

Career Opportunities

First Steps For Starting A New Business

(NAPSA)—Starting your own small business can open the door to independence, fulfillment and prosperity, but figuring out the first steps can be intimidating. Maybe you're leaving behind a secure position in an established company or putting your life's savings on the line. Maybe you want to start a business right from your kitchen table with no financial backing. There's so much to think about and so much to do, but don't be discouraged; there are resources and tools available to help.

With more than 25.8 million small businesses currently in the United States and 671,000 new companies getting started every year, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, it's important to know where to begin if you're going to be successful in a competitive marketplace.

Helping to outline those steps is the Microsoft Startup Center, a free online resource that covers a variety of integral topics on how to create a new business and see your dreams grow and thrive.

"If you want to take control of your life and you're serious about starting a business, do it right," say brothers Jeff and Rich Sloan, founders of StartupNation, the leading online community for startups. "Get informed so you work smart and get the results you're after." The Sloan brothers are contributing to the Microsoft Startup Center to provide additional small-business expertise to the online resource.

The first question the Sloan brothers ask is: What kind of business do you want to start? Think about what your passions and interests are and how you can use your best skills and experience. Once you have your business idea, you can put your plan into action with Startup Center's simple guidelines. Following are eight

steps to consider when preparing your new life as an entrepreneur:

1. Know the rules. Research which licenses and registrations you need, your tax responsibilities and the right insurance to protect your interests.

2. Set up your office. Find the best space, at home or elsewhere. Decide on what technology you'll be using, how to implement it with a local IT consultant and how to use that technology to its fullest. Visit a Microsoft Across America Connections event, which highlights the latest in small-business technology and helps you get the most out of your existing programs.

3. Build a brand. A compelling logo, marketing materials and a well-designed Web site are key to making a positive impression.

4. Do the marketing. Research your market and choose the right vehicles, including advertising, keywords and public relations, to get your message out.

5. Make the sale. Be prepared to accept payments in various forms and to keep track of customer relationships.

6. Watch the money. Manage your costs and keep your books in good order.

7. Mind the details. Support for shipping, travel and legal issues is affordable and nearby; get it in place now.

8. People first. Find the stars who will help you succeed and retain them as happy employees.

"Now" is always the best time to start it up," say the Sloan brothers. "With the right resources available, you can make your fantasy of owning a business a lasting reality."

For more information on starting up your own business, visit www.mystartupcenter.com. To learn more about working with the right technology to enhance your new business, visit www.microsoft.com/connections.