

# COUNTDOWN TO LAUNCH

Starting a successful 3D studio means hitting key sales, financial and administrative targets before and after launch. Our wallplanner sets out the milestones for each business area



PRE-LAUNCH				LAUNCH		POST-LAUNCH		
TIMELINE								
CATEGORY	1 YEAR TO LAUNCH	3 MONTHS TO LAUNCH	1 MONTH TO LAUNCH			1 MONTH AFTER LAUNCH	3 MONTHS AFTER LAUNCH	1 YEAR AFTER LAUNCH
ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE	Begin your investigations into what your main costs will be, including equipment and software, rent and staff or freelance wages. Determine your minimum break-even income. Think about what personal capital you will invest and start saving. What can partners or other backers invest, if anything?	If based in the UK, contact Business Link about potential funding bodies in your area. Decide whether or not you will go to the bank for money and, if so, write your business plan and begin applications. If you are getting a loan, add loan repayments to your costs.	By now everything should be in place. If you're getting a loan, it should be coming through: you need to have your private capital lined up for the launch. Have enough money ready to cover at least three months of trading with little or no revenue. Find a bookkeeper.			No money will be coming in yet. Pay your bills from your starter fund, eat soup if you have to, and get your first set of invoices sent out.	By now, money should be starting to trickle in - although you may still be chasing unpaid invoices. Expect still to be paying for many things from your original capital.	Hopefully, you will be breaking even by now: if not, you should be within a year. Think about how you can build reserves of cash to cover unexpected circumstances, such as the withdrawal of an investor or a 30 per cent drop in business: for long-term stability, aim for a monthly income three times that of your break-even point. Structure your reinvestment for growth, or repay your loan.
MANAGEMENT AND ADMIN	Start thinking of a name for the company. Remember that while it may be tempting to name it after yourself, it will be harder to sell later if you do.	Write a business plan: you can find an example of how the plan should be structured, and what information it should contain, at <a href="http://www.3dats.com/tutorials.asp">www.3dats.com/tutorials.asp</a> . If you need a loan, produce it in a format the bank finds acceptable.	Open a bank account. Register the company and name its officers. Let the taxman know. Get a phone, an ISP, and line up your equipment and software licenses. Arrange insurance for your studio space.			Do whatever it takes to keep the company going in this exciting but lean period.	Reassess the needs of your company. Is the software and hardware adequate, and is any of it going unused? Sell off any underperforming assets. Sub-let desks if you need; or rent extra temporary office space.	Re-evaluate your business plan. Have your goals changed based on your experience? Has your ability to meet them changed due to trading conditions? Revise your plan as necessary, then extend for three years.
RECRUITMENT	Your rough plans should include the eventual size of the company. Decide what you and your partners will be doing in terms of sales and marketing, creative work and production. What other kinds of staff will you need?	Make a firm decision on what roles your company needs to fill. Decide whether those roles will be staff or freelance. Start looking for talent, particularly for people who've worked for a start-up before. Two areas to consider carefully are sales and production. Can you adequately cover those roles and keep clients happy?	By now, you should be making job offers and/or booking the freelancers you need: seek legal advice regarding contracts and working conditions if you have to. When staff start, give them clear objectives for the first year based on your expectations for the business.			Take some time to assess whether or not your staff and freelancers are performing as you hoped. Remember, this is a new company and it's as likely to be as hectic for them as it is for you. Are your staff happy: if not, why not?	Does your company have the right complement of staff for the work you are getting in? Address this by scaling up or down - starting with freelancers.	Hold staff appraisals. This is a two-way process, not just your opinion of them and their work. Give them structured feedback, but also find out what they think of your management. Ask for their suggestions for improving the business. Assess their roles, your own, and your staffing level. Give out objectives for year two.
MARKET RESEARCH	Define what it is you want to do and work out who your clients will be. Get familiar with the trade press and websites. How many other companies are doing the work you plan to do? Who will you compete against and who can you collaborate with?	Research your potential clients in depth. What are their budgets like? Who do they work for themselves? Find out who their competitors are. Broaden your research: will there be any chance for your business to specialise or branch out into new areas? Set your pricing: you can find a useful guide at <a href="http://tinyurl.com/6rae8t">http://tinyurl.com/6rae8t</a>	You should be pitching and signing clients by now, so get feedback on your initial offering. Ask them about their needs and how those needs are changing. Find out who else they work with and who they rate out there. Can you learn anything from those companies for next time you pitch?			Get feedback from your clients on the work you are completing, where they want to go next, and why.	Once the initial wave of jobs has passed, review any opportunities you had to pass up on when you launched.	Now that you are fully part of the industry, go through your old research and work out where your company fits. Study the trade press/websites again and research any new trends relevant to your business. Just as importantly, review the work you've done and see if it is tending towards a particular specialism.
SALES AND MARKETING	You don't have anything to sell or market yet, but make sure potential clients know who you are by networking at industry events, or by contacting them directly as part of your market research.	Start planning your website. Explain in clear language what your services are, get a good portfolio together, and put together a showreel. Edit it professionally, avoiding any past work you don't have the rights to. Register your domain name.	Pitches and client lunches should be under way. Try to convert them into work for your first three months. Invite clients, press and contacts to your launch party. Write and send out a short press release about your launch.			Follow up your first client work doing everything possible to keep them happy. Your aim is to get signed to their next projects.	Follow up any pitches you didn't get in the run-up to launch. Let these clients know you are now trading, give examples and buy lunch. Update your website. Let the press and industry websites know about your biggest projects from the launch period.	If you can afford it, a birthday party for you and your clients would be nice. Create a new showreel using only work created by your new company. Develop any opportunities thrown up by your revised market research.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Need more advice on starting a business? Visit one of these handy online resources

**3DAS Bonus Material**  
Useful resources for start-ups, including a sample business plan. The site also contains tutorials of specialist interest to architectural studios  
[www.3das.com/bonus\\_material.asp](http://www.3das.com/bonus_material.asp)

**American Institute of Graphic Arts**  
Professional organisation for US designers. Its newsletter contains articles on the many issues involved in running a creative business  
[www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org)

**British Chambers of Commerce**  
UK body for assisting local businesses of all kinds. There are 56 accredited local 'chambers': visit the website to find the nearest one to you  
[www.britishchambers.org.uk](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk)

**British Design Innovation**  
Assists UK companies aiming to develop and market new IP: vital for anyone aiming to develop their own TV or straight-to-DVD projects  
[www.britishdesigninnovation.org](http://www.britishdesigninnovation.org)

**Business Link**  
UK government resource for start-ups. Local offices will assist you with further advice and can even point you in the direction of grants  
[www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

**The Design Council**  
UK national body for the design industry. Currently piloting a Creative Business Accelerator Programme (<http://tinyurl.com/6lw4q5>)  
[www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)

**Interactive Business Planner**  
Canadian government-backed online tool for planning small businesses. Guides you through the process of creating a three-year plan  
[www.canadabusiness.ca/lbp](http://www.canadabusiness.ca/lbp)

**My Own Business**  
Non-profit organisation offering advice on how to start a business in the US. Comes complete with a thumbs-up from the World Bank  
[www.myownbusiness.org](http://www.myownbusiness.org)

**SCORE**  
Resource partner of the US Small Business Administration. Runs 389 local chapters throughout the US and associated territories  
[www.score.org](http://www.score.org)

**SmallBizPod**  
UK-based specialist podcast devoted to start-ups and small businesses. Check out site founder Alex Bellinger's regular blog entries  
[www.smallbizpod.co.uk](http://www.smallbizpod.co.uk)

**Times Online**  
Online resource for entrepreneurs, run by the leading UK newspaper. Nothing directly 3D-related but general advice and anecdotes abound  
<http://tinyurl.com/46xoc3>

**US Small Business Administration**  
Independent agency of the federal government, intended to promote small businesses. Provides plenty of sample plans and resources online  
[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)