
How to Make Your First \$1000 with a CNC Machine

A practical guide to turning your CNC machine into a money-making tool, starting with your first \$1000.

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Over half of the people that own a Shapeoko make money with it. That's a statistic that we love because it represents what attracted us to CNC machines in the first place- the idea that you can own a machine that can turn your garage into a small factory.

A lot of people buy a small CNC machine because they look like fun, but they don't have any plans to sell anything. They quickly learn that a CNC machine is much more productive than they are. If they can make one of something, they can make one hundred. If they can keep feeding material into a CNC machine, it will keep cranking out parts.

Why did we call this guide "How to make your first \$1000"? We don't want to set expectations so high that you never take the first step. It's relatively easy to achieve a goal of making \$1000 and, like that CNC machine cranking out parts, if you can do \$1,000, you can do \$10,000 or more.

The guide that follows is what we've learned running Carbide 3D since 2013 and watching countless users start their entrepreneurial journey. If you're not already making money with your CNC machine then we hope this guide will inspire you to get started.

What do you want out of your business?

The question, "What are you looking for?" seems trite when you first read it. Obviously, you want to make money. The real root of the question is, "Do you want to have a business, or do you want other people to pay for your hobby?"

Having a real business means that you'll spend more time on marketing and sales and less time on making things. You'll be focused on growth, even if that means you have to spend time on things you don't enjoy.

Having other people pay for your hobby means that you'll use profits from your sales to pay for all the tools and products you want to buy anyway. The goal in this scenario is to spend the maximum amount of time in the shop doing the activities you enjoy, not in front of the computer doing the things you don't like doing.

That doesn't mean that a "hobby business" is a break-even scenario. You can still make significant money, whether that means "pizza money," "a car payment," "a mortgage payment," or more. Calling it a "hobby business" is about the frame of mind; you're in it for the experience at the expense of maximum growth.

Neither option is good or bad, and neither should be looked down upon. Spend some time thinking about your answer and keep it in mind as you read on. Know that if you choose the "hobby" option, then you can skip some of the tasks below that don't appeal to you- you're here to have fun and make a little money.

What to Sell, Product vs. Services

There are a few ways to make money with your CNC machine:

- Become a job shop
- Manufacture products for other people
- Sell your own products

We'll describe each in more detail, but the biggest takeaway is that you don't have to pick one and stay with it forever. You can get started and then move from one business type to another as opportunity or need arises.

Job Shops

A "Job Shop" is a machine shop that makes parts for other people. A job shop is set up to make one-off parts quickly, but they typically don't do large production runs of parts. The cost of getting a part made at a job shop is related more to the labor of getting ready to make the part, CNC programming, fixtures, sourcing material, and actual machining time than the material itself.

When you boil the whole business down, you're getting paid by the hour, so an hour in the shop ends up netting you \$XX after you subtract the material and tooling costs. Hopefully, the value of "XX" is a good number for you.

The benefits of a job shop business are:

- If you estimate time correctly, you should have a predictable income.
- You get to work on new products all the time.
- You don't have to worry about customer service for many people; you only need to take care of a few customers really well.
- If you like problem-solving, you get to do that without the more repetitive parts of a production business.

The downsides are:

- Since you'll probably have fewer customers, you're more dependent on each individual customer.
- You're directly trading time for money, which may not be what you're looking for.
- You need to be good at estimating the time required for a job or that the hourly profit drops quickly.

If this type of business appeals to you, the most significant barrier to starting will be finding customers. Here's where we'd begin:

- Let people know that you have a machine and that you're open for business.
- Look in forums for machine manufacturers. There are frequently people who don't own a machine asking if anyone can cut apart for them.
- Follow people on Instagram with a similar machine and read the comments. Lots of comments get posted asking for someone to make a part for them.
- Network, network, network. Talk to everyone you know who works in any product development and see if they need your services. If you do a job for anyone, ask if they know anyone else that might need your services.
- For every job you do, ask for permission to post pictures of the parts on Instagram and Facebook.

Manufacturing Products for Other People

One of the surprising business options that we've heard from a customer is the idea of becoming a manufacturer for other people. There are plenty of people who have businesses selling products, and you might be able to make those products for them cheaper than their current sources.

If *you* can make their products, why wouldn't *they* make their own products? There are a lot of reasons:

- Demand makes it difficult for them to keep up.
- They may enjoy the design / sales / marketing parts of their business more than the manufacturing part.
- You might be better at manufacturing than they are.

We make many parts for our CNC machines in-house, but we keep an outside machine shop ready to jump in if we run into any internal problems. A small business that sells on Etsy, eBay, Facebook, or local markets might be no different.

The benefit of making parts for other people is that you spend more time in the shop and less time on sales and marketing. You'll also be able to spend time optimizing the machining and product costs to capture additional profits.

The biggest downside is that, like a job shop, you'll be dependent on relatively few customers.

Manufacturing Products for Yourself

We think that manufacturing products for yourself provides the most significant upside potential of the three business types. You're going to need a broad range of skills to do it well, but when it works, it's very rewarding.

There's nothing more exciting than someone paying you directly for your work, no matter how small or large the price.

The rest of this document focuses primarily on this option.

Selling Person-to-Person

A personal anecdote:

My dad is a lifelong woodworker who never had time to get started with a CNC router at home, even though he used them extensively at work. He recently retired and told me that he was ready for a Shapeoko, so I shipped one to him.

Like many people, he'd seen the wooden flags people make online, so he started making them for himself and a few friends. One day the pool man walked through the garage on the way to clean the pool and saw the flags lined up. He asked, "How much would one of those cost?"

That's how you get started, **make something you like and show it to people**

Many users have accidentally ended up making money with their CNC machines. They make something that they want and show it to friends who ask, "How much would it be to have you make one for me?"

Sharing your projects works if you show them in person, if you post it on Facebook or, to a lesser extent, on Instagram. If you're "not comfortable selling," that's OK. Just share what you make on every platform you have. As you begin selling products, you'll become more comfortable actively promoting that you're doing this as a business.

"But I'm not on Facebook." That will have to change because Facebook seems to be the most effective way to find buyers for CNC projects. Instagram is great for some things, and you should absolutely create an account and post your work, but we haven't heard of many users finding buyers on Instagram. Twitter may as well not exist; it doesn't matter at all here.

Here's the great thing about selling on social media- the buyers have social media too. Aside from that being really obvious, it's important because you can ask them to post the item they bought in use. For instance, if they buy a wooden flag, ask them to post the wooden flag hanging on their wall. Also, ask for them to send that pic to you with permission to share it.

If you only want other people to pay for your hobby, then you could stop reading now and just follow that checklist. You'd almost certainly meet that initial \$1,000 goal and go further with very little headache and maximum time in the shop.

If you're looking to go further, keep reading because we've got a few more ideas for you.

Person-to-person checklist

- Make something you like
- Show your friends
- Post it on Facebook
- Post it on Instagram
- When people buy, ask for a picture of it in use with permission to share it.
- Ask the buyer to post a picture of the item in use
- Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Selling on Marketplaces

If you chose, "I just want people to pay for my hobby," then you may not have any need to sell at a level beyond the person-to-person process above. There are a lot of small CNC businesses that only sell person-to-person on platforms like Facebook. If you want to go a little further without taking on a lot of overhead and maintenance, then you can look at a platform like Etsy or Facebook Marketplace.

The benefit of an online marketplace is that you only need to list your products and the website, the payments, and the infrastructure is taken care of for you.

The downside of a marketplace is that you're competing for attention among millions of products but that's the wrong way to look at it. The marketplace already has a massive number of visitors and you have the opportunity to be seen by people that never would have found you any other way.

Etsy is a marketplace for handmade goods, and the variety of products there is unbelievable. They are very protective of their visitors though, they don't want you to treat it as a way to generate a lead and then move the relationship out of Etsy, they want any future business to remain in Etsy.

Facebook Marketplace is more of the wild west. There's no requirement that anything be hand-made or anything else. List your product and sell it. Want to send a customer to your website? No problem.

What about eBay? We do hear from customers selling on eBay but those customers tend to be making the type of product that matches what eBay buyers are looking for. For items like motorcycle or automotive parts, eBay is a go-to place for those. For the typical CNC projects, eBay isn't a great fit.

You should consider listing all of your products on both Etsy and Facebook Marketplace. The reward can be significant and there's really nothing to lose.

Selling at Live Events

Craft fairs and farmers markets are far less popular on the whole, but they seem to work really well for the people that commit to it.

We've heard from several people who have a regular booth at a local fair, and they treat it like a full-time job. One woman we know spends all week making inventory and then goes to a market over the weekend to sell it all.

To attend live events, you must be OK interacting with people. If this is you, you have a natural advantage because dealing with the public face-to-face is not something everyone enjoys.

A side benefit to live events is that you can have a conversation with people, including those who don't buy, to help refine your product line.

Not all markets are equal, some will be very good for selling your products and some will not. If the first market you try isn't great, don't give up, try a different one.

The one bit of advice that we've heard is that you should know your pricing bounds ahead of time because people want to negotiate prices on everything. Know your limits ahead of time, and this will be an easy conversation.

Selling in Online Stores

If you really want to do this right, you're going to want a website, and ideally, it should support e-commerce, even if you don't plan to take advantage of that on day one.

Why would you want to take on the burden of maintaining a website? Building and managing a website is not a really a burden anymore. Modern webhosting companies make designing a website more of a drag and drop process, including e-commerce.

A website is a home for your brand. It's a place that you control completely, unlike social media and third-party marketplaces where their goal is to make the most money possible for themselves, not for you. By removing other distractions, a customer on your website is looking at your products alone. If they're already buying one thing from you, it's very possible that they'll add "one more thing" to their cart before checking out.

There are three companies that we'd look at for a website:

- Shopify
- Wix
- Squarespace

Shopify - If you know that you're going to make a real run at creating the biggest business that you can, look at Shopify. If you want a template-driven way to make a store with a front page and some standard product listings, that's where Shopify shines. If you stay within the lanes, Shopify is good. If you want anything else, you don't want Shopify.

Wix - If you're looking for a website, but not necessarily an e-commerce website, then Wix is a good option. Wix lets you make a website, whether that's a portfolio, just a contact page, or something in-between, and then add e-commerce in the future.

Squarespace - Like Wix, Squarespace is a generic website builder that has optional e-commerce functionality. Squarespace might be the most flexible in terms of content layout and design of the three options listed here.

Whichever option you pick, don't overthink the layout and design at the start. Get a premade template and fill out the various sections. Whether it's a paid or free template, it's likely to look better than what you'll be able to do starting with a blank page.

How to Position Your Products for Maximum Income

Many of the products you make will be easy for you. You know what you're doing, and you've put the time in to learn your craft. To you, your products might seem simple or obvious, but they are not simple or obvious to the rest of the world. You have a relatively unique talent, and you should position your products with that in mind.

Most people shy away from bragging and self-promotion so this part might be uncomfortable, but it's critical to understand if you want to maximize your sales.

For the most part, your products are handmade art. They're not mass-produced from a factory in China. They're:

- Collectible
- Art
- Bespoke
- Custom-made
- Heirlooms
- Items that one can hand down to their children

We can acknowledge that not every product is a glittering jewel. In the fall of 2021, many of our users were making Jack-O-Lantern boxes as Halloween decorations. They're not high-design; they're just fun. That said, there's no need to downplay their value. If we were posting a Jack-O-Lantern box for sale, we might include:

- Handmade in the US (or wherever you are)
- Made from solid cedar so they'll age well and last a lifetime
- Finished using XXX so they'll withstand the elements no matter where you live.
- Each one is engraved on the back so you can think back to 2021 each year when you put it out for Halloween.

All of that is absolutely true, and, personally, I'd be more likely to pay \$40 for one of those (which honestly don't take a lot of time to make) than a \$10 blow-molded plastic version from Home Depot.

Want to charge a little more? Offer customization. Engraving is easy enough with a CNC machine, and it puts your products in a different category.

Product Photos

Even more important than the product text and description is the product photo. We've been blown away time and time again by the photos we get from people taken on their smartphones. Many are just as good, or better, than the ones we take with our expensive photo setup. For 90% of people reading this, you do not need a dedicated camera, just a smartphone and a few tips.

Product photo checklist:

- Clean the lens of your smartphone. You'd be shocked at how much pocket dirt is covering most camera lenses.
- Get photos of your product in use, in a natural environment.
- Pick a time of day where you don't have obnoxious shadows.
- Get the product head-on, not from a strange angle.
- If you can include people in the photo naturally, that's an advantage.
- Get photos back from your customers. You'll be surprised at how good they look.
- If your product has fine details, capture each detail in its own photo.
- If you have a web store like Shopify, have one "clean" photo with no background if the product allows for it.

That last one can be difficult for people without experience in a Photoshop-style program. Just search for "background removal" online, and you'll get plenty of links to online services that will do a pretty good job with almost zero effort on your part.

The Entire Experience is the Product

If you're hoping for repeat business, don't forget that the entire experience of buying from you is part of the product. If that means spending a few more minutes to neatly and carefully wrap your product for shipping, instead of rolling it up in a mess of bubble wrap, do it.

Put a hand-written thank you note in the box. We do this on our machines and many customers have emailed in to thank us for the note.

Send them an email with the tracking number, or let them know the date it got shipped if there is no tracking number.

It only takes a few minutes to elevate the customer's experience, and it makes a big difference to justify your (hopefully aggressive) pricing.

How to Price Your Products

After “Where to sell,” the next question is “What should I charge?” The unhelpful, but very true, answer is, “As much as possible.”

It’s safe to say that very few people would naturally expect the range of prices that consumers expect to pay. We’ve regularly seen users post products with a comment that “I can’t even get people to pay \$40 for this,” with a follow-up comment, “I get \$400 for those all day.”

There are excellent customers and horrible customers. You want as few of the latter as possible, and you should be unapologetic about it.

If someone says, “Really??? I could make that for a tenth of the price!” They’re not your customer. Some people say that about our CNC machines. Of the people that complain, 0% buy a machine from us, and we’re OK with that.

So, a few ideas about determining your pricing:

Look on Etsy - You’ll probably find a vast range, but hopefully, that will help bracket what pricing is possible. There’s no point in competing on price because there’s always someone out there who puts almost no value on their own time.

Ask in forums - The people in our community and Facebook groups are very open. They know the market is big enough that they don’t see each other as competition, so they’re very willing to share information. Feel free to post a picture and ask what others are getting for a product. More often than not, people will share openly.

Calculate the time it takes you - Lots of people have nerded-out trying to come up with a pricing formula that takes the guesswork out of pricing. It’s a great way to start, but it’s not the final word because it doesn’t consider consumer behavior. What it does do is help you determine what price makes a product worth your time.

A product will have 3 phases:

- Design on the computer
- Machine time (without you involved)
- Shop time (machine setup, material prep, finishing, packing, shipping, etc.)

You assign an hourly rate to each task, multiple them by time, add the material cost, and you're done. The result should be the minimum price that you'd want to sell it for. If the product cannot be sold for that price then you might want to consider a different product.

What should those hourly rates be? That all depends on your goals and what you could be making if you spent the time making money another way. Generally speaking, design time would be the most skilled task, so I'd assign that the highest rate.

If you're doing standard products, then the design time should be fixed, you do it once for all products, so design time should be minimal when you spread it out over an entire production run. If you're doing custom products, then the cost of design can be more significant.

Machine time is the lowest cost. There aren't many consumables on a per-hour basis, so the rate is probably based on you babysitting the machine while doing other tasks.

Shop time is somewhere in the middle. The cost you assign to shop time depends on whether you can babysit the machine while finishing other tasks or if you have your kids or other family members helping you.

Other Details

"Sales" are the lifeline of a business so it's fitting that we've talked mostly about sales up to now.

Once you get a sale, you want to get paid and get products shipped as quickly as possible. The following sections include operational details to get that flow moving as quickly as possible.

Taking Payment

There's never been a better time to have a small e-commerce business because you can be up and running with several payment systems in a single day. Here are a few options:

Squarespace / Wix / Shopify - If you have an e-commerce site, then the payments are built-in and they're great at letting a customer buy products directly, without you having to be directly involved. They're not as great for person-to-person selling so you'll also need an additional option below.

PayPal - No payment system has received more negative press than PayPal. It's done some absurd things to some good people, but those cases seem to be few and far between when you look at how many merchants use them. What I can tell you for sure is that many customers prefer PayPal over all other payment options. We run Carbide 3D on Shopify, which accepts all standard payment options, from credit cards to Apple and Google pay, and we still get a significant number of people that choose to pay with PayPal.

Venmo - Everyone seems to have a Venmo account. From what we understand, they don't like business conducted on their standard accounts, but that doesn't stop many people from doing that anyway. Venmo does seem more popular with the younger population so, if you're going to sell to an older demographic, you should have a more traditional payment method as well.

Quickbooks - If you're going to keep a proper set of books for your venture, you might look at Quickbooks online. And if you're going to use Quickbooks for accounting, you can send invoices and accept payments directly from Quickbooks. It's probably not the cheapest, but it's convenient for everyone involved and it looks very professional to the customer.

Stripe Payment Links - This is some hybrid of the options above. Stripe is a payment gateway that you can use if your website accepts payments. They've recently introduced Stripe Payment Links that allow you to create a product and accept payment for it just by sending a link to someone. It's probably a little more technical than the options above, but Stripe is a great company to deal with if you need help.

Bottom line, if you had to pick just one payment option, it would be hard to recommend against PayPal.

No matter what service you choose, there are going to be fees to be paid, which can range from 3-5%. It's tempting to look at the range and try to optimize for the lowest fees. Don't do

that, pick the option that's best for you and your customer. A 1-2% difference in fees is nothing compared to a better experience for your customer.

Shipping

Shipping is really two different topics, with the customer-facing part of cost and speed on the front end, and the logistics of how to ship something efficiently on the back end. Of the two, the logistics part is a lot easier.

It's well-acknowledged by now that Amazon has totally changed customer perceptions of how much shipping should cost, who should pay it, and how fast it should be. While we'd all like to be able to function at the level of Amazon, that's not practical so it's important to break down each aspect of shipping and see how it applies to you.

Who pays for shipping?

The customer always pays for shipping, whether it's built into the price or if shipping is an explicit line item on their receipt. If you're making a very premium product, priced such that the shipping cost would be relatively small, it's easier to include shipping "for free". Jewelry would be a perfect example where this policy makes sense.

In all other cases, you should see what your competitors are doing and start there. There's no point in offering free shipping if you don't get credit from the customer for it.

Should you markup shipping prices?

Generally speaking, you should not markup shipping prices. As a small business owner, you're not going to be getting a good deal from UPS or FedEx, and USPS doesn't discount at all. A marked-up shipping price will seem really high to a customer used to paying almost nothing at Amazon.

In fact, you might find it necessary to discount shipping or create a "flat rate shipping" option that's less than the actual cost. In the end, it's better to get payment for part of shipping instead of nothing.

Shipping Services

In the US, you really only have three options, FedEx, UPS, and USPS. For low-cost, small items you cannot beat the USPS flat-rate boxes and envelopes. They won't fit many of the larger home décor products that are made on CNC machines but they're a great deal for smaller items.

We can really only recommend USPS for items that you're OK losing in the mail. USPS boxes get lost and get delayed much more frequently than UPS or FedEx packages, so you'll have to decide if it's worth it to occasionally lose a package to save money in total.

At Carbide 3D, we only use USPS for items like cutters and workholding. We'll never ship a machine with USPS.

Shipping Insurance

Should you insure your shipments, or mandate that your customers pay for insured shipping? That's a tough question because, in most cases, customers don't care if the shipment was insured when a package goes missing, they expect you to deal with it and get the missing item replaced ASAP. It's not fair, but that's the reality we live in. (Thanks Amazon.)

For the first few years of Carbide 3D we paid for insurance on every machine we shipped. After a while we did the math on how many machines got lost or damaged beyond repair, and how much we paid for insurance. We paid far more in insurance than we would have paid to replace missing machines.

We decided to self-insure from that point on, meaning that we'd never pay for shipping insurance but we'd accept that a certain number of lost packages was the cost of doing business. We can say, without a doubt, that self-insuring was the correct decision for us, but it only made sense once we were big enough that we could absorb the losses.

Bottom line, if you're just starting out and you cannot afford to lose a package, insure it. Once you're big enough, and ideally you're shipping standard products that can be quickly replaced, skip the insurance.

Shipping Systems

When you're starting out, it's fine to drive over to a local FedEx/UPS store to ship products but, at some point, you'll want to get your own accounts, and a system to automate the pain of filling out shipping forms.

It's easy enough to get a FedEx or UPS account and it's good to build up a history with them. Given enough growth in your business it's possible to negotiate much better rates than the standard ones you start out with. You don't need to worry about that at the start, but it's worth building a history with them as quickly as possible.

Once you have a shipping account, it's worth looking into Shipstation, which is a platform to automate many, if not most, of your shipping tasks. Shipstation integrates with almost every sales and e-commerce platform and it will make your life better if you're tired of filling out online forms to ship packages.

Shipstation is a luxury for sure, it's another monthly subscription, but it's a quality of life improvement that we wouldn't want to give up.

Shipping Supplies

Unless you're shipping a lot of packages each day it won't make sense to use custom boxes, and buying them one-at-a-time when you ship will get expensive quickly. Find standard boxes at a company like Uline and make sure your products fit within them. It's doubtful that you'll ever find cheaper packaging than Uline and they're a company that does their job so well that you never have to think about finding a competitor.

If you'd like to make your packages look a little more polished than a plain brown box, look at getting custom stickers made, which are much cheaper than you'd expect, and almost certainly cheaper than a custom box.

Taxes and Accounting

If you're going to have a real business, even a side business, we'd always recommend doing things the right way by keeping a proper accounting and reporting the income.

The side benefit of doing things the right way is that you can probably get at least a few write-offs to offset the pain.

We'd recommend that you get an accounting program setup as soon as you decide to commit to having a business, and we'd recommend Quickbooks online. It's not the only option but every accountant knows it and there are plenty of third-party plugins and services to link it to websites and marketplaces.

A huge advantage of getting accounting up and running early is that it's easier and more stress-free to figure it out with only a few transactions to deal with instead of trying to import the last year of sales, while also learning a new program.

Finally, even if you're not planning to form any type of business structure, setup a new bank account for your sales and expenses. A separate account will help keep everything cleaner and it should be a good way to keep track of how well you're doing when you see the account go up every month.

All of that said, talk to your accountant and ignore anything we have to say on the matter.

Copyrighted Items

We see people selling products with copyrighted characters and logos on them every day. This is illegal, and you shouldn't do it even though it's done every day. (If you need proof, go to Etsy and search for your favorite professional or college sports team)

We've seen reports that people have personally been doing selling items based on copyrighted or trademarks logos and characters for years on Facebook without trouble, and we've seen people post that they got a letter from a law firm saying to knock it off almost immediately.

You should speak to a lawyer if you have any questions and find out what risk you take using copyrighted logos and characters. Depending on the particular content, you might find that you can pay a reasonable license fee to use the logo.

While official logos might be off the table from a legal perspective, go to Etsy and do that search for your sports team again. You'll find many logos and designs that are inspired by the official logos but not a copy of them.

Customer Service

As you start selling, you'll have the advantage of speaking to your customers one-to-one. As you grow, customer might be people you don't know, and that you've never spoken to before.

Here are a few things we've learned about customer service:

Over-communicate - The customer will fill in any information that you don't provide, and that information will always be in their favor. If they need to provide anything, let them know. Let them know how big things are and how much they weigh.

Don't promise delivery times - Shipping companies have become relatively unreliable. Beyond stating the date you're shipping a package and the type of shipping service you're using, don't promise a delivery date. Trust us on this one.

"I want to return this" - How you handle returns is up to you but consider your quality of life when you're trying to figure out what to do. If accepting a return makes a persistent problem go away, then it's probably worth it.

Support Email - Even if you don't have a dedicated domain name for your business, make sure you have a dedicated email. At the beginning, any customer contact is exciting. After a while, if you do well enough to have a lot of customer messages, you need to be able to draw a line between business and personal email. More importantly, you need to be able to shut off one or the other at times.

Follow Up After the Sale

Once your customer has received their purchase, you're almost done.

- Send them an email and ask for feedback.
- Ask for a photo of the product in use with permission to use it on social media
- Add their email address to a list you keep

That last one is a big deal. Tech companies would have you believe that social media is where it's at and that email is dead. **Email isn't dead, it's a moneymaker.** Depending on what you're selling, you might want to email previous customers every few months to let them know that you have a new product, maybe a seasonal product, and share some pictures.

If you can offer value with the email, that's much better than just a cold sales email. Going back to the Jack-O-Lantern product, if you sent out a "10 Great Halloween Decoration Ideas" email that happens to list some information about your products, that's a win for the reader and you.

You don't need high-design email templates, plain text works wonders, and it lets you focus on looking like a human and not a corporate marketing machine.

You can use one of the many email services available, but there's nothing wrong with keeping a list in a text file to get started.

Names, Branding, and Logos

Why did we wait so long to talk about branding? Because branding doesn't matter much when you start out. Branding is something that we all get hung up on because it feels like those things make a business "real" but it doesn't; income and profits make a business real. Don't focus on branding at the start, even though it's very tempting.

Here's what we'd recommend:

Pick a simple name. If your name is "John Smith", look at something simple like "Smith Woodworks" or "Smith Manufacturing". All you need is to ensure that you can buy the domain name to reserve it for the future.

(There are also benefits to having your name in the company name if you file taxes as a Sole Proprietor. Again, talk to a CPA about this, not us.)

Create a text-based logo. Pick a font you like and type in your business name. You can try a combination of regular, bold, and/or italics to see what you like. Save that image and consider it "done" for now, that's all you need.

What you need to start

We all get hung up on “I can get started after I get X. Once I have X, I’ll be ready.” Honestly, you don’t need much to start. This whole document is predicated on you having a CNC machine, so that might be the one thing you need.

Go make something you like, share it with people you know in real life, share it on Facebook. Let them know you’re open for business.

You can do that today.

Checklist

Believe it or not, we only planned for this guide to be 5-10 pages but it grew more than we planned. Now we're at the point that we need a guide for the guide so we're going to reduce the whole thing to a checklist:

- Make something
- Share it on Facebook
- Show it to friends
- Depending on cost, give a few away to friends that are likely to talk to a lot of other people
- Pick a fair price
- Sell a few
- Ask for customers to share
- Ask for pictures
- Repeat until you're comfortable moving on
- Pick a business name
- Grab the domain name
- Create a text-based logo
- Open a bank account
- Get Quickbooks Online
- Create an Instagram account
- Create an Etsy account
- Create a Facebook Marketplace account
- Create your first product listing
- Open a FedEx account
- Open a UPS account
- Open a ShipStation account (OPTIONAL)
- Come up with another 2-3 products
- Open an account at Shopify or Wix

Resources

Etsy - <https://www.etsy.com>

Facebook marketplace - <https://www.facebook.com/marketplace>

Background eliminator - <https://clippingmagic.com/>

Shopify – <https://www.shopify.com>

Wix – <https://www.wix.com>

Squarespace - <https://www.squarespace.com>

Fastmail.com - <https://www.fastmail.com>

Venmo – <https://www.venmo.com>

Paypal – <https://www.paypal.com>

Strip Payment Links - <https://stripe.com/payments/payment-links>

Uline – <https://www.uline.com>

Stickers – <https://www.stickermule.com>

Shipstation – <https://www.shipstation.com>

Quickbooks Online – <https://www.quickbooks.com>

Domain name registration – <https://www.namecheap.com>