

CHECKLIST:

48 Questions to Ask in Your SWOT Analysis

Every business owner should conduct a regular SWOT analysis to assess the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to its competition. Use the following checklist to start on your SWOT analysis.

STRENGTHS (INTERNAL, POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF YOUR BUSINESS)

MARKETING:

- What is my company's competitive advantage? What is our unique selling proposition?
- Do we have exclusive relationships with suppliers or distributors?
- How extensive is our distribution network?
- What are the strengths of our marketing and sales team?
- Do we have a well-known brand?

HUMAN RESOURCES:

- Do our employees have skills or expertise that our competitors' employees lack?
- Do our employees have professional accreditations or certifications that give us an advantage?

ASSETS:

- Do we have proprietary technology, intellectual property or other valuable proprietary information?
- Do we have equipment or machinery that our competitors don't?
- Does our location or building give us a competitive advantage?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

- How well capitalized is the business?
- Can we easily access additional capital if needed?
- Do the business's profit margins and other financial indicators compare favorably to industry benchmarks?

WEAKNESSES (INTERNAL, NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES OF YOUR BUSINESS)

MARKETING:

- What complaints do we frequently hear from customers?
- What objections do we frequently hear from prospects?
- Is the business's distribution limited?

ASSETS:

- Does the business's location or physical plant have any weaknesses?
- Are the business's technology, equipment and machinery outdated?

HUMAN RESOURCES:

- Is the business adequately staffed?
- Do employees lack skills or expertise needed to compete?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

- Does the business suffer from cash flow problems?
- Are the business's profit margins and other financial indicators poor compared to those of competitors?
- Does the business have excessive debt?
- Would the business have difficulty accessing additional capital?

OPPORTUNITIES (EXTERNAL, POSITIVE FACTORS THAT COULD HELP THE BUSINESS)

COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT:

- Do competitors have any weaknesses the business could benefit from?

MARKET ENVIRONMENT:

- Is the target market changing in ways that could benefit the business?
- Is there a potential niche market the business is currently ignoring?
- Is there something clients and customers are asking for that the business doesn't provide, but could add?
- Are there upcoming local, regional or national events that could present opportunities for the business?
- What opportunities for geographic expansion exist?

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT:

- How might current and projected economic trends present opportunities for the business? (i.e., housing prices, employment rates, consumer confidence)
- What changes are taking place in the industry that could create opportunity?
- Are there potential new sources of financing that could help the business?
- Could projected changes in interest rates, tax laws or banking regulations benefit the business?

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT:

- How might proposed changes to local, state and national government positively affect the business?

TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT:

- How could predicted technological advances create opportunity for the business?

THREATS (EXTERNAL, NEGATIVE FACTORS THAT COULD HURT THE BUSINESS)

COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT:

- Are our competitors planning expansion, new product or service launches, or other changes that could hurt our business?
- Are there businesses that aren't currently direct competitors, but could be in the future?

MARKET ENVIRONMENT:

- Is our target market shrinking?
- Could predicted social changes negatively impact demand for our product?
- Does the business rely too heavily on one big customer?

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT:

- How might current and projected economic trends (i.e., housing prices, employment rates, consumer confidence) negatively impact the business?

- What predicted industry trends could hurt the business?
- Could changes to external financial factors, such as revised lending standards, increased cost of capital or higher interest rates, hurt the business?
- Are there projected increases to the cost of doing business (i.e., rent, wages, inventory, utilities) that could hurt the business?

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT:

- Could local, state and national governmental changes, such as regulatory restrictions or new trade agreements, negatively affect the business?

TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT:

- How might predicted technological advances negatively affect the business?