

SWOT analysis

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats



SWOT review

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

SWOT analysis guide

Strategic planning is one of the biggest concerns of any business, from long-standing global conglomerates to one-man-bands that have just started up.

Everyone wants to move forward, but finding out where you should go and how you get there – and agreeing with other stakeholders along the way – can be a bit of a headache, to say the least. Having said that, it was a lot harder before SWOT Analysis was developed to help businesses assess their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – SWOT.

Strengths – top strengths or benefits of your business, and how you can protect and enhance them.

Weaknesses – your weaknesses or issues, and how you can minimize them or do better.

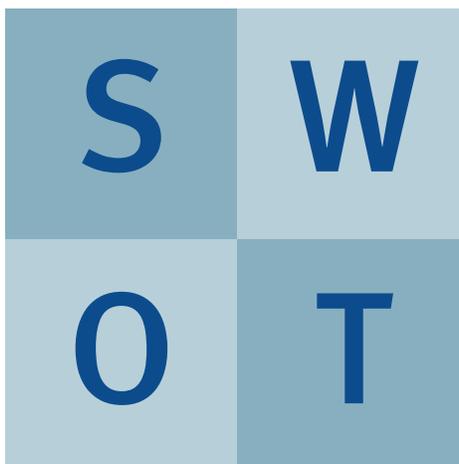
Opportunities – top opportunities for your business and how you can access and take advantage of them.

Threats – your top threats, and how you can minimize them and do better.

Our SWOT template will help you to identify each of these characteristics for your business so that you can better understand what you're doing well, what you could improve, and which external factors could affect your business.

Understanding the SWOT matrix

The concept seems simple, which is one of the reasons it's such an effective tool for business analysis. Each of the four factors are represented in a grid like this:



First, we look at the grid horizontally. The top row – strengths and weaknesses – are internal factors that you have some control over. Strengths might include highly trained and experienced staff, strong brand awareness or a great location. Examples of weaknesses could be quality issues, logistical problems, or poor service standards.

The bottom row represents external factors that are outside your control. For example, a threat might be a competitor trying to lure away your best employees, whereas an opportunity could be a new technology changing how a process is done.

Now it's time to look at the matrix vertically. The first column – strengths and opportunities – are both positive factors. They are helpful. The second column lists the issue's weaknesses and threats, both of which are negative and harmful.

How to use the SWOT template

There are four steps to effectively conducting a SWOT analysis:

1. Define the issue

Clearly identify the issue you're analyzing. Whether you're looking at your business as a whole, assessing a new idea or analyzing a competitor, define it as clearly as you can. The better defined the issue, the better able you'll be in identifying relevant factors.

2. Work the grid

Asses the issue you're analyzing using each of the four criteria. This is not always a linear process and you should feel free to jump around the grid as ideas come to you. For example, as you're listing strengths, you may realise that a serious risk exists that threatens that particular strength.

3. Analyze the results

The idea here is to be brutally honest with yourself. Are there strengths you're not making the most of, opportunities you're missing or weaknesses you're ignoring? Think about each of these factors and how you might take advantage of those that are helpful and fix, mitigate, or eliminate those that are harmful.

4. Rinse and repeat

Run a SWOT analysis on a regular basis, such as each quarter so that you're continually fine tuning your business strategy, or when you're assessing a new idea or need assistance making decisions.

Matching strengths to opportunities

Maximize both strengths and opportunities. For example, match a new market (opportunity) with a brand awareness advantage (strength).

Matching strengths to threats

Minimizing a threat by maximizing a strength. For example, tackling a price-leading market entrant (threat) with a PR campaign highlighting brand trust (strength).

Matching weaknesses to opportunities

Minimize weaknesses and maximize opportunities. For example, improve logistics (weakness) to meet a new market (opportunity).

Matching weaknesses to threats

Minimize weaknesses and threats. For example, a struggling company (with weaknesses) merges with competitor (threat) to survive.

Being able to visualize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of your business and various projects is essential in fine-tuning your strategy, and that's what the SWOT matrix helps you to do.

They're essential for making decisions and exploring new ideas.

