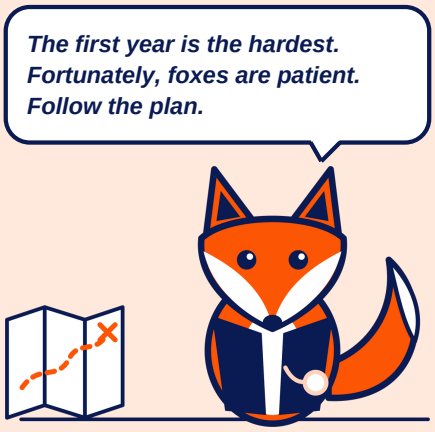
Cranleys
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS



CRANLEYS' CUNNING PLANS · No. 09 · STARTING UP

First-Year Survival: The 12-Month Business Plan Checklist

Tick it, print it, pin it up. Every box you cannot tick is a conversation worth having.



By Colin Davison FCA, Managing Partner, Cranleys Chartered Accountants. In practice since 1998. Reviewed 15 November 2026 against the 2026/27 rules.

THE QUICK ANSWER

Plan your first year in four blocks of 90 days. Set targets for customers, cash and profit, diarise every tax and filing date, and hold a monthly review. Check progress against your forecast, fix problems early and decide what to stop as well as what to start.

THE KEY FIGURES

The key facts	What to know
Plan	four blocks of roughly 90 days
First accounts (company)	21 months from incorporation
First confirmation statement	within a year of incorporation
Review	monthly, with a longer one each quarter

The checklist, box by box

	The check	What to do	Keep as evidence
☐	**Do you have 90 day targets?**	Customers, sales, cash and one thing to fix. Keep it short and measurable.	90 day plan
☐	**Are all deadlines in one calendar?**	Tax returns, VAT, payroll, accounts and confirmation statements.	Compliance calendar
☐	**Is there a monthly review?**	Compare actual with forecast, update the forecast and note what changed.	Review notes
☐	**Is cash protected?**	Hold back for tax and keep a buffer.	Tax savings account
☐	**Is your pipeline growing?**	Know how many leads and customers you need each month.	Pipeline sheet
☐	**Have you asked for help early?**	Problems are cheaper to fix in month three than month twelve.	Adviser meeting notes

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MY PRO TIP

review every month, not every year.

A worked example

A company incorporated on 15 January 2026 files its first accounts by 15 October 2027. Many founders think that gives them nearly two years of calm. It does not. Tax payments, VAT and payroll deadlines arrive long before that, so the 12 month plan is what keeps the business safe.

The trap to avoid

Treating the year end as the first moment to look at the numbers. By then it is too late to change the year.

The Rufus test

One question that tells you if you have the right adviser:

If I could change one number by month six, which one would decide whether I am still trading in month twelve?

What has changed recently

- Early filing dates matter. See the company formation checklist.
- Cash sits at the heart of year one. See the pricing and cashflow checklist.
- Growth is the next stage. See the scaling cashflow checklist.

Questions I get asked

What should I do in the first year of business?

Win customers, protect cash, register for taxes, keep records and review monthly against a simple plan.

When are my first company accounts due?

21 months after incorporation for a private company.

How do I make a 90 day plan?

Pick three or four targets, set a date for each and review weekly.

When should I get an accountant?

Early. Setting up properly is cheaper than fixing problems later.

The 9 CAD Keys link: Acceleration

Acceleration in year one is momentum, built from small wins that you track and repeat.

Colin's 9 CAD Keys. CORE: Clarity, Capability, Consistency. ADVANCED: Analysis & Positioning, Alignment, Acceleration. DYNAMIC: Differentiation, Dexterity, Development. Score each key 1 to 5 in the free Business Value Assessment Scorecard, total out of 45. *Freedom is built. One CAD Key at a time.*

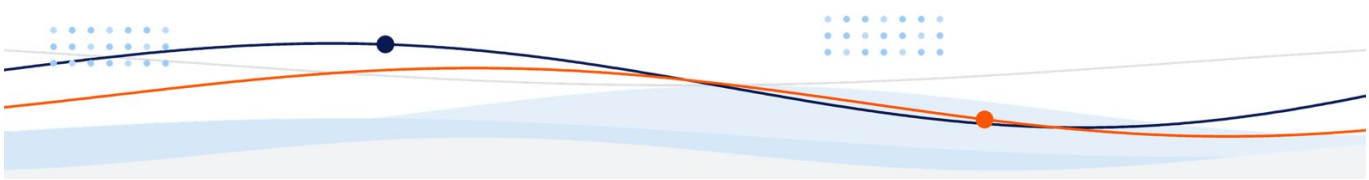
Tick these next

Business checklist 01
Business Idea, Market and Business Model Checklist

Business checklist 03
Company Formation, Companies House and HMRC Checklist

Business checklist 04
Pricing, Cashflow and Funding Checklist for New Businesses

Business checklist 10
Growing Without Going Broke: Scaling Cashflow Checklist



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Go deeper: my books

For this topic, start with **Starting Up Secrets**, part of The Cranleys Business and Tax Secrets Series: Property Tax Secrets, Inheritance Tax Secrets, Business Tax Secrets, Starting Up Secrets, Business Growth Secrets and Business Exit Secrets. The books are launching soon. Join the launch list at cranleys.online/books and I will tell you the moment each one is released.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Ring me. Free draft plan, no hard sell.

I will build you a free draft tax plan or business plan on my 9 CAD Keys: a scorecard, a 12-month cashflow forecast, a 90-day action plan and a review with me. **1** Get in touch. **2** Short intro call. **3** Your free draft plan in plain English. You decide what happens next.

Twelve months, twelve ticks.

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Scan to read online, tick it on screen and take the Scorecard



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