriate and the person is willing to discuss it. What triggered the task? What did they use? Who else had to approve the result? Where did they wait, redo work or accept a compromise? What happened when they chose not to act? A question about an actual episode can reveal dependencies that a broad preference question misses. It can also reveal that the supposed problem is infrequent or already solved well enough. You are not entitled to someone's time or private examples. Explain the limited purpose, ask permission for any recording and keep only the information the investigation needs.

Rowan's fictional task is preparation of an event notice. In the supplied case, one organizer describes waiting for the venue address to be confirmed, another already uses a reliable template, and another finds image permissions more troublesome than layout. These invented accounts do not point to one universal pain. They suggest at least three different circumstances. Rowan could focus on formatting already approved content, improve the input checklist, or decide that the real problem lies elsewhere. The wrong response would be to erase the distinctions and write “organizers urgently need design help.” That sentence contains urgency, a broad audience and a solution none of the supplied observations establishes.

Keep an observation and its interpretation in separate sentences. “The participant asked where to enter the event date” describes an event in a test. “The form is confusing” is an interpretation that may be reasonable but still needs a scope. “Customers cannot use online forms” is a much broader claim and is not supported by that event. The source reference, date, task version and any assistance given should stay with the note. When assistance changes the result, describe it. A person who completes a step after coaching has provided information about a coached task, not independent completion of the original instructions.

You also need to notice who is absent from your evidence. Friends, current customers, members of one group and people who volunteered for a test may not represent the wider audience you imagine. This does not make their contributions worthless. It limits the claim you can make from them. A small qualitative exercise can reveal a missing instruction without estimating how many

people in a population would buy. An online trend can suggest vocabulary without establishing local demand. A competitor's public review can reveal a question worth asking without proving the underlying event happened exactly as described. BD-01 should identify these limits beside the information, not in a forgotten footnote.

Mara begins with a different fictional question: how people locate a household maintenance record when they need it. The pack is not yet the subject of the question. The supplied scenario includes one person using a phone folder, one keeping receipts in an envelope and one relying on another household member. Mara has not discovered that everyone needs printed pages. She has found different existing systems and a shared retrieval task that might be investigated further. A useful next prototype could test whether an index points to the right record, using invented data. It would not need to collect real insurance, identity or banking documents to answer that limited usability question.

Practice separating three statements: what was supplied, what you infer and what you will check next. Suppose four fictional listeners express interest, two complete a prototype task without help and nobody purchases anything. The supported counts are four expressions of interest, two independent task completions and zero observed purchases. They cannot be added together as six customers or converted into a reliable sales rate. A reasonable decision is to preserve the promising observations, revise an unclear step and investigate a suitable purchasing question separately. The exercise succeeds when it improves the next decision, even if it does not give you a reassuring market-size claim.

# 03 — Compare alternatives from the customer's side

A competitor list can become a catalogue of businesses that resemble yours. That is a useful starting point, but it misses alternatives that look different while serving the same task. The customer might ask a colleague, use a general-purpose tool, postpone the job, accept a simpler result or decide the result is not worth the effort. These choices compete for the customer's time and attention even when no money changes hands. An offer does not become compelling because you cannot find another company using the same description. It must earn a place among the options the person actually considers.

Choose a comparison unit before gathering prices. Rowan cannot fairly compare a one-page file made from approved text with a campaign that includes writing, multiple formats and printing. Mara cannot treat a digital download and a delivered printed pack as equivalent without identifying what each includes. Write the customer's task, the minimum outcome and the relevant constraints. Then record what is known about each alternative under the same headings. Price can be one heading, but so can preparation time, required skill, waiting, access, revisions, physical delivery and the cost of correcting an error. Unknown is an acceptable entry; an invented match is not.

Use a source and a date for information about a real alternative. A public page may describe a starting price, a limited package or a promotion that changes. A statement about a feature is not proof that every user obtains the promised outcome. You can report what the page says without adopting its claim as a finding from your own investigation. Do not copy another provider's sales language or design to make your comparison look authoritative. Your value is in the organizing question and the care of the comparison. The SBA's competitive-analysis guidance supplies useful categories; the actual conclusions still depend on the evidence you gather. [R1]

Consider Rowan's three invented alternatives: an existing free template, a willing volunteer and a paid formatting service. The template might be fast for someone who understands it, but require time to adjust an awkward text block. The volunteer might know the organization's habits, but have uncertain availability. A service might offer a defined process, while requiring a budget and approved inputs. These are scenario assumptions, not researched facts about real providers. They show how a comparison can lead to a narrower offer. Rowan might emphasize a bounded formatting task with a clear input check, without claiming to replace the judgment or relationships of the organization's own team.

The strongest alternative is sometimes the one you least want to discuss. “Keep the current system” may be a rational decision if the problem is rare, switching takes effort or the proposed solution introduces new maintenance. For Mara's pack, a household that can already retrieve a receipt promptly may gain little from rewriting it onto another sheet. A product that creates a second inconsistent record can make the task worse. This is why the DTP collections use references to an existing master record rather than insisting that every worksheet become a new authority. The same principle applies to your business: useful integration can matter more than an impressive list of features.

Look for a specific improvement you could demonstrate without an inflated superiority claim. “The input checklist names the required date, location and approved text” is a checkable description. “The best event service in the region” requires a very different basis. “This printed index provides a place to record a private document locator” describes the pack. “Never lose an

important document again" makes a sweeping outcome promise the pack cannot control. Federal Trade Commission guidance explains that advertising claims must be truthful, not misleading, and supported by evidence where appropriate. [R6] A claim should remain within the scope of what the business can substantiate.

BD-03 is a working comparison, not a permanent ranking. Give it a review trigger: an offer change, a different audience, an outdated source or a newly discovered alternative. A difference that mattered during a prototype may become less important once people explain how they actually use the result. Avoid treating your earliest comparison as a document that must be defended. If a better alternative exists, you can refer the person elsewhere, alter your scope or stop pursuing that particular idea. Preserving the reason is useful work. It prevents the same unsupported assumption from returning later under a different title or more attractive packaging.

For practice, compare Mara's pack with an existing envelope of receipts. The envelope is inexpensive, familiar and already contains the documents. The proposed pack may improve indexing, but it also needs someone to maintain it. A useful test could ask whether a fictional receipt can be found from a completed sample index, and how an unclear locator would be corrected. A successful exercise would support that retrieval step for that sample. It would not show that every household prefers paper or that the pack is worth a particular price. The next decision should reflect that limited result and the remaining cost of adopting the system.

# 04 — Design an experiment that can change a decision

A test is easiest to interpret when you write the decision before choosing the activity. Otherwise, the activity can produce a pile of impressions while leaving the original uncertainty intact. “Show people the prototype” describes something you will do. “Decide whether the input checklist can be followed without explanation” identifies a question whose answer could change the next version. “Decide whether to offer a paid pilot under the actual applicable terms” is another question, with different evidence and responsibilities. One activity may inform several questions, but recording them separately prevents a favorable result on one from silently answering all the others.

Use a short experiment record: assumption, task, participants or data source, version, expected evidence, limit, stop condition and decision point. The limit might involve time, cost, number of attempts or a boundary on what information is collected. The stop condition might be a privacy concern, an unsafe step, a broken delivery route or an assumption that no longer makes the test meaningful. These are design choices for your circumstances, not universal thresholds supplied by this book. If the test involves real people or real commitments, arrange the actual permission, communication and applicable requirements before proceeding. A worksheet does not authorize the activity it describes.

In the original guide's fictional service case, five practice sessions produce four expressions of interest, two independent completions and no purchases. Suppose the draft input checklist is version R-1. The next experiment can be more specific: present revised checklist R-2 with an invented event and observe whether the reader identifies all required inputs without coaching. The record should identify the task, the version and any intervention. If the person omits an image-permission check, Rowan learns something about that instruction. The result does not establish whether the person would buy the service, whether payment would work or whether the finished file would improve attendance.

Make the evidence observable enough that a second reader can understand the conclusion. “They loved it” often combines demeanor, praise and interpretation. A more useful record might say that a participant completed four of five specified fields, asked one question and said the example was easy to read. Those observations may still be limited or ambiguous, but they can be examined. Keep the person's words separate from your summary, and obtain any necessary permission before preserving or sharing identifiable material. You do not need a public archive of raw participant information to maintain a credible private record of a small test.

Mara can use a paper prototype without pretending it is a finished commercial product. A fictional sample household has an appliance record, a warranty locator and a service note. The bounded task is to identify which record answers a stated question. If the sample points to a missing document, the issue is not solved by a larger cover title. The pack may need a way to mark “requested but not received.” That change improves the record model. It does not yet settle printing cost, handwriting space, shipping reliability or the legal meaning of a warranty. A prototype earns its cost when it exposes such distinctions early enough to change the design.

Predetermine what would count against the idea as well as what would support another step. If every result can be reinterpreted as success, the exercise is a demonstration, not a useful decision test. You might decide that repeated confusion about a required input warrants revision before taking orders, or that a delivery-time observation beyond a stated limit warrants a smaller

scope. The chosen boundary should fit the seriousness of the decision and the cost of being wrong. A small informal test cannot justify a high-stakes claim merely because the threshold was written in advance. It can still support a modest and clearly bounded next action.

Separate measurement problems from disappointing outcomes. A participant might not have seen the right version, a timer might have included an interruption, or a transaction simulation might have skipped the failure route. Those defects limit interpretation. Record them instead of deleting the attempt to improve the apparent success rate. If you repeat a test, preserve both versions and explain what changed. The useful count may be distinct tasks, participants, attempts or records; those are not interchangeable. A single person trying a corrected step twice does not become two independent people, and a second successful lookup does not erase the first broken locator.

At the decision point, choose an action with a reason: repeat under clearer conditions, revise a specific element, investigate a different uncertainty, pause or stop. For the fictional R-2 checklist, a reader who completes the task only after one explanation may support improving the wording and trying again. It does not require building a whole website. For Mara, a correct sample retrieval may support testing the physical writing space next. BD-12 preserves these decisions, while BD-01 keeps the observation and interpretation close. The objective is a chain of increasingly useful evidence, not a collection of favorable anecdotes arranged to look like inevitability.

# 05 — Research the requirements for the activity you will actually perform

A business can look ready from the outside while basic operating questions remain unresolved. A name, a website, a sample product and a spreadsheet are visible accomplishments. They do not establish the applicable registrations, permissions, insurance, tax obligations or terms for an actual activity. This chapter offers a research method, not a universal setup checklist. The right questions depend on what you do, where you do it, how you deliver it, whom you serve and which people or organizations are involved. The SBA notes that license and permit requirements vary by business activity, location and government rules. [R4]

Describe the activity at a level that an appropriate agency or adviser can evaluate. “Creative business” may be too vague. Rowan's proposed work involves receiving customer-supplied material, formatting a digital file and sending a deliverable. Mara's proposed work involves arranging production of printed goods, holding supplies, assembling orders and shipping them. These descriptions reveal different questions. Adding employees, selling in another location, handling regulated information or changing the product could change the inquiry. Keep a dated activity description with the record so that an answer about one version of the business is not silently applied to another.

BD-04 separates the question, responsible source, current answer, supporting evidence and unresolved condition. A useful entry identifies the official agency or qualified adviser whose answer is relevant. A search snippet, a forum story or another owner's arrangement may help you locate that source, but it is not itself a determination for your circumstances. If an answer depends on information you have not supplied, preserve that limit. “I found a page mentioning a license” is different from “the responsible source confirmed this requirement for the stated activity.” An application submitted is different from an approval received, and an approval may still carry conditions that need attention.

Keep business structure, registrations, tax questions, permissions, contracts and insurance as distinct subjects even when a service offers to handle several together. This book does not select an entity type or calculate a reader's tax obligations. IRS starting-a-business guidance links to federal-tax topics and recordkeeping information; it does not replace state, local or activity-specific sources. [R5] A practical organizer records which question was answered and by whom. If professional advice is needed, bring a precise activity description and the existing source record. Asking a focused question is more useful than asking whether an entire business is “all legal” without defining its operations.

Names and identity deserve their own small index. A project label, a public brand, a legal seller, an account name and a payment descriptor can refer to different things. Record their relationship and the source of each designation. Do not assume that using a working title establishes ownership, availability or approval. Rowan's example label Clear Event Flyer remains fictional; Mara's Index & Keep is a teaching label, not a title-clearance finding. If a real name will be used, investigate the relevant requirements and potential conflicts through appropriate sources. A design exercise and a formal name or rights review are different pieces of work.

The same care applies to material supplied by a customer or found online. An accessible image is not, merely by being accessible, evidence that your intended use is permitted. Record who

supplied an asset, its source, the claimed permission and the actual scope you have established. If the answer is missing, do not fill it with a guess to make the order look complete. The U.S. Copyright Office provides general information about asking permission and locating copyright owners; the resolution of a particular use depends on the actual material and circumstances. [R8] This book supplies no ready-made legal release, contract clause or assurance that a particular use is lawful.

Protect the information that the inquiry creates. A requirements worksheet can point to an official document without reproducing its full identifier, private contents or account details. Use approved private storage and record a locator meaningful to the responsible person. Who may see or change that record is a separate decision from who knows that it exists. A helper can be told that a banking question is unresolved without receiving credentials or identity documents. If a document contains sensitive information that is irrelevant to the planning question, copying it into every working folder adds exposure without adding useful evidence.

For practice, give Rowan three fictional entries: a relevant question identified, a request for clarification sent, and an answer limited to the original activity description. None should become “everything approved.” Mara's exercise might identify a source for a shipping or product question without supplying the answer. The next action is to obtain and evaluate the actual information before making a dependent commitment. The earlier prototype work can remain useful while that inquiry is open. Finishing a research register is not a cosmetic step before launch; it is a way to avoid promising work on assumptions that should have been resolved at their source.

# 06 — Write an offer that a customer and a producer can both use

An offer has two readers. The prospective customer needs to decide whether the result suits the task and what participation or payment would involve. The person producing the result needs to know what work is included, what inputs are required and how completion will be checked. If these readers are working from different interpretations, the disagreement may remain hidden until delivery. Good scope writing reduces that gap. It should make the ordinary route clear and show how an unusual request will be handled, without pretending that a worksheet is a legal agreement or that a short description resolves every applicable consumer obligation.

Begin with the deliverable rather than the ambition. Rowan's revised fictional offer describes a one-page print-ready PDF, created from customer-approved text and usable images, with one revision round on the agreed scope. The revised example price is $150, used for comparison rather than recommended as a market price. Printing, distribution, new copywriting and urgent turnaround are excluded. The completion checks concern the supplied event facts, readability and the agreed file format. The offer does not promise attendance. Mara's pack needs an equally concrete description: which pages and physical items are included, what is shown in a sample, how the pack is delivered and what the buyer must do to use it.

Name dependencies that affect timing. A promise to finish “in two days” is ambiguous if neither person knows when the clock begins, what counts as complete input or what happens during a requested change. The appropriate actual terms will depend on the arrangement; the workbook does not prescribe them. Operationally, you need to know whether required material is present, whether a response is pending and whether a proposed date has actually been agreed. A visible dependency record helps prevent two opposite errors: blaming the customer for an unstated requirement or treating every late input as a reason to make an unsupported new promise.

Explain revision scope in terms that can be discussed. A correction to a supplied date, a change in design direction and an added page may involve different work. If “one revision” means different things to each person, the number alone will not prevent confusion. Record the existing version, the requested change, the impact you can identify and the actual decision. Do not quietly produce extra work and then assume the original agreement included a new charge. Do not silently substitute a smaller deliverable when the request becomes difficult. A proposed change becomes part of the working scope only through the relevant actual agreement and authority.

Price communication needs the same precision. Identify the currency, what the stated amount covers and which unresolved terms require an answer. A quoted amount, a possible discount, an invoice and money received are different records. The business may need advice on payment terms, cancellation, refunds, tax presentation or other obligations; this book does not supply clauses for those decisions. Your organizational record can still be clear about the source of the actual terms and about any question that remains unanswered. BD-07 holds the scope, while BD-08 tracks the proposal and later states without turning an attractive quote into cash.

Try reading the offer as someone who is busy, unfamiliar with your process and uncertain about the next step. Can that person tell whether they are eligible for the service, what they should

prepare, how they will know their request was received and where to ask a question? An attractive visual treatment cannot compensate for an absent input list or hidden limitation. A usability check may reveal a confusing label even before any sale occurs. Record the version and what the reader actually did. One successful task can support improving that route; it does not establish every person's understanding or full accessibility of every format.

A counterexample shows why shorter is not always clearer. “We handle your event marketing for $150” looks simple, but in Rowan's case it promises much more than the intended formatting task. Correcting it requires adding useful distinctions, not merely adding a long disclaimer after the sale. A more bounded description can be shorter than the resulting dispute. Conversely, a page that lists every imaginable exception may bury the decision the customer needs to make. Arrange the information around the task: result, inputs, process, limits, actual terms and help. Test whether readers can find the point relevant to them, rather than counting words as a measure of clarity.

Use BD-07 to draft a working offer and mark any term whose source or authority is unresolved. Then give yourself a change exercise. A fictional customer asks Rowan for a second page after approving the one-page scope. The supported status is a change request. A useful response process identifies the impact on price, timing and deliverables, seeks the required decision and preserves both versions. No extra page or extra payment is established by the request alone. For Mara, a request for a customized insert may become a separate prototype rather than an unplanned addition to every pack. Clear limits make room for useful flexibility because they show what is changing.

# 07 — Test the economics without disguising assumptions as profit

A price is only one input in an operating model. To understand what an order contributes, define the unit being sold, the period being reviewed, the currency and the included costs. Separate variable cash costs tied to the unit from fixed costs in the chosen period and from startup outlays. If you use an allowance to examine the owner's time, identify it as a planning assumption rather than inventing a cash payment. A model becomes misleading when the same expense appears twice, when an important cost is omitted without notice or when an intermediate remainder is labeled profit without the information needed to support that conclusion.

Return to Rowan's original fictional model. A $120 order has $20 of direct cash costs, leaving $100 per order before fixed costs and the owner-time allowance. Two owner hours valued for planning at $25 per hour create a $50 allowance, leaving a separate planning contribution of $50. With $300 of included fixed costs for the same month, three orders supply $300 before that time allowance. Six orders supply $300 after it. These are two different questions. Neither calculation establishes full profitability, tax treatment, adequate cash at every date or the value of the owner's time in a real market.

The revised $150 offer changes only the price in this first comparison. Direct cash cost remains $20, so cash contribution becomes $130. The same two-hour, $25-per-hour allowance leaves $80 planning contribution. Covering $300 of included fixed costs requires three whole orders on the cash-cost model because two contribute only $260. It requires four whole orders after the allowance because three contribute $240 and four contribute $320. The arithmetic is more favorable than before. It does not establish willingness to pay $150, a reliable two-hour delivery time or complete identification of costs. Those assumptions still need their own evidence.

The SBA describes a basic break-even calculation as fixed costs divided by the difference between selling price and variable cost per unit. [R3] Use that relationship only within the conditions of your model. If a whole order is the meaningful unit, a fractional result generally means that another whole order is needed to reach the modeled threshold. A zero or negative contribution does not produce a useful positive order target by this calculation. If prices, costs or product mix vary substantially, a single average can conceal the pattern you need to understand. Label the simplification and consider the actual mix instead of displaying false precision.

Mara's invented organizer sells for $24. Included variable cash costs per sold unit are $5.50 for printing, $1.50 for packaging, $3.00 for seller-paid postage and $1.00 for an assumed transaction charge. The total is $11, leaving $13 before the included fixed setup cost and other exclusions. With $156 of setup cost, twelve sold units contribute exactly $156. At twenty sold units, modeled sales of $480 less $220 of included variable costs and $156 of setup leave $104. These inputs are teaching assumptions, not current vendor quotes. The $104 is a modeled remainder before unlisted costs, not a certified profit figure.

Now examine Mara's time separately. Twenty minutes per assembled sold unit is one-third of an hour. At an assumed value of $18 per hour, the planning allowance is $6 per unit. Subtracting that allowance from $13 leaves $7. Covering the same $156 setup amount then requires twenty-three whole sold units: twenty-two contribute $154, while twenty-three contribute $161. This does not

mean Mara has paid herself $6 on every unit. It shows how a chosen time allowance changes the planning question. A reader who wants a different allowance can change it, but should preserve the original model and identify the assumption being revised.

Stress the model using a small number of meaningful changes. For Rowan's $150 offer, three hours rather than two produces a $75 time allowance and a $55 planning contribution. Six whole orders are then needed to cover $300, since five contribute $275. For Mara, a higher actual shipping cost changes contribution directly unless another part of the model changes. Do not quietly combine a higher price, faster work and lower costs into a “realistic” scenario just because the total improves. Change one input at a time first so that you can see why the result moved, then test combined scenarios with their assumptions explicitly named.

BD-06 is a place for the model and its limits. Record the source or uncertainty of each input, which costs are included, what the calculation answers and what it leaves unresolved. A favorable threshold is a question to test against demand, capacity and cash timing, not permission to launch. A difficult result can still be useful. It may suggest reducing coordination work, changing the deliverable, finding a better process, exploring another price or stopping before a larger commitment. The appropriate choice is not supplied by the spreadsheet alone. It comes from the economics together with the customer's task and the operation you can responsibly support.

# 08 — Follow cash through time, including the money tied up in unfinished work

An annual total or per-unit calculation can look comfortable while a required payment arrives before the supporting receipt. Cash planning therefore needs a sequence, not just a sum. Start with a dated opening balance whose basis you understand. List actual receipts and outflows separately from expected ones, identify when obligations arise and keep uncertainties visible. Do not use a later positive balance to conceal an earlier gap. If a supplier must be paid before a customer pays you, the business needs a way to handle that interval. Whether a particular funding arrangement is appropriate requires its own assessment; this book supplies no borrowing recommendation.

Mara's fictional case illustrates the difference between a sold-unit model and a cash period. She pays for printing and packaging supplies for thirty units before all of them are sold. Printing costs 30 × $5.50 = $165, and packaging supplies cost 30 × $1.50 = $45. Those two outflows total $210. The supplies are available for assembly, but only twenty units are assembled and sold in the supplied period. Postage for those twenty units totals $60, and the assumed transaction charges total $20. Setup costs $156. Actual classification of supplies and inventory is outside this teaching exercise; the cash dates and amounts are the subject here.

With a supplied opening cash amount of $500 and $480 in actual customer receipts, the ending amount for these included events is $500 + $480 - $165 - $45 - $60 - $20 - $156 = $534. Net cash movement is positive $34. Compare that with the $104 remainder in the sold-unit model from Chapter 7. The difference is $70: the printing and packaging supplies for the ten units not sold, at $7 per unit. That $70 has already left cash even though the simplified sold-unit model includes only the twenty sold units' variable costs. Neither figure alone is a complete profit statement or proof of adequate funding for future obligations.

The order of those events matters. Suppose the $210 supply payment and $156 setup payment occur before any customer receipt. The starting $500 falls to $134 after these included outflows. The later $480 cannot be treated as available at the earlier date merely because it appears in the same monthly review. If the starting amount were smaller, the sequence could reveal a gap even if the final balance were positive. Keep the illustration bounded: it omits many possible costs and is not a recommendation for a starting balance. Its purpose is to show why a cash calendar and a unit model answer different questions.

For services, unfinished work can tie up time and coordination even without a shelf of supplies. Rowan might spend time clarifying an inquiry, preparing a proposal or waiting for approved inputs. A quoted fee is not money received. An accepted order is not necessarily ready for production. A deposit, when actually received under the relevant terms, is a cash event; its legal and accounting treatment is a separate question. Recording these states prevents a pipeline from becoming a fictional bank balance. It also makes visible the commitments that may require attention even when no new cash comes in during the review period.

Prepare two linked views rather than forcing all information into one total. The first is the actual cash record for a defined period: unique receipts and payments, dates, currencies and supporting references. The second is the forward-looking list: expected receipts, upcoming outflows, conditions, dates and confidence limits. A promised payment belongs in the second

view until the actual event is established. When it arrives, record the real date and preserve the earlier expectation as history if it helps explain the variance. Do not backdate a receipt to make the earlier plan appear accurate, and do not count the expectation again after matching the receipt.

Pay attention to reversals and shared amounts. A refund should remain linked to the original event without disappearing into an unexplained net total. A single deposit that covers several invoices needs supported allocations; the same deposit cannot be counted once for each invoice. Unallocated received cash is not the same thing as an unpaid balance, and a statement saying payment was issued is not yet evidence that the money was received. The Small Business Operations Forms and DTP's business record planner offer detailed reconciliation sheets for these situations. Refer to the approved master record rather than creating a second ledger whose corrections no longer reach the first.

Use BD-11 to build one short period you can check. Then explain the result in words: which cash events were included, what remained unpaid, which assumptions failed and what must happen next. If the result is difficult, avoid solving it only by moving a hoped-for receipt earlier. Identify an actual option and its consequences, such as a smaller test, a delayed nonessential outlay or a changed operating arrangement subject to proper review. A cash record does not make a decision for you, but it can expose the timing a tidy summary hides. That visibility is especially useful before adding volume to a model that already strains its resources.

# 09 — Treat capacity as a promise you must be able to keep

An order threshold is useful only if the operation can deliver the necessary orders. Capacity is not simply the number of hours on a calendar divided by the fastest time you remember producing an example. Work includes preparation, communication, checks, changes, corrections, recordkeeping and dependencies on other people. Some of it varies with each order; some supports the period as a whole. State which time belongs in your model and which is outside it. If the owner's available hours are shared with other responsibilities, those constraints need to appear before the business accepts commitments that depend on them disappearing.

Rowan's original ten-hour delivery budget and two-hour order estimate allow five whole orders in the simplified model. The original $120 price required six orders to cover the included fixed costs after the owner-time allowance. That combination does not fit. The revised $150 example requires four orders after the allowance and would use eight of the ten hours if two hours really covered the relevant order work. If actual work takes three hours, capacity falls to three whole orders and the planning threshold rises to six. The problem becomes more severe on both sides: each order contributes less after time, and fewer orders fit into the period.

Do not respond to that result by assuming speed will improve on demand. First identify where the time goes. Rowan can record intake, clarification, formatting, checks, revision and delivery as separate steps in a bounded prototype. Some coordination may result from unclear instructions. Some may be necessary judgment that should remain. A task completed under unusually favorable inputs is not a reliable estimate for every order. Preserve observations from slow or incomplete attempts as well as smooth ones. You may discover that the appropriate offer is smaller, that a different input requirement is needed, or that the proposed schedule is unsuitable for the available time.

Distinguish active work time from elapsed time. A two-hour task can span several days if it waits for an approval or a supplier. The business may have enough active hours while still being unable to meet a particular delivery date. Map the dependencies in sequence: input received, usable input confirmed, work started, review requested, response received, final check and delivery. Record which dates are promised, which are proposed and which are actual. This is not an argument for making every customer responsible for every delay. It is a way to see the information and decisions needed for a realistic agreement and an honest update when circumstances change.

Mara has eight hours available for assembly and order preparation in the fictional period, after separately reserved administrative time. At twenty minutes per assembled unit, the simple upper bound is twenty-four units. Twenty units require six hours and forty minutes, leaving one hour and twenty minutes within that stated budget. If two units each require an additional thirty minutes of rework, another hour is used and only twenty minutes remain. The arithmetic does not include every possible interruption or new task. It demonstrates how a seemingly small correction can consume the space between a planned workload and a capacity limit.

Paying for thirty sets of supplies does not create time to assemble thirty units. In Mara's supplied case, printing and packaging supplies for thirty were purchased, but twenty units were assembled and sold during the period. The remaining ten sets are not proof of finished, available stock. A supplier's completion date, the actual condition of materials, the time for inspection and shipping arrangements can each constrain the promise. Record whether an item is ordered,

received, checked, ready to assemble, assembled or dispatched when those distinctions matter. Calling all these states “inventory available” can lead to commitments based on goods that are not yet ready for a customer.

Use a small work-in-progress list rather than relying on memory. For each active job, identify the next step, required input, responsible person, current version and agreed timing. Count distinct jobs separately from attempts or revisions. A returned correction is work on an existing job unless the actual scope says otherwise; it should not inflate the number of completed orders. Avoid filling the schedule to a theoretical maximum before you have observed normal variation. The amount of room to retain is a judgment for the actual operation, not a fixed percentage prescribed here. What matters is that any allowance or buffer is visible and that you know what would consume it.

Try a capacity decision using BD-06 and BD-10. Rowan has four potential orders, but only two have usable approved inputs. One proposed deadline conflicts with a known absence. Which facts belong in the capacity record? All of them. Four inquiries do not establish four ready jobs, and an available slot does not establish permission to start. A useful decision might be to clarify inputs and timing before making a commitment. For Mara, a change from twenty-minute to thirty-minute assembly reduces the simple eight-hour limit from twenty-four to sixteen units. Do not call that result a failure of motivation. It is a changed operating assumption that requires a changed plan.

# 10 — Make the path from inquiry to purchase honest and usable

The route to an order starts before a payment is received and continues after a payment screen appears. A person needs to find a relevant description, understand the offer, recognize the seller, provide appropriate inputs, understand the actual terms and receive the expected result. They also need a way to ask for help or report a problem. A break at any point can create work for the business and frustration for the customer. Before relying on volume, examine the entire route as a sequence of observable steps. A technically successful click is not proof that the person understood the offer or that the promised result can be delivered.

Choose channels by fit and permission, not by the temptation to reach everyone. A public information page, an authorized introduction, an existing relationship and unsolicited bulk messages involve different circumstances. This book does not authorize outreach or provide a mailing list. Record how an interested person reached the offer and the contact route they actually agreed to use. If you plan a marketing activity, check applicable requirements and the platform's current rules for that activity. Your evidence question may be about whether a suitable reader understands the offer; it does not necessarily require acquiring names or running a paid campaign.

Write claims at the level your evidence supports. Rowan can describe an agreed formatting process and show an original fictional sample labeled as such. He cannot present that sample as a real customer success. Mara can show the included pages and explain their intended use. She cannot turn a prototype retrieval exercise into a promise of guaranteed household organization. FTC guidance on advertising emphasizes truthful, nondeceptive claims and the need for evidence to support them. [R6] A claim does not become acceptable merely because similar language appears elsewhere. Review the words, images and placement together, including the impression a hurried reader is likely to take away.

Be especially careful with proof-like material. A testimonial, a review, an illustration, a simulated order and a fictional case have different meanings. Label invented examples where the reader encounters them. Do not use invented people or quotations as if they were real purchasers, and do not imply that a payment occurred because an example includes a price. This book's two cases teach a method; they are not evidence of market demand for Rowan's or Mara's offers. When a real business obtains genuine feedback, it still needs appropriate permission and accurate presentation. The current FTC materials are a starting point for understanding relevant advertising and endorsement responsibilities, not an approval of a specific campaign. [R6]

BD-09 organizes a purchase-journey check. Start with the exact question and environment. A safe early walkthrough may use invented information, no live payments and a clearly labeled simulation. If later testing uses a payment provider's supported test mode, follow its current instructions and the owner's actual authority; do not improvise a live charge to create a screenshot. Examine the offer, seller details, required inputs, confirmation, receipt, delivery and support route as separate steps. Record which were actually observed and which remain proposed. A successful test in one environment does not establish behavior on every device, browser, payment method or customer circumstance.

Test an ordinary failure route as well as an ordinary success route. What happens if an input is missing, an order cannot be fulfilled, a link is wrong or a person sends a question through the intended contact route? The appropriate response and actual terms need to be established for

the business. Your test should not create a real unwanted order or expose private information merely to demonstrate an error. You can rehearse a fictional failure, inspect a draft response and identify what would require further authorized verification. Keep “we discussed what should happen” separate from “we observed the actual system perform the step.”

Make the content usable across the formats you actually offer. A printed page needs readable text and room for necessary entries. A digital file needs a usable route to the information and an accurate description of its format. A nonfillable PDF should not be sold or described as an interactive form. A successful visual inspection does not establish screen-reader acceptance. State limitations accurately and respond to observed barriers rather than hiding them behind a broad claim of accessibility. The method is the same as elsewhere in the book: define a claim, identify its evidence, record its limits and choose a useful next check.

For practice, Rowan receives three fictional proposal responses: one accepted but unpaid, one still awaiting a reply and one declined. Each proposal quotes $150. The record contains $450 of quoted possibilities and one accepted unpaid amount of $150, but no received cash. There is no reason to convert the decline into a future sale. A suitable next action could be an agreed clarification for the accepted proposal, while capacity remains conditional on usable inputs and actual terms. Mara's sample page might attract interest without any purchase. Preserve that result as interest. Honest state tracking improves both planning and the credibility of what you tell the next reader.

# 11 — Deliver the defined result and make corrections traceable

Delivery begins with a known version of the scope. Before starting work, confirm the relevant inputs, required permissions, current instructions and completion checks. This does not mean turning a small order into a large bureaucracy. It means retaining enough information to answer a later question: what were we trying to deliver, what did we use and what did we actually check? A short record can do that well. An undocumented memory becomes harder to rely on when several similar jobs overlap, a person is absent or a revision changes only one of several copies.

Use checks that relate to the promised result. For Rowan's flyer, the agreed event date, location, supplied contact details, readable text and file format are different from a claim about attendance. A spellcheck cannot establish that the customer approved the location. A file opening on the producer's machine does not establish that the intended recipient can access it through the delivery route. Choose checks according to the actual scope and record the observed result. If something cannot be checked with the available information, keep it unresolved. Do not substitute confidence in your effort for evidence about the deliverable.

For Mara's pack, inspection can distinguish content, print and assembly questions. Are the correct pages present? Does the print match the approved version? Are any marks or cuts interfering with the writing area? Does the stated package contain the specified items? A prototype inspection can reveal a defect without determining the quality of an entire later production run. If a limited sample is checked, record the sample and its limits. A few favorable examples do not justify an unqualified statement that every unit is defect-free. Decide how the actual process will identify, segregate and correct a problem without mixing an earlier version into current orders.

Keep a small issue record tied to the job and version. Describe the observed problem, its source, the affected item, the chosen correction and the result of the recheck. A correction should not erase the earlier observation. If a date was changed in one file but not another, record which copy is current and which recipients or downstream steps may be affected. A note saying “fixed” is less useful than a record that identifies what was corrected and how the new version was checked. This is particularly important when a change request arrives after someone has already relied on a previous copy.

A separate fictional operating simulation now gives Rowan an order called R-21. This later supplied scenario is for learning delivery and records; it does not change the earlier exploratory case's zero observed purchases. R-21 calls for one PDF under scope version SC-21. Rowan checks the agreed facts and sends file D-21 through the specified route. At that moment, the supplied evidence establishes sending, not necessarily access or acceptance. If a later response confirms the recipient opened the file, record access. If the response also gives the relevant acceptance decision, record that separately. Do not make the recipient's silence say more than it does.

Change management is most valuable when the request seems small. A request for a second page can affect layout, time, price, review and the delivery description. A request to replace an image may raise a new permission question. A request to change a date may require correcting copies already sent. BD-10 connects the issue to the scope and the actual decision. Preserve what was requested, what was agreed and what was delivered. Do not assume that an internal

revision note is the customer's agreement, or that an agreed change has been completed merely because the decision was documented.

An error response should be clear enough to support action. Identify the issue you can substantiate, the current affected version and the next step under the actual arrangement. Avoid inventing certainty about a cause you have not established. A late input, a production mistake and a failed delivery route can require different responses even if the customer experiences them all as delay. Appropriate legal terms and customer obligations remain separate questions. Operationally, the business needs a way to keep the person informed through an approved route, prevent further use of a wrong version where appropriate, and record whether the intended correction reached its destination.

Practice a handoff before calling the job closed. Another authorized person should be able to find the current scope, deliverable, checks performed, delivery record and remaining issue without guessing. That person does not need unnecessary private customer details or credentials in the worksheet. A concise private locator and a clear authority boundary may be enough. BD-10 and the Operations delivery sheet can serve different levels of detail; choose one master rather than maintaining competing lists. Completion is a supported state for the agreed work, not a declaration that no future question can arise. A traceable record makes a later question manageable without rewriting the past.

# 12 — Reconcile invoices, payments and supporting records without counting twice

A business record system should help you identify events, connect their evidence and explain differences. An invoice, a receipt, a bank entry and a customer message may all relate to the same event; they are not four separate payments merely because there are four documents. The IRS explains that business records and supporting documents are needed to substantiate entries and help monitor a business. [R7] This chapter develops an organizational method for those records. It does not determine tax classification, accounting treatment, retention periods or required filings. Those questions need the appropriate current sources and professional judgment for the actual business.

Give each meaningful event or record a stable reference. Link the invoice to the relevant job and scope. Link a received payment to evidence of that receipt, and record its actual date and currency. When a payment covers more than one invoice, retain the source of the allocation. If the allocation is unknown, do not distribute the money simply to make every balance look tidy. The total assigned to invoices should not exceed the amount of the actual receipt. Unallocated cash can be recorded as such while the question is resolved. An unresolved allocation is more honest than two apparently complete ledgers that count the same money differently.

The later fictional Rowan simulation supplies two invoices, R-21 and R-22, each for $150. R-21 has two actual receipts: $100 and $50, for $150 total. The supplied facts then include an agreed $20 credit and an actual $20 refund linked to that credit. The net invoice amount is $130, and the matched receipts less the refund also total $130. Under these stated teaching facts, no amount remains unmatched on R-21. This is not a rule that every refund reduces an invoice in the same way; the exercise supplies the credit specifically so that the document and cash relationship can be examined.

R-22 has a $150 invoice and a supported $60 receipt, leaving $90 unmatched in this bounded comparison. Across the two invoices, the original amounts total $300. After the $20 credit, the net amounts total $280. Actual customer receipts total $210, and the $20 refund leaves $190 net customer cash. The $90 difference remains associated with R-22: $280 minus $190 equals $90. No late-payment conclusion follows without the actual due-date terms and relevant timing. No collection message is sent by this exercise. Its purpose is to keep the invoice, credit, receipt and refund evidence aligned without treating a proposal or expectation as cash.

Now review the separate cash period for the same supplied simulation. Opening recorded cash is $500. Receipts are the $100, $50 and $60 customer payments, totaling $210. Outflows are two distinct job-related payments of $20 each, $300 of included fixed costs, a separate $100 startup payment and the $20 customer refund. Ending recorded cash is $500 + $210 - $40 - $300 - $100 - $20 = $250. Net cash movement is negative $250. The pending $90 is not added, and a planning allowance for the owner's time is not invented as a cash outflow. The calculation covers only the listed events.

Correct a missing document without inventing its contents. Suppose one of the $20 payments has a supported payment record but the supplier receipt is still requested. You can record the actual payment and the missing supporting document as separate facts. That does not authorize a tax conclusion or justify writing a fictional receipt. Use an exception reference, a

next action and the responsible person. If a later document clarifies the purpose or amount, preserve the correction's source and date and update the approved master. The earlier incomplete state remains part of the explanation rather than something to conceal.

Royalty records require the actual agreement's basis. A fictional statement might specify 100 units, 10 allowed returns, a $2 rate on the remaining 90 units and a supported $20 downward adjustment. Under those supplied terms, the amount is $180 - $20 = $160. A matched $100 receipt leaves $60 unresolved in that statement comparison. Another agreement might use a percentage, a different basis or different treatment of returns, so this calculation cannot be transferred without reading the actual terms. Keep units, rates, adjustments and receipts distinct. DTP's royalty planner supplies fuller matching prompts; the book does not provide a royalty agreement or a universal rate.

At the end of a review, ask whether another reader can reproduce the subtotal from its included events. State the period, currency, opening basis, unique receipts, outflows, exclusions and unresolved items. Mark the destination and status of the handoff to the actual bookkeeping record: prepared, sent, acknowledged or incorporated, according to the evidence. A worksheet can be arithmetically correct while its master update is still pending. Closing that distinction is more useful than adding another polished spreadsheet. The record supports decisions when it remains connected to its sources and when corrections reach the place people will actually use next.

# 13 — Turn repeated work into a process that can survive a handoff

A process becomes valuable when it helps someone perform an actual task, notice a problem and finish with a supported result. It does not need to document every motion or turn every judgment into a rigid rule. Start with work that repeats, matters to the customer or creates confusion when the usual person is unavailable. The first process page might cover intake, checking a deliverable, correcting a record or preparing an order. It should identify the trigger, expected result, required inputs, steps, checks and exception route. A document called "standard procedure" is not useful merely because it has a formal title and a long revision history.

Write for a capable person who does not know your private shorthand. "Check the file" leaves several questions open: which file, against which facts, using which version, and what result means the check is complete? A more useful instruction identifies the current scope reference, the relevant supplied information and the checks needed for the deliverable. It also tells the reader where to stop if a required input is missing. You do not need to embed private records or credentials in the process page. An approved locator and a clear route to the responsible person can make the instruction usable without exposing more information than the task requires.

Rowan's intake process might begin with a permitted inquiry route and end with an input review that identifies whether a proposed job is ready for a scope decision. It does not end with "customer confirmed" if the person has only asked a question. The page can identify where the latest offer is stored, which inputs are needed, what permission questions must be resolved and who may agree to a change. A substitute can prepare the information while leaving a pricing or legal decision to the authorized person. Keeping these boundaries visible prevents a helpful handoff from becoming an unintended commitment.

Mara's assembly process needs different checks. The process version should identify the current page set, the relevant supply references, the items included in a pack and how a defect is recorded. An out-of-date insert should not reenter an order just because it is physically close to the current material. If the process depends on a printer, a shipping service or a supplier response, record that dependency without pretending to control it. The producer can verify which version was requested and what was received. That evidence is more useful than a general instruction to "make sure the supplier does it right."

Separate coverage, access and decision authority. A person may agree to monitor an inbox but not to accept orders, issue refunds or change a delivery promise. They may understand the process while lacking access to a required record. A successful conversation about coverage does not establish that every technical route works. Record what the substitute has actually agreed to do, for what period, with which permitted actions and with what exception route. If no backup person has agreed, write that plainly. Listing a familiar name in a blank field does not create an agreement or solve the capacity problem.

A tabletop exercise can reveal unclear instructions without performing real transactions. Use an invented inquiry or record, identify the process version and ask the substitute to explain the next step. Stop at the first point requiring a guess. Does the missing information belong in the instruction, in a source record or in a decision only the owner may make? Revise accordingly and preserve the observation. Do not call the discussion an access or recovery test. If an actual

access check is later appropriate, define its authority, environment, expected evidence and limits separately. The DTP continuity guide develops these distinctions in more detail and provides additional forms.

Return from coverage with a small reconciliation, not just a statement that everything is fine. Count distinct incoming items, completed actions, unresolved requests and records awaiting a decision. Explain differences rather than forcing totals to match. Identify what was sent, which version was used and whether the intended recipient acknowledged or incorporated the handoff. A packet prepared for the returning owner is not yet a packet received. A note about a proposed process improvement is not a new approved instruction. The difference matters when someone later asks why a particular action was taken or whether a correction reached the working copy.

Try documenting only one process with BD-10 and BD-12, linking to the fuller continuity sheet if needed. Give it a trigger and an outcome specific enough to rehearse. In Rowan's example, the outcome could be “a scope decision packet with all missing inputs identified,” not “a successful customer.” In Mara's example, it could be “a checked pack with current-version evidence and any defect recorded,” not “a perfect delivery.” A small process that another person can follow is more useful than a large manual nobody has used. Improve it when an actual observation shows where it fails, and keep the current version easy to distinguish from its history.

# 14 — Plan for interruptions, information risk and the limits of your control

Risk planning begins with the commitments the business has made and the dependencies needed to keep them. A risk list that names every possible disaster can become too broad to guide action. Start with a few plausible interruptions to the work you actually do: an unavailable person, an inaccessible record, a failed device, a missing input, an unreliable supplier or an error discovered after delivery. Describe what could be affected, what evidence would reveal the problem and what the business can responsibly do next. Do not assign impressive-looking probabilities when you lack a basis for them. A clearly described dependency can be useful even when its likelihood is uncertain.

Distinguish prevention, detection, response and recovery. A checked current version may reduce the chance of sending the wrong file. A final comparison may detect an error before sending. A correction process addresses an error already found. A recovery plan describes how the business would restore usable work or continue under an interruption. These functions overlap, but none automatically proves the others. Owning a backup copy does not establish that it can be restored, and knowing how to apologize does not establish that affected records can be located. Write the specific question before deciding what a test result would demonstrate.

Handle personal and business information according to the task and actual obligations. Collecting less unnecessary data can simplify the operation, but it does not by itself settle every privacy responsibility. Decide what the business needs, why it needs it, where it will be kept, who may access it and what happens when the purpose ends. Do not place credentials, full account numbers or identity documents in general worksheets or public examples. A record index can identify an approved location without reproducing the record. NIST's small-business cybersecurity guidance provides starting points for topics such as account security, software updates and protecting and testing backups; implementation must fit the actual systems and authority. [R9]

For a small file-based operation, identify the difference between synchronization and an independent recovery capability. If a mistaken edit or deletion reaches every synchronized copy, merely seeing the same folder on two devices may not answer the recovery question. This book does not prescribe a universal backup architecture. It asks you to record what the existing arrangement actually preserves, how access is controlled and how restoration would be checked safely. An authorized test using owned sample files in an isolated destination can establish a bounded result. It should not overwrite active customer records or be described as full disaster recovery unless its scope actually supports that claim.

Rowan's fictional interruption is a period of unavailability while one job awaits approved input. A suitable continuity record identifies the current scope, the missing input, the agreed contact route and the substitute's limited authority. The substitute might be authorized to acknowledge a message and preserve it for review, while not being authorized to approve a new deadline. That distinction protects the customer from an unsupported promise and the helper from an unclear responsibility. If the required record cannot be reached, the right result is an access gap and a next action, not an invented confirmation that the job is ready to proceed.

Mara's interruption involves a supply delivery that does not match the expected page version. The response starts by identifying the affected material and preventing confusion with the current version while the issue is investigated. The actual supplier arrangement determines the available remedies and obligations; a worksheet does not create them. Operationally, Mara needs a clear count, version references, the source of the discrepancy and a record of communications through the appropriate route. A replacement requested is not a replacement received. A replacement received is not a replacement checked. Each state answers a different question about what can safely be promised next.

Consider the cost of a dependency before increasing volume. If every order requires one person's undocumented knowledge, growth increases exposure to that bottleneck. If a supplier's minimum order ties up cash beyond the current test's limit, a favorable per-unit price may still be a poor fit. If an offer requires handling information the business cannot appropriately protect, the scope may need to change. Insurance, contracts, technical controls and professional advice can be relevant to real situations, but this book does not select them for the reader or claim that any single measure removes the risk. The model should show what remains unresolved after a proposed measure is added.

Use a compact risk review: dependency, plausible interruption, affected commitment, current prevention or detection, response owner, recovery question and next review trigger. Connect important unresolved items to the launch or delivery decision rather than leaving them in a separate file nobody consults. Some issues justify pausing a dependent activity; others justify a smaller scope or a clearer disclosure while additional work proceeds. The choice should be proportionate to the actual consequences and obligations. A useful business is not one that declares itself free of risk. It is one that makes promises with a realistic understanding of what supports them and responds honestly when that support changes.

# 15 — Review the evidence and choose to continue, change, pause or stop

A review should end with a decision or a clearly assigned question, not merely an updated collection of numbers. Choose the period and the version of the model under review. Bring together customer observations, quality findings, time use, cash events, unresolved requirements and the effect on the people doing the work. Keep the categories distinct. A week of encouraging comments does not cancel an inability to deliver the scope. A positive cash balance does not prove demand. A smooth prototype does not settle actual permissions. The purpose is to see how the parts fit, including where they do not, before committing to more of the same.

Use measures that answer the current decision. For an early intake test, independent completion of specific steps may matter more than page views. For an operating period, actual jobs delivered, corrections, time used, matched receipts and unfinished work may be relevant. Record the denominator and definitions when using a rate. Two successful attempts out of three attempts are not necessarily two successful people out of three people. A single person's repeated use may teach you about improvement or repeated error, but it should not be counted as a larger independent sample. The review needs enough context that someone else can interpret what the measure means.

Give negative and ambiguous findings a stable place. A declined proposal may reveal poor fit, unclear timing, a price concern or no explanation at all. Do not invent the reason. A missing response remains missing unless further evidence arrives. A customer correction can reveal a process problem even when the customer is satisfied afterward. A useful review preserves these facts because they identify where to improve. If the records include only wins, the next version of the model will be built from a distorted sample of the work. Honest uncertainty is not an unfinished form to be cleaned up; it is information the next decision needs.

For Rowan, the original $120 model conflicts with the stated time capacity after the owner-time allowance. The $150 model fits the simplified two-hour assumption better, but the three-hour sensitivity case does not. The next useful question is therefore partly operational: what work really fits in the chosen scope, and how long does it take under relevant conditions? The earlier fictional expressions of interest do not answer willingness to pay the revised price. A sensible teaching conclusion is to revise the input and scope process, observe a bounded prototype and keep the price question separate. It is not necessary to declare the idea either a triumph or a permanent failure.

For Mara, the sold-unit model and actual cash-period illustration reveal a different constraint. Twenty sold units leave a modeled $104 before exclusions, while the included cash movement is only $34 because supplies for ten additional units have already been paid for. The assembly example also shows how rework can consume the remaining time. The next decision might concern a smaller supply commitment, a clearer production check or a different pack design. The relevant actual vendor terms and demand would need investigation. A larger batch is not automatically an improvement merely because one quoted unit cost decreases. It changes cash, storage, work and exposure to a version error.

Write four options before choosing one. Continue means repeat a defined activity under conditions the current evidence supports. Change means identify a specific assumption or process to revise and the result you expect to learn from it. Pause means stop a dependent activity while a stated question is resolved, with an owner and a review trigger. Stop means end a defined line of work or experiment and preserve enough reasoning to avoid repeating it unconsciously. These options can coexist at different levels. You can stop an ineffective offer variant, continue serving an existing bounded commitment and pause a new feature whose requirements are unresolved.

Avoid treating past effort as a reason that future effort must continue unchanged. Time already spent cannot be recovered by an inaccurate forecast. It can still produce reusable learning, a tested instruction, an owned asset or a better understanding of a customer task. Record what can be reused and what depends on the discarded assumption. A paused printed pack might leave a useful retrieval exercise. A discontinued service package might leave a clear intake checklist. Do not claim that every sunk cost becomes an asset; some work will simply have been a cost of investigation. Recognizing that honestly can protect the next decision from becoming an attempt to justify the previous one.

BD-12 closes the loop by linking the decision to its evidence, time or cost limit, responsible person and next review point. Keep the older model alongside the new one, labeled so that nobody follows the wrong version. If the decision affects current customers, suppliers or helpers, identify the actual commitments and the appropriate communication or professional questions before acting. A review record does not cancel an obligation. The measure of a useful review is whether it changes subsequent behavior in a traceable way: a clearer promise, a smaller experiment, a corrected record, a more reliable process or a decision to leave an unsuitable idea behind.

# 16 — Assemble one decision packet and take the next useful step

The end of this book should leave you with a coherent small packet, not a demand to complete every blank in every available workbook. Begin with the customer task and current model. Add the evidence needed for the next decision, the actual scope, the relevant economics and time model, the applicable requirements record and the unresolved items. If you are already operating, include current delivery and cash records or locators to their approved masters. Use the twelve BD forms where they help; refer to the more detailed Operations, business-record or continuity forms only when the added detail answers a real question. A duplicate record is not progress if nobody knows which copy to update.

The packet should tell a chronological story without turning expectations into events. Here is the current model; here is what we observed; here is the interpretation and its limits; here is the change we made; here is what remains uncertain; here is the next bounded action. Dates, versions and source references make that story reviewable. They also protect useful work from being forgotten when a new idea seems more exciting. You do not need to defend an earlier assumption once better information arrives. You do need to preserve enough of the earlier reasoning that the change can be understood instead of appearing as a silent rewrite of the result.

Try the following capstone as a private exercise. Rowan has four expressions of interest, two independent prototype completions and zero purchases in the original exploratory scenario. What paid demand has been observed? The answer is zero. What can the other facts support? They can support describing interest and task completion under the supplied conditions and choosing a more precise next investigation. They cannot support six customers, a conversion forecast or a claim that the revised $150 price is validated. A good decision packet preserves the different measures and identifies the next question without discarding the useful observations.

Next, use Rowan's $150 price, $20 included cash cost, two owner hours valued at $25 per hour, $300 included fixed cost and ten available delivery hours. Cash contribution is $130, and planning contribution after the time allowance is $80. Three whole orders cover the included fixed cost before the allowance; four cover it after the allowance. Five two-hour orders fit the simplified capacity. Change only delivery time to three hours. Planning contribution becomes $55, the threshold becomes six whole orders and capacity becomes three whole orders. The answer is not “raise the forecast.” It is that this changed model does not fit, and the relevant scope, time or economics question needs attention.

Now use Mara's $24 price and $11 included variable cash cost per sold unit. The contribution before setup and exclusions is $13. Twelve sold units cover the $156 setup cost in that model. Adding a $6 owner-time allowance leaves $7, so twenty-three whole sold units are needed to cover the same setup amount. At twenty units, the modeled remainder before time and other exclusions is $104. In the supplied cash period, $210 of printing and packaging supplies were bought for thirty units, and the other stated outflows and receipts leave net cash movement of $34. The $70 difference represents the paid printing and packaging supplies for ten units not sold in the period. No profit or tax conclusion follows from either limited figure alone.

Reconcile the later Rowan operating simulation. Two $150 invoices total $300. The supplied $20 credit reduces the net amount to $280. Receipts total $210, and the actual $20 refund leaves $190 net customer cash. The $90 unmatched amount belongs to R-22. Using the separate $500 opening cash amount, the $210 receipts and the listed $40 job payments, $300 fixed-cost payment, $100 startup payment and $20 refund gives ending cash of $250. The pending $90 does not belong in that cash total. A future receipt would be recorded as a new actual event in its real period, not backdated to improve this review.

Finally, test the state language. A revised file has been prepared but not sent: its status is prepared. A request has been received but the scope has not been agreed: it remains an inquiry or proposal according to the record. A substitute has discussed a process but has not tested access: the discussion does not establish access. A supplier has promised a replacement that has not arrived: the replacement remains expected. These distinctions are small enough to fit on a page and important enough to affect a real commitment. When a packet overstates a result, correct the wording before deciding what the business can rely on next.

The fictional cases end with useful choices rather than guaranteed success. Rowan has a narrower description of the service, a visible capacity problem to investigate and a record system that can distinguish delivery from payment. Mara has a clearer relationship among supplies, sold units, cash and assembly time, along with a reason to examine batch size and version checks. Neither has been transformed into evidence that a real market will reward the idea. What has improved is the quality of the next decision. That is a result you can pursue without pretending to know the future or turning a modest experiment into a public success story.

Choose one next action that changes something you can actually know or do. State its owner, scope, resource limit, source of authority and review trigger. Leave unrelated ambitions outside that action long enough to finish it coherently. Then return to the model with the actual result. A useful business is built through this connection between a promise and the work that supports it: understanding a task, making a clear offer, delivering within known limits, keeping honest records and changing course when the evidence warrants it. The forms that follow are places to hold that work. The value comes from the decisions and care you bring back to them.

# Worksheet appendix

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

Use the form that serves your next decision. The chapter examples provide context; a completed form records your evidence and choices, not a guaranteed result.

# BD-01 — Find a problem worth understanding

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Customer, task and recent problem

### Observed behavior, source/date and note permissions

### Your interpretation and existing alternative

### Interest, task completion and paid demand, kept separate

### Next bounded experiment, success/stop conditions

### Owner, review date and evidence that would change the decision

# BD-02 — Write a model you can revise

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

**Model version/date and intended customer**

**Problem, proposed offer and promised result**

**Delivery method, inputs and dependencies**

**How customers could find the offer; permission limits**

**Cost/revenue assumptions and weakest evidence**

**Next check, owner and decision history**

# BD-03 — Compare alternatives fairly

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Customer task and alternatives, including doing nothing

### Sources, dates, scope and what was actually observed

### Comparable features, prices and exclusions if known

### Interpretations and missing information

### Reason to keep the current alternative

### Claim to test, fair evidence and next review

# BD-04 — Find the requirements for your actual activity

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Actual activity, locations and operating circumstances

### Separate agency/adviser question for each requirement

### Official source, date checked and scope of answer

### Application/approval status and evidence reference

### Conditions, unresolved questions and next check

### Responsible person and real source for any deadline

# BD-05 — Keep business identity consistent

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

**Project/brand label and legal-seller question**

**Document references and source of each name/status**

**Mismatches, corrections and version history**

**Institution requirements and actual response reference**

**Application, approval and operational availability states**

**Protected record locator and next action; no secrets**

# BD-06 — Test the economics and the time

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### One order, currency, period and model version

### Price and included per-order cash costs

### Owner-time hours/rate, if used; keep allowance separate

### Fixed/startup costs, exclusions and evidence sources

### Contribution, whole-order threshold and delivery capacity

### Changed assumption, revised result and next check

# BD-07 — Describe the offer and its limits

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Offer version, customer task and defined deliverable

### Included work, exclusions and required customer inputs

### Timing assumptions, dependencies and revision scope

### Price/payment/refund questions for actual terms review

### Factual acceptance checks and rights/permission gaps

### Requested change, actual agreement and next step

# BD-08 — Follow a proposal without inventing revenue

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

Inquiry/proposal ID and permitted contact route

Offer version, quoted amount and date

Actual status and supporting response reference

Payment and delivery states, recorded separately

Next agreed action, owner and capacity dependency

Decline/change history and review date

# BD-09 — Test the purchase journey before relying on it

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Offer/version, test environment and exact test scope

### Seller/terms/permissions questions and source references

### Receipt and delivery tests: actual results/evidence

### Failure, refund, privacy and recovery checks or gaps

### Unresolved blockers, responsible person and retest

### Owner decision and limits; simulation is not a sale

# BD-10 — Deliver a defined result and handle changes

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

Order/deliverable version and agreed scope reference

Input completeness and rights/permission checks

Quality checks actually performed and findings

Issue, change request and rework record

Delivery/access evidence; acceptance kept separate

Correction or continuity handoff and next check

# BD-11 — Review cash timing and unfinished work

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

### Review period, currency and opening-balance basis

### Dated cash received and supporting references

### Dated outflows/refunds and supporting references

### Unpaid, upcoming and other funding items kept separate

### Reconciliation, exclusions and remaining uncertainty

### Decision, responsible person and next review

# BD-12 — Decide what to improve, pause or repeat

Use brief notes and aliases. Keep completed records private. Label any continuation with the form code, question and date. The same forms are included in the book and its worksheet companion.

Model/version and evidence from the latest period

Customer, quality, time and cash findings

Continue/revise/pause/stop options and reasons

Next test, time/cost limit and stopping condition

Continuity dependency and authorized record reference

Decision, owner, review point and evidence still needed

# References and editorial notes


## R1 — U.S. Small Business Administration — Plan your business: market research and competitive analysis

https://www.sba.gov/counseling/plan-your-business/#market-research

Supports separating market research and competitive analysis and identifying questions about demand, market size, location, saturation and pricing. No DTP case is actual market evidence.

## R2 — U.S. Small Business Administration — Plan your business: write your business plan

https://www.sba.gov/counseling/plan-your-business/#business-plan

Describes a business plan as a way to think through key elements and guide starting and managing a business. A plan is not a forecast of guaranteed outcomes.

## R3 — U.S. Small Business Administration — Plan your business: break-even point

https://www.sba.gov/counseling/plan-your-business/#breakeven-point

Supports the elementary fixed-cost divided by price-minus-variable-cost relationship. The book separately states model assumptions, exclusions, whole-order rounding and positive-contribution limits.

## R4 — U.S. Small Business Administration — Launch your business: licenses and permits

https://www.sba.gov/counseling/launch-your-business/#licenses-permits

Requirements and fees vary with business activities, location and government rules. The source is a starting point, not a reader-specific permission or approval.

## R5 — Internal Revenue Service — Starting a business

https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/starting-a-business

Links to basic federal-tax topics including business structure, employer identification numbers, business taxes and recordkeeping. No tax classification or universal filing list is supplied here.

## R6 — Federal Trade Commission — Truth in Advertising

https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/topics/truth-advertising

Advertising must be truthful and not misleading, with appropriate substantiation. DTP examples are labeled fiction and are not testimonials, endorsements or real market results.

## R7 — Internal Revenue Service — Recordkeeping

https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/recordkeeping

Supports keeping records and supporting documents to monitor business activity and substantiate entries. This book does not prescribe tax treatment, deductions or retention periods.

## R8 — U.S. Copyright Office — Can I Use Someone Else's Work? Can Someone Else Use Mine?

https://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq-fairuse.html

Provides information about asking permission and identifying copyright ownership. This book makes no legal determination about a particular asset or use.

## R9 — National Institute of Standards and Technology — Cybersecurity Basics

https://www.nist.gov/itl/smallbusinesscyber/cybersecurity-basics

Small-business guidance includes account protection, software updates and measures to protect and test backups. No complete security or recovery certification is claimed.

Title and source precedence: Building a Useful Business is the owner-requested expanded book working title. Build a Useful Business — Validation, Setup & Launch Workbook, edition 0.2, remains an earlier separate working guide. The title variation is recorded, not a silent retitling or replacement of that guide.

All twelve BD-01 through BD-12 form titles and prompt sets are retained exactly from the 0.2 guide. The narrative and explained exercises expand those questions. Detailed intake, invoice, cost, royalty and handoff methods also consolidate related DTP Small Business Operations Forms 0.1, Small Business Expense, Mileage & Royalty Planner 0.3 and Business Continuity & Key Records Mini Binder 0.3 material.

Rowan's original $120 model and the revised $150 sensitivity example extend the existing guide. Mara is a new fictional product-case wrapper that expands the Operations workbook's fixed/variable/time example with a thirty-unit supply purchase, twenty-unit cash period, capacity and version-control decisions. No actual customer or commercial outcome is represented.

Related working guides: https://davidtompublishing.com/build-a-useful-business/ ; https://davidtompublishing.com/small-business-operations-forms/ ; https://davidtompublishing.com/business-working-guide-downloads/ ; https://davidtompublishing.com/continuity-working-guide-downloads/ . Use the additional forms only when they provide useful detail, and keep a clear approved master for each record.

Primary references checked November 3, 2026 after the coherent draft was completed. The source ledger preserves the exact narrow claims, retrieved excerpts, redirects and unsuccessful source candidates. Original examples and organizing methods are teaching material, not empirical studies or agency endorsements.

These forms are organizational records, not official filings, legal agreements or invoices. Use private references instead of credentials, full account numbers, government identifiers, confidential customer files or unnecessary personal details. A worksheet records a decision or question; it does not authorize an action or change an agreement.

Print-and-write PDFs are not fillable and are untagged. Editable Word is supplied. Native Word/font behavior, physical printing, reader usability and assistive-technology acceptance remain untested unless separately recorded. Working-edition content and source checks do not certify broader demand, commercial, legal, accounting, tax or technical acceptance.