

BUSINESS PLAN

The AI Shortlist

Blog Business · Nashville, Tennessee

PREPARED BY

Ethan Cole

LOCATION

Nashville, Tennessee,
United States

CONTACT

hello@theaishortlist.example
(555) 010-4820



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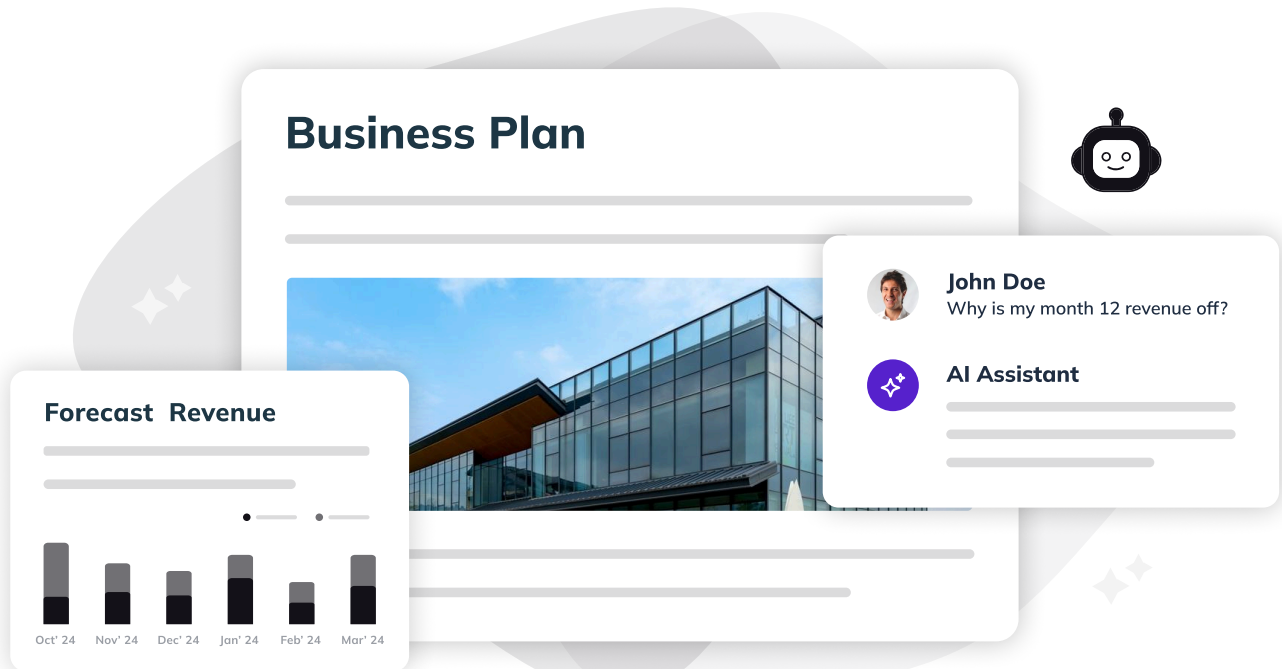
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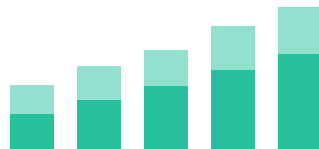
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Executive Summary

- 1.1 Business Overview
- 1.2 Mission Statement
- 1.3 Market Opportunity
- 1.4 Unique Selling Points
- 1.5 Financial Highlights
- 1.6 Funding Requirement

1.1 Business Overview

The AI Shortlist is an independent technology blog run by its founder, Ethan Cole, from a home office in Nashville, Tennessee. It tests AI tools on real work, reviews and compares the software small businesses run on, explains the week's AI news in plain English, and publishes practical technology guides.

Its readers are small business owners, freelancers and working professionals across the United States who want to use AI and software well without a technical background. Everything is free to read. The blog earns from software affiliate commissions, display advertising, sponsored reviews and newsletter placements, a paid Pro membership and digital guides.



1.2 Mission Statement

To cut the noise around AI and software down to a short list of tools that actually work, tested on real tasks and explained so that a busy owner can choose with confidence and get back to running the business.

1.3 Market Opportunity

The AI Shortlist is written in Nashville, but its readers are wherever someone searches for a tool or opens the newsletter, so the market is national. The money a blog sells into is brand spending on independent creators: US creator economy ad spend reached \$37.0 billion in 2025, up 26% from \$29.5 billion in 2024. The part brands pay creators directly for sponsored content, US influencer marketing spending, is \$10.52 billion.

Technology is a strong subject for that money. Software companies pay publishers 20% to 30% of a subscription in recurring affiliate commissions, and search demand for AI and software is large: "ai news" alone draws 287,000 US searches a month. At the scale of one business, a comparable technology news and tutorial site earned about \$17,280 a year in profit when it was sold.

1.4 Unique Selling Points

- Every tool is used for at least two weeks on a real task, from a paid account, before it is reviewed.
- Reviews are scored on the same five criteria every time: setup time, output quality, price, data handling and support.
- Written for owners and professionals, not engineers: what a tool does, what it costs, and whether a small team needs it.
- One weekly newsletter turns the week's AI news into three things worth knowing and one tool worth trying.

- Sponsors can buy a placement but never a score; every paid relationship is disclosed beside the link.

1.5 Financial Highlights

Revenue is projected at \$48,128 in the first year, \$56,792 in the second and \$67,014 in the third. Gross margin holds at 82.0% throughout, because the main cost of a review is the software subscription and the editing that go into it. Net income is \$4,711 in the first year, rising to \$6,732 and then \$9,116, a net margin of 13.6% by the third year.

Break-even revenue is \$37,307, which the blog passes in its first year as traffic builds toward its run rate. Under a conservative scenario, third-year net income is \$5,915; under an upside scenario it reaches \$13,440.

1.6 Funding Requirement

The startup budget is \$14,550, and the founder is putting in \$26,000 of his own savings. There is no loan and no outside equity, and profit stays in the business through the projection to pay for more reviews, video and a second writer.

The money buys the laptop and monitor, the microphone, camera and lighting for tutorials, a first year of paid plans for the tools reviewed at launch, the website and its membership setup, and about 40 edited launch articles. What is left carries the blog through the 50 days before the first affiliate, ad and sponsor payments arrive.

The AI Shortlist rests on hands-on testing, a clear focus on the owners and professionals that larger tech publishers write past, and a cost base low enough to clear break-even in its first year. It is aimed at the readers searching every day for the right tool, and the founder's own savings are what put the first reviews in front of them.

1.6.1 Income Statement (3 Year projections)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Revenue	\$48,128.40	\$56,791.51	\$67,013.98	\$171,933.89
Cost of Sales	\$8,663.11	\$10,222.47	\$12,062.52	\$30,948.10
Gross Margin	\$39,465.29	\$46,569.04	\$54,951.46	\$140,985.79
Operating Expense	\$30,592.00	\$34,910.57	\$40,006.47	\$105,509.04
Total Expense	\$43,417.40	\$50,059.68	\$57,897.56	\$151,374.64
Net Income	\$4,711.00	\$6,731.83	\$9,116.42	\$20,559.25



Get your executive summary and whole plan with AI

Create yours now →

Company Overview

2.1 Legal Structure

2.2 Vision Statement

2.3 Background & History

2.4 Future Goals

2.1 Legal Structure

The AI Shortlist will be formed as a single-member limited liability company in Tennessee. An LLC keeps the founder's personal assets apart from the business, which matters for a publisher that signs affiliate and sponsorship agreements with software companies and publishes recommendations that readers buy on. Formation costs \$300 with the Tennessee Secretary of State, the annual report costs the same, and the company registers for Tennessee franchise and excise taxes. Because the blog is written and recorded at home, it also holds a Metro Nashville home occupation permit.

Affiliate agreements, sponsorship contracts, the membership terms and the site's privacy policy are all issued in the company's name, so a commission or a sponsor dispute never touches the founder personally.

2.2 Vision Statement

To become the first place a small business owner checks before paying for an AI tool or a piece of software: trusted because every recommendation was tested on real work, and useful because it says plainly what a small team can skip.

2.3 Background & History

The AI Shortlist is the founder's plan rather than an operating business. Ethan Cole spent seven years as an IT and software consultant to small businesses in Nashville, setting up CRMs, accounting systems and, more recently, AI tools for dental practices, law firms and retailers. The question he heard most never changed: which of these tools is actually worth paying for, and which is a demo that falls apart on a real day's work.

The blog is his answer to that question, written for the owners he used to advise. He intends to launch it in March 2027 with about 40 reviews, comparisons and guides already tested and published, so a reader who arrives from search finds a library rather than a single post.

Before launch he is spending the autumn of 2026 building the testing scorecard, the review and comparison templates and the newsletter format, and applying to the affiliate programs of the tools he already uses with clients. The work is done first because readers judge a review site on its first recommendation, and one bad one is remembered.

2.4 Future Goals

In the first 0 to 18 months, the goal is a working publishing rhythm and a first audience: three new articles a week across the four content pillars, a library of about 200 pieces, approval from the main software affiliate programs, a managed ad network's entry program, a newsletter list of 10,000 readers and the first sponsored reviews. By the end of that period the blog should reach its run rate of 70,000 monthly sessions and 150 paying Pro members at \$9 a month.

Over 1 to 3 years, which the financial projection covers, the aim is to grow revenue from \$48,128 in the first year to \$67,014 in the third while keeping gross margin at 82.0%. A part-time freelance writer joins in the second year to cover AI news and tutorials, and the first digital guide, a playbook for putting AI to

work in a small business, launches the same year.

Over 3 to 5 years, the blog moves to a full managed ad network, adds paid workshops for members, and builds its newsletter into a sponsorship business of its own.

2.4.1 Business Owners

Ethan Cole

Total ownership: 100%

100%

Ethan Cole
10,000 Shares

2.4.2 SMART Goal



Specific

- Ethan Cole takes the blog to its run rate within a year of launch.
- Three tested articles and one newsletter a week.
- Pro and the first sponsors open in year one.



Measurable

- 70,000 monthly sessions by the end of year one.
- A newsletter list of 10,000 readers and 150 paying Pro members.
- 2 sponsored placements a month at about \$1,000.



Achievable

- Seven years of software consulting supply the skills.
- About 40 launch articles are tested before go-live.
- Freelance editing keeps video from slowing publishing.



Relevant

- Owners choose new AI tools every month.
- Brand spending on creators keeps growing.
- Pro lessens reliance on search traffic.



Time-Based

- Company and office ready by November 2026.
- Site live with 40 articles in March 2027.
- Run rate and 150 members by March 2028.

Market Analysis

3.1 Overview

3.2 Market Segmentation

3.3 Market Trends

3.4 Market Size

3.1 Overview

A blog is paid for two things: attention, which brands buy through advertising and sponsorship, and trust, which readers and software companies pay for through memberships and affiliate commissions. Both pools are growing. US internet advertising revenue reached \$294.6 billion in 2025, up 13.9% from \$258.6 billion in 2024, led by social media and digital video.

Inside that total, the money aimed at independent creators is growing fastest. US creator economy ad spend more than doubled from \$13.9 billion in 2021 to \$29.5 billion in 2024 and grew 26% in 2025, about four times the 5.7% growth of the media industry overall. Software and AI companies are among the most active buyers, because a trusted review reaches people who are about to choose a tool.

3.2 Market Segmentation

A technology blog earns from four buyers, each paying for something different:

- Software and AI companies paying affiliate commissions on readers who sign up through a review, often a share of the subscription for months.
- Brands buying sponsored reviews and newsletter placements directly from creators, which US influencer marketing spending puts at \$10.52 billion in 2025.
- Advertisers buying display space through managed ad networks, paid per thousand sessions. Raptive alone represents more than 7,000 publishers and creators.
- Readers paying for an ad free site, a prompt library, templates and member deep dives.

Readers split by what they come for. News readers arrive in large numbers but are least likely to buy; readers of a software comparison arrive in smaller numbers at the moment of choosing a tool, which is why reviews earn most of the commission income.

3.3 Market Trends

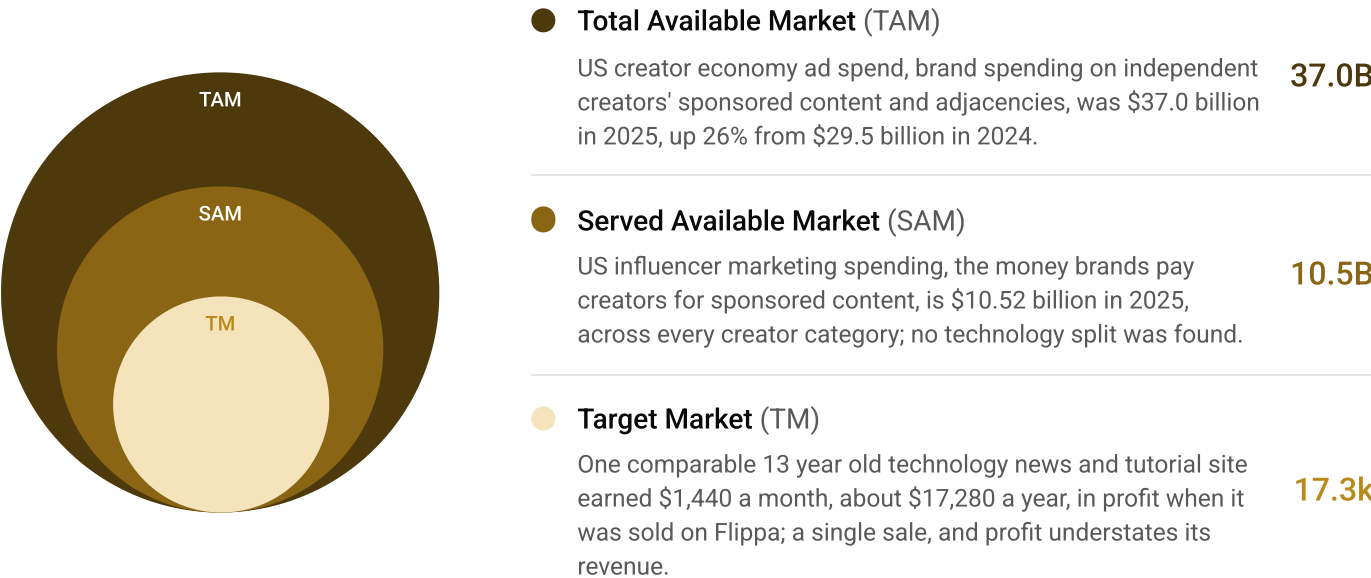
- AI summaries are taking clicks. Users clicked a traditional search result on 8% of Google visits that carried an AI summary, against 15% without one, and an AI Overview cut the top result's click-through rate by 34.5% on average.
- Newsletters have become the main channel for AI news. The Rundown AI reached a list of more than 1 million readers in February 2025, and Duple's six technology newsletters reach more than 900,000 readers, most of them in the US.
- Buyers check reviews before they buy software. G2 holds more than 3 million verified reviews across more than 200,000 products.
- Creator spending keeps outpacing the media market, so brands are moving budget toward independent voices their buyers already trust.

3.4 Market Size

The total addressable market is US creator economy ad spend, \$37,000,000,000 in 2025. No published revenue total exists for blogs as a category, so this is the closest sourced measure of the money an independent publisher competes for.

The serviceable market is the part brands pay creators directly for sponsored content, US influencer marketing spending of \$10,520,000,000 in 2025. It covers every creator category, since no technology split could be found, and it is the pool The AI Shortlist's sponsored reviews and newsletter placements are sold into.

The obtainable market is set at the scale of one business: \$17,280, the annual profit of one comparable 13 year old technology news and tutorial site when it was sold. It is a single sale, not an average, and profit understates that site's revenue. The plan's first-year revenue of \$48,128 is not comparable to it directly, because The AI Shortlist adds software affiliate income, sponsorships and a membership to the advertising that site relied on.



3.4.1 PESTEL Analysis



Political

- Tennessee levies no state tax on wage income, though the LLC owes franchise and excise taxes.
- Federal and state AI policy debates shape which tools launch and how they handle data.
- Privacy rules govern how the newsletter and the site collect reader data.



Economic

- Small businesses trim software spending in a downturn, which slows new sign-ups and commissions.
- Advertising budgets fall every January and in any recession, moving display income month to month.
- AI startups spend heavily on marketing while funding is plentiful, which lifts sponsorship demand.



Social

- Owners feel pressure to use AI but distrust hype, which raises the value of tested reviews.
- Professionals increasingly follow news through newsletters and LinkedIn rather than news sites.
- Remote and freelance work keeps growing the market for productivity software.



Technological

- AI summaries in search answer part of software queries before a reader clicks through.
- AI tools change monthly, so reviews must be retested or they go out of date.
- AI writing tools let rivals publish faster, which makes hands-on testing the point of difference.



Environmental

- A home office and remote team keep the blog's footprint small.
- Readers increasingly ask about the energy use of AI tools, a subject reviews can address.
- Test devices are kept and reused rather than replaced every year.



Legal

- The FTC's Endorsement Guides require clear disclosure of every sponsored review and affiliate link.
- Screenshots and product names are used under fair use for review, never implying endorsement.
- Affiliate and sponsorship agreements must set terms for commissions, content and payment in writing.



Research your market size and trends in one place

See how it works →

Customer Analysis

4.1 Target Market

4.2 Customer Segments

4.3 Customer Persona

4.4 Customer Purchase Journey

4.1 Target Market

The AI Shortlist serves two customers. The first is the reader: a small business owner, freelancer or working professional in the United States who has heard that AI should save them time, has tried a tool or two, and does not have an IT department to ask which one to pay for. They want a straight answer, tested on the kind of work they do, in the time it takes to read one article.

The second is the software company: AI startups and established software vendors that want their product in front of people about to choose a tool. They pay commissions on the readers who sign up and pay for sponsored reviews and newsletter placements, so the blog has to serve the reader first for any of them to buy.

The reader's need repeats. New AI tools launch every week and existing software keeps changing its prices and features, so a reader who finds one source they trust tends to come back to it rather than start a new search each time. The blog and the newsletter are built for that habit.

Both customers are national. A reader in Ohio and a software company in California are equally within reach, which is why the market is set by what readers search for and subscribe to rather than by where the blog is written.

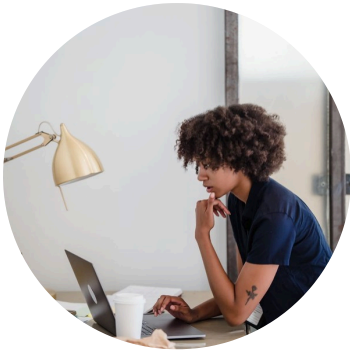
4.2 Customer Segments

- **Small business owners:** the core group. They read software comparisons when they are about to buy, and their sign-ups earn most of the affiliate income.
- **Freelancers and solo professionals:** writers, designers, consultants and bookkeepers who want AI to save them hours each week. They read tutorials and are the likeliest to buy the Pro membership for its prompt library and templates.
- **Curious professionals:** employees who follow AI news to keep up at work. They are the newsletter's largest group and the audience sponsors pay to reach.
- **Software and AI companies:** the business customer, paying commissions, sponsored reviews and newsletter placements, usually around a launch or a new feature.

Each segment needs a different page. Owners want a verdict and a price, freelancers want the steps, and curious professionals want the news in five minutes. The four content pillars are built around those three needs, so every article is written for one segment rather than for all of them at once.

The segments move into one another. A curious professional who starts a side business becomes a buyer of software, and a freelancer who saves an hour with one tutorial becomes a likely member. The marketing follows that path: news and search bring the first visit, the newsletter turns visitors into regulars, and the templates turn regulars into members.

4.3 Customer Persona



"Every week someone tells me about a new AI tool. I don't have time to try them all. I just need to know which one is worth paying for."



Identifiers / Personality Traits

- Pays for six or seven software subscriptions and suspects some are wasted
- Reads newsletters on her phone between client calls
- Follows small business owners and AI commentators on LinkedIn

Dana, the Small Agency Owner

Demographics

Age: 41

Status: Married, one child

Location: Raleigh, NC

Income: \$95,000 personal

Professional Role

Education: Bachelor's degree in Marketing

Job: Owner of a four-person marketing agency



Goals

- Save her team hours each week on proposals and reports
- Pay only for tools the team will actually use
- Keep up with AI without spending her evenings on it



Challenges

- Reviews that read like adverts and never show real work
- Prices that change once the trial ends
- Not knowing what a tool does with client data

4.4 Customer Purchase Journey

A reader's journey usually starts with a problem at work: too many hours spent on proposals, or a CRM nobody uses. Because AI summaries now answer part of a search on the results page, and users click a result on 8% of visits that carry one against 15% without, the first visit has to earn the second.

- **Discover:** a search for a comparison, a LinkedIn post or the newsletter brings the reader to one review or tutorial.
- **Decide:** the review's scorecard and its plain verdict on who should and should not buy help the reader choose, often through the review's affiliate link.
- **Return:** the weekly newsletter keeps the reader up to date on AI news and on changes to the tools they use.
- **Commit:** after several weeks of the newsletter, readers who use AI daily join Pro for the prompt library, templates and deep dives.

A software company's journey is shorter and more deliberate. It finds the blog through its reviews or the media kit linked on the advertise page, sends a brief, agrees the placement and fee in a written contract, and receives a performance report thirty days later. Repeat bookings come from that report.

Competitive Analysis

5.1 Competitors

5.2 Comparison

5.3 Competitive Edge

5.4 SWOT Analysis

5.1 Competitors

The AI Shortlist competes for the same reader attention as four kinds of rival, each strong at something the blog does not try to match.

- **AI newsletters:** daily newsletters with very large lists. The Rundown AI reached a list of more than 1 million readers in February 2025. They are fast on news but rarely test a tool on a real task.
- **Large technology publishers:** news sites and review sections with big newsrooms and strong search positions, written mostly for consumers and enthusiasts rather than small business buyers.
- **Software review platforms:** marketplaces built on user reviews, with G2 holding more than 3 million verified reviews across more than 200,000 products. They are broad and crowdsourced rather than tested by one hand.
- **Creator videos and search itself:** short tutorials on video platforms, and AI summaries that now answer part of a software question on the results page.

5.2 Comparison

The comparison below sets The AI Shortlist against those groups on what a small business reader actually notices. The newsletters win on speed and the platforms on breadth; where they fall short is the narrow promise this blog makes, that every recommendation was tested on real work by someone who has set these tools up for small businesses.

Feature	The AI Shortlist	AI newsletters	Large tech publishers	Software review platforms
Every tool tested on a real task before review	✓	✗	✓	✗
Written for small business buyers	✓	✗	✗	✓
Free to read	✓	✓	✗	✓
Weekly plain-English AI news	✓	✓	✓	✗
Prompt library and templates for members	✓	✗	✗	✗

5.3 Competitive Edge

The edge is focus and method. A one-founder blog cannot out-report a newsroom or out-review a platform with millions of reviews, so it competes on a promise it can keep on every page: tools tested on real tasks, scored the same way every time, and judged for a small team rather than an enterprise. Seven years of setting up software for small businesses is what makes that judgment credible.

Independence is the other half. Sponsors can buy a placement but never a score, and every paid link is disclosed where the reader sees it. That costs some sponsorship income and is what makes the reviews worth reading, which is what the commissions depend on.



Tested On Real Work

Every tool is used for two weeks on a real task from a paid account, so verdicts hold up on a reader's own workload.



Built For Small Teams

Seven years of setting up software for small businesses shapes every review around what a team of five actually needs.



Scores Sponsors Cannot Buy

Placements are for sale and scores are not, and every paid link is disclosed where the reader sees it.



Recurring Income From Reviews

Software affiliate programs pay a share of each subscription for months, so a good review keeps earning after it is published.

5.4 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Every tool is tested for two weeks on a real task, so verdicts hold for readers.
- Seven years of small business software consulting gives the reviews credibility.
- Software affiliate programs pay recurring commissions, so good reviews keep earning.
- No rent and a gross margin of 82.0% keep the blog profitable on modest traffic.

Weaknesses

- One founder tests, writes and sells, so a busy month slows publishing.
- A new domain starts with almost no search authority against established publishers.
- Sponsorship income depends on audience figures the blog will not have in its first months.

Opportunities

- New AI tools launch every week, so demand for tested reviews keeps renewing.
- Brand spending on creators is growing far faster than the media market as a whole.
- Templates, prompts and guides turn the tested archive into higher value products.
- LinkedIn and newsletters reach owners who never start from a search engine.

Threats

- AI summaries on search results answer part of a software query before the reader clicks through.
- Large AI newsletters and publishers compete for the same readers and sponsors.
- A software company can cut its commission rate or close its affiliate program.

✦ Strategic Summary

The blog should grow the newsletter and Pro as fast as its search traffic, so tested reviews earn from readers it owns rather than clicks it rents.



Generate your SWOT analysis free in minutes

Try it now →

Products & Services

6.1 Our Offering

6.2 Signature Items

6.3 Additional Services

6.4 What Sets Us Apart

6.5 Content Pillars

6.1 Our Offering



The AI Shortlist publishes for readers in two forms. The free site carries tested AI tool reviews, software comparisons, tutorials and a weekly AI news roundup, paid for by affiliate commissions, advertising and sponsorships. The Pro membership, at \$9 a month, adds a prompt library, workflow templates, member deep dives and an ad free site for readers who use AI every day.

To software companies it sells sponsored reviews and newsletter placements. Every line earns from the same testing: a review written once earns

commissions when readers sign up, advertising when they read it, and material for the newsletter, the templates and the guides.

6.2 Signature Items

Every review follows the same format, so a reader always knows where to look: a one-line verdict at the top, who should and should not buy, the five-point scorecard, the real price after the trial ends, screenshots from a working account, and two alternatives for readers the tool does not suit. The pieces that carry the blog are head-to-head comparisons such as the main ChatGPT alternatives or the CRMs that suit a team of five, "best for" shortlists by job, and step-by-step tutorials that take a reader from sign-up to a finished piece of work.

6.3 Additional Services

- **Sponsored reviews and newsletter placements:** a clearly labelled review or a sponsor slot in the weekly newsletter, at an average of \$1,000 a placement.
- **Digital guides:** a practical playbook for putting AI to work in a small business, launching in the second year.
- **Tools page:** the software the founder uses and recommends, linked through affiliate programs and disclosed on every page.

6.4 What Sets Us Apart

Every tool is used for at least two weeks on a real task from a paid account, never a demo, and every review is retested every six months or sooner when a tool changes its pricing. Reviews say what a tool costs after the trial, what it does with a reader's data, and when a small team simply does not need it.

The writing is for people who run businesses, not for engineers: short sections, screenshots at each step, and the verdict first, so a reader can decide in two minutes and read on only if they want the detail.

6.5 Content Pillars

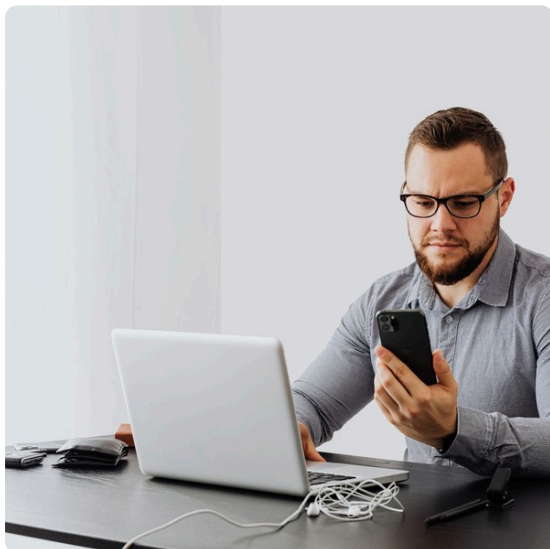
The blog publishes on four pillars, each chosen for the reader it brings and the revenue it earns:

- **AI Tools:** hands-on tests and tutorials of AI assistants, writing, image, meeting and automation tools. The fastest growing searches, and the source of the prompt library.
- **Software Reviews:** comparisons of the software small businesses run on, from CRM and project management to accounting, password managers and website builders. The pillar that earns most of the affiliate income.
- **AI News:** a plain-English weekly roundup of what changed and what it means for a small business. The pillar that builds the newsletter and sells sponsor slots.
- **Tech Explainers & How-To:** guides to the basics, from securing accounts to choosing a laptop for work. Steady search traffic that sends new readers into the reviews.

Three new pieces go up each week, spread across the pillars, and one older review is retested and updated, so the archive stays accurate as tools change rather than ageing behind the new work.

6.5.1 Reviews, Tutorials & AI News

A free library of tested AI tool reviews, software comparisons, step-by-step tutorials and a weekly plain-English AI news roundup. Every tool is used for at least two weeks on a real task before it is reviewed.



Free to read

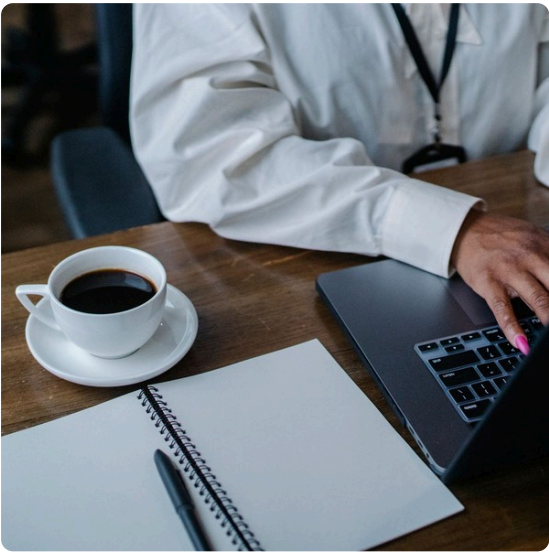
Readers never pay to read the site. Software affiliate commissions, display advertising and sponsored placements pay for the testing, and none of them can buy a score, so a reader gets the same verdict whether a tool pays a commission or not. That independence is what makes the reviews worth reading and the links worth clicking.

Specifications

- Three new articles published each week
- A five-point scorecard and the post-trial price on every review
- Screenshots from a working account at each step
- Reviews retested every six months

6.5.2 Shortlist Pro Membership

A paid membership for readers who use AI at work every day. Members get a prompt library, workflow templates, a monthly deep dive on one workflow and an ad free site.



From \$9 per month

Priced below a single AI tool subscription, so the membership pays for itself the first week a member uses one template at work. The annual plan, at \$90, suits members who use it all year, and both plans can be cancelled at any time from the account page.

6.5.3 Features



Two-Week Real-Task Tests
Every tool is used on real work from a paid account before it is reviewed.



Five-Point Scorecard
Setup time, output quality, price, data handling and support, scored the same way every time.



Real Prices
Each review states what a tool costs after the free trial ends.



Weekly AI News
The week's changes in AI explained for small business owners in one newsletter.

6.5.4 Pricing

Free Reader \$0 per month • Every review and tutorial • Weekly AI news newsletter • Starter prompt pack	Most Popular Pro \$9 per month • Full prompt library • Workflow templates • Monthly member deep dive • Ad free site	Pro Annual \$90 per year • Everything in Pro • Workshop recordings • Early access to guides
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Marketing & Sales Strategies

7.1 Market Positioning

7.2 Marketing Objectives

7.3 Online Marketing

7.4 Public Relations and Branding

7.5 Partnership & Collaboration Strategy

7.6 Customer Loyalty & Retention

7.7 Sales Channels

7.1 Market Positioning

The AI Shortlist is positioned as the technology blog for people who run small businesses: more tested than the AI newsletters, more focused than the large technology publishers, and more personal than the review platforms.

That position follows from where the rivals stop. The newsletters are fast but rarely test a tool, the publishers write mostly for consumers and enthusiasts, and the review platforms collect opinions rather than testing by one hand. The blog takes the space between them, a single tested verdict written for a small team, and every page, newsletter and sponsorship is built to protect that promise.



7.2 Marketing Objectives

- Reach 70,000 monthly sessions by the end of the first year, as the launch library and the weekly articles are indexed.
- Build a newsletter list of 10,000 readers, the base the Pro membership and sponsorship sales both depend on.
- Sign 150 paying Pro members at \$9 a month.
- Sell an average of 2 sponsored reviews or newsletter placements a month to software and AI companies.

Each objective is reviewed monthly against what the analytics, the email platform and the affiliate dashboards report, and the publishing calendar is adjusted toward whatever is moving the nearest target.

Newsletter Referral Rewards

\$85

per month

Rewards readers who bring a colleague onto the newsletter list.

Newsletter Cross-Promotions

\$72

per month

Paid swaps with newsletters in marketing, freelancing and productivity.

Promoted LinkedIn Posts

\$48

per month

Promotes the takeaways from the strongest reviews to small business owners.

Starter Pack Giveaways

\$36

per month

Design and delivery of the free prompt pack offered for sign-ups.

Total marketing budget: \$2,888 a year, \$241 a month.

7.3 Online Marketing

Search is the foundation, aimed where a new site can rank. News terms belong to large publishers, so the blog targets specific comparisons and how-to questions that a small business owner types when choosing or setting up a tool, with the verdict and the price where the reader expects them.

LinkedIn is the second engine, because that is where owners and professionals talk about work. The founder posts a short takeaway from each review or tutorial, with screenshots, and short screen-recorded videos go to YouTube Shorts and LinkedIn, each pointing back to the full article and the newsletter.

Email is the channel the blog owns outright. Every article offers a free starter pack of prompts in return for an email address, and new readers receive a short welcome series that introduces the four pillars and Pro before the weekly send begins. Search rankings and social reach can change overnight; the list is the audience the blog keeps.

Every review is also built to be found again. Each carries a dated last-tested line, a comparison table updated when prices change, and links to related tutorials, so a reader who arrives for one tool finds the next answer without going back to search.

Paid marketing is small by design. The plan budgets 6.0% of revenue, \$2,888 in the first year or \$241 a month, for newsletter referral rewards, cross-promotions with other newsletters and a few promoted LinkedIn posts. Traffic is earned by the reviews, not bought.

7.4 Public Relations and Branding

The brand is clear and practical: a short list as the mark, a clean layout, screenshots instead of stock images, and writing that sounds like a consultant who has set these tools up before. The founder offers expert commentary on AI for small business to local business media in Nashville and speaks at chamber of commerce and coworking events, where a credited mention brings readers and makes the blog easier for software companies to trust.

Original data is the strongest press asset a small publisher has. Twice a year the blog publishes what it has measured across its tests, such as the real price of AI tools after their free trials or the time each took to set up, which gives journalists and other newsletters a reason to cite it and link to it.

7.5 Partnership & Collaboration Strategy

The most valuable partners are the software and AI companies whose affiliate programs the blog joins, approached with a media kit once it has traffic to show. Alongside them, the founder trades recommendations with other newsletters in neighbouring subjects, such as marketing, freelancing and productivity, which sends readers both ways at no cost.

Software companies with a promising product but little review coverage are approached for a free account to test, never for payment. Those relationships are what later turn into affiliate agreements and sponsorships.

Sponsors are limited to tools the founder would recommend anyway, and no more than one sponsor appears in a week's newsletter. Readers who trust the verdicts are what a sponsor is paying for, so protecting that trust protects the fee.

7.6 Customer Loyalty & Retention

A reader comes back when the last recommendation worked. Beyond that, the weekly newsletter tells readers when a tool they use changes its price or features, Pro members get new prompts and templates every month and a deep dive on one workflow, and every reader question gets an answer from the founder, which is often what turns a reader into a member. Members who cancel are asked one question about why, so Pro improves where it is losing people.

7.7 Sales Channels

Revenue reaches the blog through four routes, listed below in order of what each is worth at the run rate. Readers pay directly only through Pro and the guides; everything else is paid by software companies and advertisers for the attention the reviews earn.

The channels open in sequence. Affiliate links earn from launch, display advertising starts a few months in, sponsorships and Pro follow once the audience figures and the list can support them, and the first guide joins in the second year.



Software Affiliate Commissions

The largest line, earned when readers sign up through a review, often as a share of the subscription for months, dependent on reviews that rank and convert.



Sponsored Reviews & Placements

Labelled reviews and newsletter slots sold directly to software and AI companies, dependent on audience figures and the media kit.



Display Advertising

Earned on every page read through a managed ad network, dependent on traffic and the season's ad rates.



Pro Memberships & Guides

Monthly and annual memberships and digital guides paid by card on the site, dependent on the newsletter list converting.



Write a marketing and sales strategy for your business

Start writing →

Operations Plan

8.1 Daily Operations

8.2 Staffing & Training

8.3 Location and Facilities

8.4 Milestones & Timeline

8.5 Ad Network & Sponsorship Management

8.1 Daily Operations

The week follows a fixed rhythm so that three articles and a newsletter go out every week without a scramble:

- **Monday:** read the week's AI news, plan the newsletter and choose the tools to test.
- **Tuesday and Wednesday:** test tools on real tasks, take screenshots, record tutorials and write reviews.
- **Thursday:** send the newsletter, publish the first article and post the LinkedIn takeaways.
- **Friday:** publish the remaining articles, deliver sponsored work, answer reader questions and review the week's traffic and commissions.

Each review moves through the same checklist before it goes live: tested for two weeks, scored, priced after the trial, screenshots captured, edited, disclosures added, links checked and read on a phone.

Each test follows a written protocol: the same three real tasks for its category, timed from sign-up, with the scorecard filled in at the end of each week and screenshots saved to a shared library so the review can be checked later.

Reviews are planned around the software calendar: new AI models and features are tested as they launch, and comparison pieces for accounting and tax software are updated before the start of the year, when small businesses review their tools and affiliate demand peaks.

8.2 Staffing & Training

In the first year the founder runs the blog alone, with video editing bought from a freelance editor by the piece. From the second year a part-time freelance writer covers AI news and tutorials two days a week. Training is the testing standard itself: the writer shadows three full review cycles, then tests independently with the founder checking every scorecard for the first month.

Freelance editing is booked a month ahead in blocks of recordings, which gives the editor predictable work and the blog a dependable turnaround around product launches.

Every task repeated weekly is written down as a checklist, from publishing a review to preparing a sponsor report, so the writer and the editor can take work over without a long handover and the blog keeps publishing through an illness or a holiday.

8.3 Location and Facilities

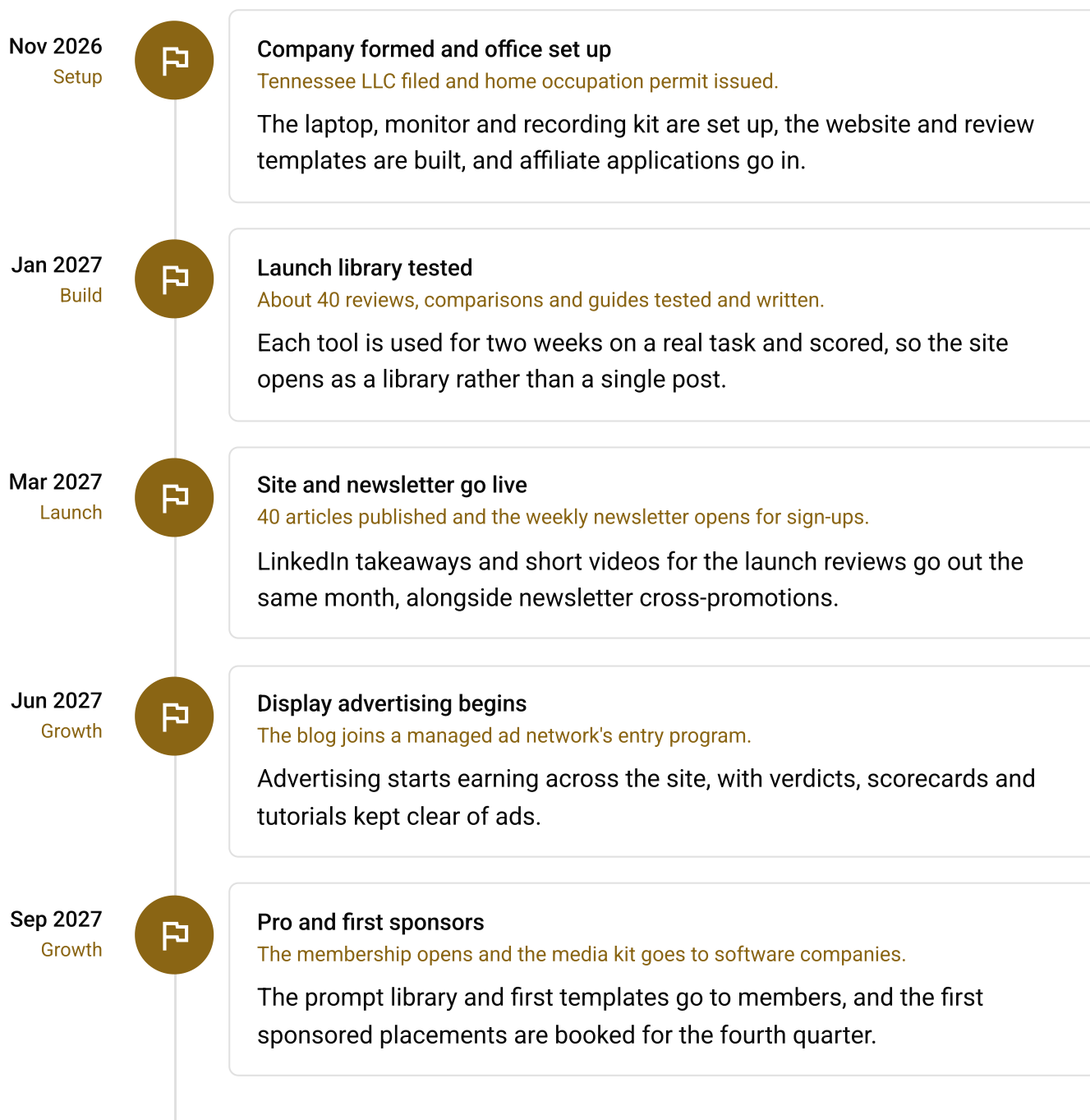
The blog is run from the founder's home office in Nashville under a Metro Codes home occupation permit, which costs \$50. The permit keeps the work inside the home, within 20% of its floor area and 500 square feet, and allows no more than one non-resident employee on site, which fits a blog whose staff work remotely.

The office has a laptop and second monitor for side by side testing, a USB microphone, a webcam and a key light for tutorials, and a quiet corner for recording. The tools are tested on the same ordinary hardware a small business owner uses, so performance claims hold on a reader's machine.

Test accounts are kept apart from the business's own: a dedicated work profile, a password manager for every trial account, and a rule that no real client or reader data is ever loaded into a tool under review.

8.4 Milestones & Timeline

The milestones below run from forming the company to the blog reaching its run rate, a period of about eighteen months. Each stage has a test before the next begins: the launch waits until 40 articles have passed the scorecard, the ad network application waits until traffic meets its threshold, and Pro opens only once the newsletter list can support it.



Mar 2028
Milestone



Run rate reached

About 70,000 monthly sessions and 150 members.

With the library past 200 articles, the freelance writer joins for AI news and tutorials and work on the first digital guide begins.

8.5 Ad Network & Sponsorship Management

Income from brands runs through three systems, each managed to protect the reader's trust as well as the revenue.

- **Affiliate programs:** the blog joins programs directly or through affiliate networks, tracks every link through one link manager, and checks monthly that each program still pays and each link still works. Commission never decides a score.
- **Display advertising:** placed through a managed ad network's entry program as soon as the blog qualifies, with ad density set so that review verdicts, scorecards and tutorials stay clear of ads.
- **Sponsorships:** a quarterly rate card and media kit on an advertise page, a written contract for every placement covering the review or slot, deadlines and payment on net 30 terms, and a performance report thirty days later.
- **Disclosure:** sponsored reviews are labelled at the top and in any video, and affiliate links are disclosed beside the links themselves, as the FTC's Endorsement Guides require.
- **Corrections:** when a vendor changes a price or a feature, the review is updated within a week and the change is noted at the top, so readers and sponsors can see the record.

Pro billing runs through the site's membership plugin and card processor, and the founder reconciles affiliate, ad network, sponsor and membership income against the books each month.

At the end of each month the founder reviews sessions, commissions by program, list growth, members and sponsorship bookings against the plan, and moves the next month's reviews toward the pillars that are earning.

Management Team

9.1 Key Members

9.2 Organization Chart

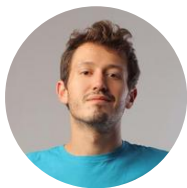
9.3 Advisory Board Members

9.1 Key Members

The founder is accountable for everything a reader or a sponsor sees: the accuracy of every review, the publishing schedule, traffic and revenue. He is measured on monthly sessions, newsletter growth, paying members, affiliate income and sponsorship bookings, reviewed against the plan each month.

The freelance writer is answerable for the AI news roundup and tutorials: every piece tested and sourced, delivered two days before it is due. The freelance editor is measured on turnaround and consistency, with edited tutorials and short videos delivered within 48 hours of each recording.

Because the team is small, each person can cover for another: the founder edits his own videos when a launch needs a same day turnaround, and the writer can draft the newsletter when the founder is on sponsored work.



Ethan Cole

Founder & Lead Reviewer · ethan@theaishortlist.example

Seven years as an IT and software consultant to small businesses in Nashville, setting up CRMs, accounting systems and AI tools for practices, firms and retailers.



Rachel Moore

AI News & Tutorials Writer (freelance, from the second year) · rachel@theaishortlist.example

Technology writer who has covered workplace software for business publications and writes tutorials for non-technical readers.



Alex Turner

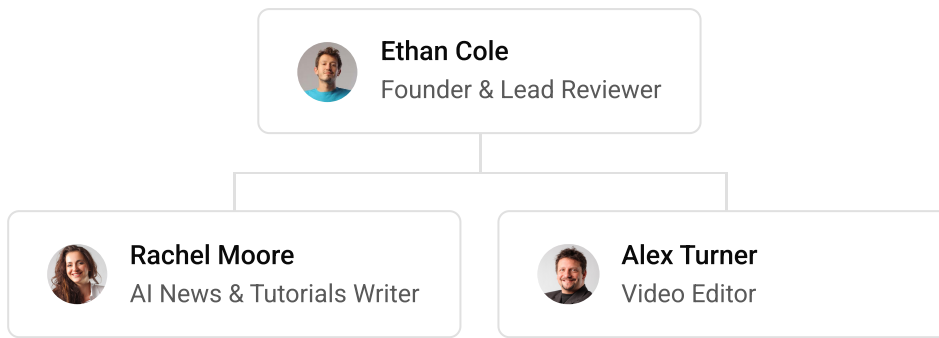
Video Editor (freelance) · alex@theaishortlist.example

Edits screen-recorded tutorials and short vertical video for software companies and creators.

9.2 Organization Chart

The structure is flat. Both team members report directly to the founder, and there is no middle layer: the writer's drafts and the editor's files come straight back to the person who publishes them.

The first role added beyond the chart would be a part-time partnerships and administration assistant, the one position in the hiring plan with no budget yet, reporting to the founder and taking over sponsor scheduling and invoicing.



9.3 Advisory Board Members

There is no formal advisory board at this stage. The founder draws on three informal advisors instead: a certified public accountant who handles Tennessee franchise and excise filings and the year-end accounts, an attorney who reviews the affiliate, sponsorship and membership terms, and a small peer group of independent newsletter writers who meet online each month to compare sponsor rates and growth.

Once the blog reaches its run rate, the founder intends to formalise this into an advisory group of two or three people, adding an experienced technology editor, meeting each quarter to review the publishing plan and the sponsorship pipeline.

9.3.1 Hiring Plan



Group By Department	Position Filled	Time of Hire	Time of Start	Filled
Editorial	1 of 2	45 days	14 days	50%
Video	0 of 1	30 days	7 days	0%
Partnerships & Admin	0 of 1	60 days	14 days	0%

 **Invite your team to edit and review your plan**

Start collaborating →

Financial Plan

10.1 Key Assumptions

10.2 Capital Requirements and Use of Funds

10.3 Income Statement (3 Year projections)

10.4 Balance Sheet (3 Year projections)

10.5 Cash Flow Statement (3 Year projections)

10.6 Break Even Analysis

10.1 Key Assumptions

Revenue is built from four lines: $(\text{Monthly Sessions} \div 1,000 \times \text{Display Ad RPM} + \text{Sponsored Posts} \times \text{Average Sponsorship Fee} + \text{Paid Members} \times \text{Membership Price}) \times (1 + \text{Affiliate \& Product Share}) \times 12$. Each driver is set conservatively for a one-founder blog:

- Traffic of 70,000 monthly sessions at the run rate, earning a display RPM of \$18, toward the low end of the \$15 to \$40 sites earn because technology pays less for display than other subjects.
- 2 sponsored reviews or newsletter placements a month at an average fee of \$1,000.
- 150 paying Pro members at \$9 a month, about 1.5% of a newsletter list of 10,000.
- Software affiliate commissions and digital guides adding 45.0% on top of the three main lines, the line a technology blog is built on.

Revenue starts at 20.0% of the run rate and ramps over 12 months while the library is indexed and affiliate programs approve the site, then grows 18.0% a year. Gross margin is 82.0%. Payroll is 40.0% of revenue, covering the founder's draw and a part-time writer from the second year; marketing is 6.0%; technology costs \$400 a month and administration \$150 a month, with no rent.

On those assumptions revenue is \$48,128 in the first year, \$56,792 in the second and \$67,014 in the third, and net income rises from \$4,711 to \$6,732 and \$9,116. Break-even revenue is \$37,307. Third-year net income is \$5,915 under the conservative scenario and \$13,440 under the upside scenario.

Working capital reflects how the trade is paid: 85.0% of revenue is earned on credit and collected in 50 days on average, while suppliers are paid in 30.

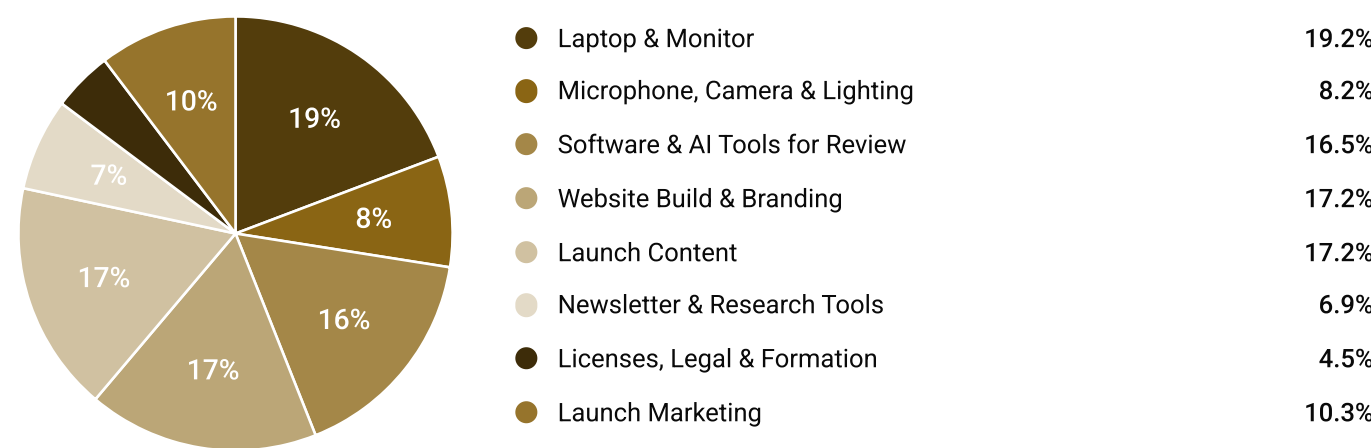
10.2 Capital Requirements and Use of Funds

The total startup cost is \$14,550, funded by an owner contribution of \$26,000 from the founder's savings. There is no loan and no outside equity, and no distributions are taken during the projection.

The largest uses are the laptop and monitor, the website with its membership setup, the launch content and a first year of paid plans for the tools reviewed at launch, followed by the microphone, camera and lighting, launch marketing, the newsletter and research tools, and the formation and legal costs. The contribution above the startup cost stays in the business as cash, because most income is earned on credit and affiliate programs and ad networks pay weeks after the traffic that earns it.

No equipment beyond the startup budget is needed to reach the run rate. Replacing the laptop, microphone and test devices is provided for at 2.0% of revenue each year.

10.2.1 Use of Funds



Use Of Funds	Amount
Laptop & Monitor	\$2,800.00
Microphone, Camera & Lighting	\$1,200.00
Software & AI Tools for Review	\$2,400.00
Website Build & Branding	\$2,500.00
Launch Content	\$2,500.00
Newsletter & Research Tools	\$1,000.00
Licenses, Legal & Formation	\$650.00
Launch Marketing	\$1,500.00

10.3 Income Statement (3 Year projections)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Revenue	\$48,128.40	\$56,791.51	\$67,013.98	\$171,933.89
Cost of Sales	\$8,663.11	\$10,222.47	\$12,062.52	\$30,948.10
General Costs	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Revenue Specific Costs	\$6,064.18	\$7,155.73	\$8,443.76	\$21,663.67
Personnel Costs (Direct Labor)	\$2,598.93	\$3,066.74	\$3,618.76	\$9,284.43
Gross Margin	\$39,465.29	\$46,569.04	\$54,951.46	\$140,985.79
Gross Margin (%)	82.00%	82.00%	82.00%	82.00%
Operating Expense	\$30,592.00	\$34,910.57	\$40,006.47	\$105,509.04
Payroll Expense (Indirect Labor)	\$19,251.36	\$22,716.60	\$26,805.59	\$68,773.55
General Expense	\$10,931.55	\$11,711.24	\$12,631.26	\$35,274.05
Bad Debt	\$409.09	\$482.73	\$569.62	\$1,461.44
Amortization of Current Assets	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
EBITDA	\$8,873.29	\$11,658.47	\$14,944.99	\$35,476.75
Additional Expense	\$4,162.29	\$4,926.64	\$5,828.57	\$14,917.50
Long Term Depreciation	\$2,910.00	\$3,137.17	\$3,405.22	\$9,452.39
Gain or loss from Sale of Assets	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
EBIT	\$5,963.29	\$8,521.30	\$11,539.77	\$26,024.36
Interest Expense	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
EBT	\$5,963.29	\$8,521.30	\$11,539.77	\$26,024.36
Income Tax Expense / Benefit	\$1,252.29	\$1,789.47	\$2,423.35	\$5,465.11
Total Expense	\$43,417.40	\$50,059.68	\$57,897.56	\$151,374.64
Net Income	\$4,711.00	\$6,731.83	\$9,116.42	\$20,559.25
Net Income (%)	9.79%	11.85%	13.60%	11.96%
Retained Earning Opening	\$0.00	\$4,711.00	\$11,442.83	
Owner's Distribution	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Retained Earning Closing	\$4,711.00	\$11,442.83	\$20,559.25	\$20,559.25

10.4 Balance Sheet (3 Year projections)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Assets	\$31,423.04	\$38,283.03	\$47,550.69	\$47,550.69
Current Assets	\$19,783.04	\$28,644.37	\$39,976.97	\$39,976.97
Cash	\$14,179.05	\$22,031.66	\$32,173.97	\$32,173.97
Accounts Receivable	\$5,603.99	\$6,612.71	\$7,803.00	\$7,803.00
Inventory	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other Current Assets	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Long Term Assets	\$11,640.00	\$9,638.66	\$7,573.72	\$7,573.72
Gross Long Term Assets	\$14,550.00	\$15,685.83	\$17,026.11	\$17,026.11
Accumulated Depreciation	\$2,910.00	\$6,047.17	\$9,452.39	\$9,452.39
Liabilities & Equity	\$31,423.04	\$38,283.03	\$47,550.69	\$47,550.69
Liabilities	\$712.04	\$840.20	\$991.44	\$991.44
Current Liabilities	\$712.04	\$840.20	\$991.44	\$991.44
Accounts Payable	\$712.04	\$840.20	\$991.44	\$991.44
Income Tax Payable	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Sales Tax Payable	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Short Term Debt	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Long Term Liabilities	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Long Term Debt	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Equity	\$30,711.00	\$37,442.83	\$46,559.25	\$46,559.25
Paid-in Capital	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Common Stock	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Preferred Stock	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Owner's Contribution	\$26,000.00	\$26,000.00	\$26,000.00	\$26,000.00
Retained Earnings	\$4,711.00	\$11,442.83	\$20,559.25	\$20,559.25
Check	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

10.5 Cash Flow Statement (3 Year projections)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Cash Received	\$42,115.32	\$55,300.06	\$65,254.07	\$162,669.45
Cash Paid	\$39,386.27	\$46,311.62	\$53,771.48	\$139,469.37
COS & General Expenses	\$16,283.69	\$18,738.81	\$20,923.78	\$55,946.28
Salary & Wages	\$21,850.29	\$25,783.34	\$30,424.35	\$78,057.98
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Sales Tax	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Income Tax	\$1,252.29	\$1,789.47	\$2,423.35	\$5,465.11
Net Cash From Operations	\$2,729.05	\$8,988.44	\$11,482.59	\$23,200.08
Assets Sell	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Assets Purchase	\$14,550.00	\$1,135.83	\$1,340.28	\$17,026.11
Net Cash From Investments	(\$14,550.00)	(\$1,135.83)	(\$1,340.28)	(\$17,026.11)
Amount Received	\$26,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$26,000.00
Loan Received	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Common Stock	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Preferred Stock	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Owner's Contribution	\$26,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$26,000.00
Amount Paid	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Loan Capital	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Dividends & Distributions	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Net Cash From Financing	\$26,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$26,000.00
Summary				
Starting Cash	\$0.00	\$14,179.05	\$22,031.66	
Cash In	\$68,115.32	\$55,300.06	\$65,254.07	\$188,669.45
Cash Out	\$53,936.27	\$47,447.45	\$55,111.76	\$156,495.48
Change in Cash	\$14,179.05	\$7,852.61	\$10,142.31	\$32,173.97
Ending Cash	\$14,179.05	\$22,031.66	\$32,173.97	\$32,173.97

10.6 Break Even Analysis

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Starting Revenue	\$0.00	\$48,128.40	\$104,919.91	\$104,919.91
Net Revenue	\$48,128.40	\$56,791.51	\$67,013.98	\$67,013.98
Closing Revenue	\$48,128.40	\$104,919.91	\$171,933.89	\$171,933.89
Starting Expense	\$0.00	\$43,417.40	\$93,477.08	\$93,477.08
Net Expense	\$43,417.40	\$50,059.68	\$57,897.56	\$57,897.56
Closing Expense	\$43,417.40	\$93,477.08	\$151,374.64	\$151,374.64
Is Break Even?	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Break Even Month	Nov '26	-	-	
Days Required	11 Days	-	-	
Break Even Revenue	\$41,443.90	-	-	



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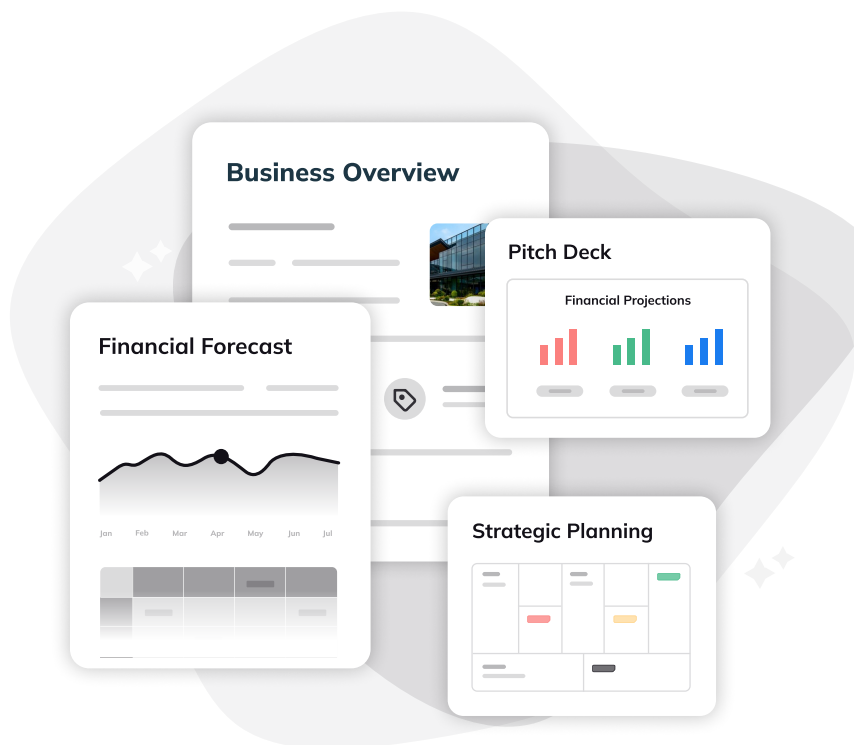
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