

Small Business Guide:

VETERANS



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INTRODUCTION

Did you know that, as a veteran, your military experience has equipped you with some of the most highly prized skills of a successful entrepreneur? Entrepreneurship is not for the faint-hearted; it requires determination, discipline, perseverance, risk-taking, a calm head under pressure, and the ability to face challenges with confidence. According to the [U.S. Small Business Association \(SBA\)](#), veterans are 45% more likely to make it in business than the ordinary civilian, and it likely comes down to this resilience and perspective.

So you have a lot to offer the world of business, but it also works both ways. Entrepreneurship gives you a focus, a goal and a pivotal role to play in society. It offers a way to contribute and a way to connect with the people around you. It's not surprising, then, that the number of self-employed veterans is on the increase, and this can only be a good thing. If you want to be next, this guide will cover everything you need to know to turn your big idea into a successful business.



1. THE VETERAN TRACK RECORD IN BUSINESS

Veteran-owned businesses are nothing new. Following World War II, more than [50% of veterans](#) launched their own businesses in the U.S, and there was a similar boom after the Korean War. In 2004, the SBA released figures to reveal that [22% of veterans](#) were either purchasing or considering their own startup, and in 2016 they estimated that [9.1% of all U.S. businesses](#) were veteran-owned, with a total of nearly 6 million employees between them.

It's not just that these businesses are popping up, but their success rate and sustainability also speaks for itself. These are just some of the success stories that might give you the inspiration and the boost you need to take the leap:

Plated

- Founded by Nick Taranto of the U.S. Marine Corps
- Provides healthy and affordable meals to people's homes
- Employs over 700 people
- Revenue of more than \$100 million in 2015
- Average annual revenue growth of 500%

Black Rifle Coffee Company

- Founded by Evan Hafer of the Special Forces
- Offers high quality, small batch coffee
- In 2015, was able to give back \$48,000 to organizations such as the Thin Blue Line Project and the Marine veteran-founded Raider Project

Rhumbix

- Founded by Zach Sheel (U.S. Navy, Seabee/Civil Engineer) and Drew DeWalt (U.S. Navy, Submarine Warfare)
- An app and productivity platform that collects construction site data in real-time, including delays, safety hazards and timecards, in order to better review performance vs. budget

Bottle Breacher

- Founded by Eli Crane (U.S. Navy, Navy SEAL)
- Makes handcrafted, 50-caliber bottle openers
- Employs both Active Duty military personnel and veterans
- Total sales have increased from \$150,000 to more than \$15 million

There are hundreds more stories, just like these, of veterans who have embraced the world of entrepreneurship and seen great success, so as you think about launching your own business you've got some healthy stats behind you.

Some of the most common industries for veteran-owned businesses include:

- Transportation and warehousing
- Construction
- Professional, scientific and technical services
- Manufacturing
- Retail and wholesale trade
- Real estate

Whatever your niche, it's worth doing your research and looking into some of these business models in more detail so that you can learn from their experiences and get some tactical insights. Networking with fellow veterans who are further along the journey is an excellent place to start.



2. GETTING STARTED

As you set out on your newest adventure, this impressive track record of entrepreneurial veterans should certainly give you confidence, but it's still crucial that you do your due diligence, make informed decisions, and develop a solid strategy. Success is never guaranteed but there are certain steps you can take to get yourself on the best possible path:

- 1. Settle on Your Big Idea** – Many veterans have launched businesses based on a need that they became aware of during their time in the field, so that may be a good place to start. Whatever your big idea, build your business around your skills, strengths and passions as this is what will give you the edge over your competition.
- 2. Do Your Market Research** – Make sure that you know who you're trying to reach, and that your company name, branding and offering are pitched appropriately. Don't just make assumptions about your industry and target market but actively study the relevant demographics, behaviors, attitudes and trends.
- 3. Develop a Business Plan** – This is your action plan for getting started. How is your business going to make money? How are you going to reach your target audience? How are you going to remain competitive? Think about realistic and actionable strategies that will get you from where you are to where you want to be. You will refine this as you go – it's not a once-and-for-all model.
- 4. Create a Financial Plan** – Dig a little deeper into the realistic costs of your startup. What do you need to get started, and how are you going to manage your budget going forward? Keep detailed financial records from day one and you will make your life much easier further down the line!
- 5. Generate a Buzz** – It's never too early to start building your brand and growing a following amongst the people that matter. With social media, networking and online marketing streams it's never been easier, but just make sure that you're choosing the most appropriate channels and platforms for your business and your audience.
- 6. Set Goals** – This is a process that never ends – you will keep re-visiting your goals and setting new ones as your business evolves. You should always know what you're working towards and what "success" will look like for you and your business. Make sure that your goals are specific and practical, and that you set realistic timelines. This helps you to use your time productively and strategically.
- 7. Get Clued Up** – Before you launch, make sure that you're fully in the know about any laws, regulations or licenses that might be relevant to your business. Check out the SBA list to be sure that you've covered all the bases. You also need to think about insurance and the relevant state tax obligations. This is the less fun side of the business, but its vital to your success that you're protected from the start.

3. ACCESSING FUNDING

When turning your bright idea into a business, there are a good number of costs to cover before you start to make any money back. These can include property, equipment, products or raw materials, market research, advertising and wages. How much you need will depend on the particular nature of your business, but you will need to estimate your startup costs as accurately as possible and – most likely – explore funding options. You will probably also need to think about financial support when it comes to growing your business, so it pays to know what's out there for entrepreneurial veterans.

GRANTS

A grant is a lump sum that is given because you meet the criteria and guidelines and, unlike a loan, you don't have to pay it back. There are plenty of private organizations across the U.S. that are keen to support veterans in kick-starting their businesses, as well as government grants, so make sure that you capitalize on the opportunities that are open to you, specifically. The [Veterans Business Outreach Center Program](#) is a really useful resource for getting advice about what's available, based on your history, business and geographic location.



- [GrantWatch](#) has an extensive, searchable library of grants for veteran-owned small businesses in particular regions and industries.
- In 2017, the SBA awarded \$300,000 in [Women Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program](#) grants, specifically for female veterans.
- The [HCC Veteran Entrepreneurship Training \(VET\) Program](#) offers veteran small business owners access to investors, funding partnerships and networking contacts in the relevant industry.
- There are a number of grants available from [federal agencies](#) that are specifically aimed at supporting veterans in business. [The U.S. government grant website](#) is also a helpful resource for guiding you through the application process.

LOANS

The idea of a loan might seem more risky than a grant as it involves taking on a debt, but if you choose the right one for you, use it effectively, and plan an appropriate repayment structure, a small business loan can provide an invaluable opportunity for your business to launch, gain momentum, grow and thrive. There is a wide spectrum of small business loans available, so if you do your homework you can find one with an interest rate and repayment schedule that works for your business.

Traditional lenders, like banks, often have a long list of prerequisites and you can end up jumping through a lot of hoops before eventually being rejected. This can be hugely frustrating when you're trying to get your business off the ground, take the next step, or capitalize on a new opportunity.

At Rapid Finance, we aim to make it as quick, easy and stress-free as possible to find the right financing option for you, and to get the funds into your account. You can apply for a free quote to get a better idea of the right route for you, and the application process takes just a few minutes. Often, we are able to approve and transfer funds in as little as one day, giving you the power to move your business forwards.

4. DOING BUSINESS WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES

As well as grants, some federal agencies also offer opportunities and contracts specifically to veterans and veteran-owned businesses. The Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization advocates on behalf of small businesses, including service-disabled and veteran-owned organizations, to ensure that they have access to contracting and subcontracting opportunities with various federal agencies. You can find out more about how to do business with individual agencies through the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

Similarly, the [Vets First Verification Program](#) gives verified veteran-owned businesses and service-disabled veterans the chance to compete for contracts that have been specifically set aside. You can find out more about your eligibility and the verification process on their website.



5. FRANCHISING OPPORTUNITIES

The world of franchising is yet another industry that is increasingly proactive about providing business opportunities for returning servicemen and women. Again, the skills, competencies and character traits that you have honed in the military make you an attractive asset to a franchise, and well-suited to the responsibility and discipline required. You get the benefit of inheriting a proven business model, with plenty of training and support, while also being allowed the independence and authority to make meaningful decisions.

Every industry offers its own franchise opportunities, but veterans are particularly well represented in certain areas, including:

- Automotive
- Child Education
- Fitness
- Food
- Home Services
- Security
- Sports
- Training

[VetFran](#) is an International Franchise Association (IFA) initiative that aims to make you aware of the many franchising opportunities open to veterans, connect you with franchisors, and provide valuable resources to support you in taking this step. Franchisors who join VetFran offer veterans a 10% discount off initial franchise fees in order to make this an even more accessible option.

You can browse and search franchise opportunities specifically aimed at veterans through [Franchise Direct](#) and find something that matches your skills, passion and lifestyle.

6. RESOURCES & SUPPORT FOR VETERANS IN BUSINESS

As a veteran, you have the advantage of a wealth of available resources and support services that are tailored to you. As someone who has faithfully served our country, many organizations and government agencies are only too willing to give something back. You can start with your nearest [Veteran's Business Outreach Center](#) (19 locations nationwide), the [Veteran Entrepreneur Portal](#) and the [Veteran Fast Launch Initiative](#).

Whether its education and training, business consulting, networking opportunities, counseling or mentoring, the key is to utilize every resource and make the most of the support that's out there:

- The SBA's [Boots to Business program](#) is a three-part education and training program for anyone affiliated with the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force or Coast Guard. This program is currently available at over 165 military installations around the globe, and in 2014 alone it was responsible for training or counseling over 100,000 veterans and service-disabled small business owners.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' [Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment \(V&RE\) program](#) offers services to veterans who are starting their own businesses, as well as personalized career counseling and support.
- The HCC's [Veteran Entrepreneurship Training \(VET\) program](#) provides expert training and guidance on how to launch and sustain your small business, direct from successful entrepreneurs. You also benefit from access to investors and community business leaders, and invaluable networking opportunities.
- [Score](#) is a nationwide association of volunteer business counselors, offering free business mentoring and training. As well as webinars, courses and face-to-face events, you can get paired up with a mentor for personal support in all areas of starting and growing your business.
- [Veterans Business Network \(VBN\)](#) is an association of veteran business owners, executives and entrepreneurs and supports veterans who are making the move into business. On a mission to become the largest veteran-owned business database in the U.S, it's an excellent source of connection and networking opportunities.

Don't under-estimate the value of support, counseling and personal mentoring. Success in business is about more than just having the right skills and expertise to get the job done. Connecting with other veterans who have made the transition from military to business is a great way to boost your confidence, learn valuable lessons, and maintain a healthy perspective. A mentor can help you to clarify your ideas and business plan, make informed decisions, and even access the right funding to make it happen.

The bottom line is that, as a veteran in business, the odds are behind you and the opportunities are plentiful. You have an integral role to play in the economy of our country, and in society, and there is much to be gained along the way. In 2007, veteran-owned businesses showcased sales of \$1.22 trillion, with an annual payroll of \$210 billion. With the right approach, resources and support, you can be a part of that.

After the sacrifices you've made for our country, it's only right that we do everything we can to help you succeed in your dream business venture. Whether you're looking for financial services, advice or [small business resources](#), [get in touch today](#) and we'll help you take the next step.





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