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Print-on-Demand Startup Checklist

Launch Your First POD Business
Step by Step

Designed for:

- ✓ Complete beginners launching their first POD store
- ✓ Sellers on Etsy, Shopify, or any POD-compatible platform
- ✓ Anyone who wants a clear, step-by-step launch roadmap

Works With Any
Platform:

Etsy · Shopify · Printify · Printful · Gelato · Redbubble · and more

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Free Resource · Print-Friendly · Platform-Neutral

Business Setup Checklist

Decisions made here shape every product, listing, and design choice that follows.

■ Choose a Specific Niche

Broad stores compete with everyone. Narrow niches (dog moms, teachers, nurses) compete with fewer — and convert better.

■ Define Your Target Customer

Name them: age, interests, what they buy as gifts, what they wear. Every design decision filters through this person.

■ Research What's Already Selling

Browse bestsellers in your niche on Etsy and Amazon. Understand demand before designing anything.

■ Choose Your Primary Product Type

Start with one or two products: t-shirts, mugs, tote bags, or posters. Master one before expanding.

■ Select a POD Supplier

Evaluate suppliers on print quality, product range, shipping times, and integration with your selling platform.

■ Order Samples Before You Sell

Order at least one product from your supplier before listing. Quality issues discovered after a sale are costly.

■ Create a Seller Account on Your Platform

Etsy, Shopify, Redbubble — wherever you sell, set up your account completely before listing products.

■ Connect Your POD Supplier to Your Store

Most suppliers offer direct integrations. Connect and sync accounts so orders fulfill automatically.

■ Niche Selection Tips

- Good niches have passionate buyers who spend money on identity-driven products.
- Hobbies, professions, pets, and milestone events (weddings, graduations) are proven evergreen niches.
- Avoid niches so broad you can't stand out — 'funny t-shirts' is not a niche.
- Test: could you name 20 designs for this niche right now? If yes, it's specific enough.

■ Supplier Selection Criteria

- Print quality: request samples in your niche's primary colors.
- Shipping speed: check production + shipping times to your target market.
- Product range: confirm they carry the specific items you plan to sell.
- Integration: verify direct connection to your selling platform without manual steps.

Design & Product Checklist

Your designs are your product — these steps ensure they look professional and sell.

■ Create Designs at the Correct File Size

Use your supplier's exact print file specifications. Uploading undersized files produces blurry prints.

■ Use High-Resolution Files (300 DPI Minimum)

300 DPI is the print standard. Files that look sharp on screen may print blurry if they're below this.

■ Check Designs for Spelling and Grammar Errors

Read every word aloud. Spell-check misses wrong words that are spelled correctly. Errors in print cannot be recalled.

■ Test Designs on Multiple Product Colors

A design that looks great on white may disappear on black. Preview every color variant before publishing.

■ Generate Professional Mockups

Use your supplier's built-in mockup generator or a free mockup tool. Real-looking mockups dramatically increase conversions.

■ Preview Mockups at Thumbnail Size

Shrink your mockup to the size it appears in search results. Is the design still visible? If not, make it larger.

■ Write Benefit-Focused Product Descriptions

Lead with what the buyer gets: a laugh, a statement, a gift idea. Follow with material specs and sizing info.

■ Set Pricing That Covers All Costs

Price = supplier base cost + platform fees + desired profit. Don't underprice to compete — compete on design quality.

■ Quick Win

- Order one physical sample of your best design before publishing any listings.
- Photograph it yourself in natural light — real product photos outperform supplier mockups and build immediate buyer trust.
- Use that photo as your listing's hero image alongside your mockups. Buyers who see a real photo convert at a higher rate.
- This single step separates stores that look professional from stores that look like dropshippers.

■ Pricing Formula

- Base cost (supplier) + Platform fee + Shipping buffer + Profit margin = Sale price.
- Never price below your total cost — even by \$0.01.
- Check competitor pricing in your niche, then match or go slightly above if your design quality is stronger.
- A \$22 t-shirt that gets 10 sales beats a \$16 shirt that gets 20 sales — margins matter more than volume.

■ Mockup Best Practices

- Use lifestyle mockups (person wearing the shirt) and flat-lay mockups together.
- Show the design clearly — not at an angle where it distorts or is hard to read.
- Match mockup model style to your target audience where possible.
- Avoid using too many props — the product and design are the focus.

Store Launch Checklist

Before your first listing goes live, every item here needs to be checked.

■ Write SEO-Optimized Listing Titles

Include what the product is, the niche keyword, and a use case. 'Funny Nurse Mug — Gift for Nurses — Coffee Mug' beats 'Nurse Mug.'

■ Add Relevant Tags and Keywords

Use all available tag slots on your platform. Think like a buyer: what would they type to find this product?

■ Upload All Listing Photos

Include at least one lifestyle mockup, one flat-lay mockup, and one size/detail image per listing.

■ Set Accurate Size and Variant Information

Inaccurate size charts and variant descriptions are the #1 cause of returns and negative reviews in POD.

■ Write and Publish Store Policies

POD items typically cannot be returned for fit or preference — state this clearly to prevent disputes.

■ Set Shipping Expectations in Your Listings

Note that items are made to order with a production time. Under-promise and over-deliver on delivery timelines.

■ Create At Least 10 Listings Before Launch

A store with 2–3 listings looks new and unestablished. Launch with at least 10 listings to appear credible.

■ Complete Your Store Profile and About Section

Buyers check who they're buying from. A complete profile with your brand story converts better than a blank one.

■ Common Mistakes

- Generic titles like 'Funny T-Shirt' with no niche keywords — invisible in search.
- Launching with 2–3 listings — buyers don't trust stores with almost nothing in them.
- No stated production time — buyers expect instant shipping and leave negative reviews.
- Copying competitor descriptions — platforms penalize duplicate content in search rankings.
- Not filling in all available tag/keyword slots — leaving visibility on the table.

■ SEO Title Formula

- **Format:** [Design Type] + [Niche] + [Product] + [Use Case or Recipient]
- **Example:** 'Funny Dog Mom Mug — Gift for Dog Lovers — 11oz Coffee Mug'
- Put the most important keyword first — platforms weight the beginning of titles more.
- Avoid keyword stuffing — titles should still read naturally to a human buyer.

First 30 Days Checklist

Your store is live. Now build the habits that separate growing shops from abandoned ones.

- Add at least 3–5 new listings per week during your first month.
- Review listing analytics weekly — which listings get views? Which convert?
- Check for any customer messages or questions and respond within 24 hours.
- Monitor your supplier's production and shipping times for accuracy.
- Read buyer reviews as they come in — use feedback to improve future listings.
- Research trending designs or seasonal opportunities in your niche.
- Test one new product type with a strong design to expand your catalog.
- Review your pricing against new competitors entering your niche.
- Update any listing with zero views after 2 weeks — revise title and tags.
- Identify your top 3 performing listings and create variations of those designs.

■ Top 10 POD Beginner Mistakes

1. Launching with designs in multiple unrelated niches — confuses buyers and algorithms.
2. Skipping the sample order — discovering quality issues after customer complaints.
3. Pricing too low trying to compete — selling more but earning less than minimum wage.
4. Uploading low-resolution design files — blurry prints, negative reviews, refunds.
5. Giving up after 30 days with no sales — most POD stores take 60–120 days to gain traction.
6. Ignoring SEO — titles and tags are your only marketing tool on search-based platforms.
7. Copying existing designs — copyright and trademark violations can shut down your store.
8. Listing on every platform at once — spreading too thin means mastering none.
9. Not stating production/shipping times — buyer expectation mismatches cause disputes.
10. No store branding or profile — anonymous stores lose to any established competitor.

■ Final Quick Reference

- Niche chosen and validated with market research
- POD supplier selected and samples ordered
- Store account fully set up with branding
- Supplier integrated and order fulfillment tested
- All designs at 300 DPI or above
- Spelling and grammar checked on every design
- Mockups generated — lifestyle + flat-lay
- Pricing covers all costs plus profit margin
- 10+ listings live before public launch
- SEO titles and tags completed on all listings
- Store policies published and shipping times stated
- First 30-day review and growth plan in place