

8strategies

WHAT'S NEXT?

Business Resource Guide

Practical Tools, Resources & Recommendations for Navigating What's Next

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to invest in yourself, your vision, and your growth.

Whether you are launching a new business, refining an existing one, or exploring what comes next, success rarely comes from having every answer. More often, it comes from taking the next step, learning along the way, and remaining committed to the journey.

Earlier this year, I found myself at a crossroads. After 25 years in corporate leadership and eight years dedicated to one organization, I was given an opportunity to reimagine what was next for me professionally.

I had a choice: continue investing my energy into someone else's vision or finally pursue a vision of my own.

I chose the latter.

What followed was one of the most challenging, clarifying, and energizing seasons of my life. In a matter of weeks, I launched 8 Strategies establishing the brand, website, templates, systems, and operational infrastructure needed to bring the business to life. Much of it was accomplished using free and low-cost resources that are readily available to anyone willing to learn, adapt, and act.

This guide is a collection of the tools, platforms, and resources that helped me get operational. It is not a theoretical list; it is a practical one shaped by experience. I have personally used nearly everything included in these pages. My hope is that it helps shorten your learning curve, provides clarity where you may feel stuck, and gives you a practical place to begin.



Where Should You Start? *If you're feeling overwhelmed by all the information available to entrepreneurs today, focus on building your foundation first. The sequence matters.*

First 30 Days	Days 30-60	Days 60-90
Register your business	Build your website	Implement a CRM
Obtain your EIN	Create your LinkedIn presence	Begin outreach
Open a business bank account	Develop marketing materials	Build referral relationships
Set up email & phone	Establish your brand presence	Create systems for growth

Focus on progress, not perfection. You do not need to do everything at once. The goal is not to complete every step - it is to identify the next one and take it.

The table has been set. Now let's create momentum.

Greatness awaits!

Ershla Johnson

Founder & Managing Principal
Eight Strategies, LLC

01 BUSINESS SETUP & OPERATIONS



Key Insight: Legal and financial structure is the foundation everything else is built on. Get it right first, and everything that follows is easier.

Georgia Secretary of State

Purpose: Register your business entity (LLC, Corporation, etc.).

Why It Matters: Formal registration establishes your business legally and creates separation between personal and business activities.

Cost: Filing fees apply

Website: <https://ecorp.sos.ga.gov>

IRS EIN Registration

Purpose: Obtain your Employer Identification Number (EIN).

Why It Matters: An EIN is required for business banking, tax reporting, and many vendor relationships. Get this immediately after registering your business.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://www.irs.gov>

Novo

Purpose: Free business checking account built for small businesses and founders.

Why It Matters: Maintaining separate business finances creates professionalism, simplifies accounting, and is essential for tracking income and expenses.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://novo.co>

Bluevine

Purpose: Business banking with interest-bearing checking accounts.

Why It Matters: A strong alternative to Novo with competitive interest rates on your balance — your money works while you work.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://bluevine.com>

02 PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE



Key Insight: **Perception** precedes the relationship. How you show up before the first conversation determines whether that conversation happens at all.

AVS Technologies

Purpose: Managed IT services for small businesses, including Microsoft 365 management, website hosting, remote IT support, hosted business phone services, endpoint security, and virus protection.

Why It Matters: AVS Technologies has been helping small businesses in Atlanta stay productive, secure, and connected since 2001. As a founder, technology problems pull you away from your actual work. Having a dedicated local IT partner means your email, phone, security, and hosting are managed by real people who know your business — not a call center. They offer transparent pricing and no-nonsense guidance, which makes them an ideal partner for entrepreneurs who need reliable support without unnecessary complexity.

Contact: Vernon Harris

Cost: Contact for pricing. Free consultation.

Website: <https://avscomputer.com>

Google Workspace

Purpose: Professional business email, calendar, file storage, and collaboration tools.

Why It Matters: A business email address (yourname@yourbusiness.com) builds credibility and trust. It signals that you are serious.

Cost: Starts at \$6/month

Website: <https://workspace.google.com>

Google Voice

Purpose: Dedicated business phone number at no cost.

Why It Matters: Allows you to maintain professional boundaries without sharing your personal number. I used this before I was ready to commit to a full business line.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://voice.google.com>

Calendly

Purpose: Scheduling and appointment booking tool.

Why It Matters: Eliminates back-and-forth scheduling emails and creates a more professional client experience. Clients can book directly on your calendar.

Cost: Free plan available

Website: <https://calendly.com>

Anytime Mailbox

Purpose: Virtual business address.

Why It Matters: Protects your personal privacy while establishing a professional business presence. Use for business registration, mail, and your website.

Cost: Plans start around \$10/month

Website: <https://anytimemailbox.com>

iPostal1

Purpose: Virtual business address with mail management and access to co-working office space locations nationwide.

Why It Matters: iPostal1 gives you a real street address for your business registration, website, and correspondence — without a physical office. The added option to access co-working spaces means you have a professional place to meet clients on demand, without a long-term lease commitment.

Cost: Plans start around \$9.99/month

Website: <https://ipostal1.com>

03 WEBSITE & BRAND DEVELOPMENT



Key Insight: *Your brand is not your logo—it is the total impression you leave. Invest in it early, own it completely, and position it to grow with you.*

Apple Pie Printing

Purpose: Full-service print shop specializing in booklets, banners, signs, training materials, trade show displays, and branded collateral.

Why It Matters: Apple Pie Printing is an Atlanta-based company that offers fast full-color offset and digital printing for a wide range of needs — from custom booklets and brochures to retractable banners and trade show displays. If you need professional printed materials for an event, client presentation, or brand launch, this is a local, experienced resource that delivers quality on deadline. James is the primary contact. I have been collaborating with him for 18 years.

Contact: James Wiley

Cost: Varies by project

Website: <https://www.applepiebookletprinting.com>

Canva

Purpose: Graphic design and marketing materials for non-designers.

Why It Matters: I used Canva to create my social media graphics, event invitations, presentations, branded documents, and more. Canva Pro unlocks significantly more templates and brand management features — worth the investment.

Cost: Free plan available; Pro at ~\$13/month

Website: <https://www.canva.com>

WordPress

Purpose: Website development platform.

Why It Matters: My website (eightstrategies.com) is built on WordPress. It provides flexibility and scalability to grow with your business. There is a learning curve, but the control and ownership are worth it.

Cost: Free platform; hosting costs vary

Website: <https://wordpress.org>

QR Code Generator

Purpose: Create QR codes for websites, forms, resources, and events.

Why It Matters: I used QR codes throughout my event materials and printed collateral. Simple, free, and professional.

Cost: Free basic plan

Website: <https://www.qr-code-generator.com>

Blinq

Purpose: Digital business card app.

Why It Matters: Share your contact information, social links, and website with a tap or scan. A modern, paperless alternative to traditional business cards that makes a strong impression.

Cost: Free plan available

Website: <https://blinq.me>

04 CRM & LEAD TRACKING



Key Insight: Relationships are your most valuable business asset. A CRM ensures none of them get lost as your business grows.

HubSpot CRM

Purpose: Track leads, prospects, and client conversations in one place.

Why It Matters: HubSpot's free CRM is robust enough to run a small business. I use it to manage my pipeline, track outreach, and keep my contacts organized. It also integrates with Gmail, which makes it seamless.

Cost: Free CRM plan available

Website: <https://www.hubspot.com>

Airtable

Purpose: Flexible project and relationship management.

Why It Matters: Think of it as a smart spreadsheet. Great for tracking clients, projects, content calendars, and anything that needs structure without a rigid format.

Cost: Free plan available

Website: <https://airtable.com>

Trello

Purpose: Visual project management using boards and cards.

Why It Matters: Excellent for tracking tasks, project phases, and team workflows visually. Simple and intuitive — you can be up and running in minutes.

Cost: Free plan available

Website: <https://trello.com>

05 INVOICING & PAYMENTS



Key Insight: Getting paid professionally is not optional — it is the first signal that you take your business seriously. So will your clients.

Wave

Purpose: Free invoicing and accounting platform built for small businesses.

Why It Matters: I recommend Wave as a starting point. It handles invoicing, expense tracking, and basic accounting at no cost. Clean, simple, and professional.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://waveapps.com>

Stripe

Purpose: Online payment processing for businesses.

Why It Matters: Stripe allows you to accept credit card payments online. Integrates with websites, invoicing tools, and almost any platform. Industry standard for a reason.

Cost: No monthly fee; transaction fees apply

Website: <https://stripe.com>

PayPal Business

Purpose: Business payment collection and invoicing.

Why It Matters: Widely trusted and familiar to clients. Easy to set up and use for collecting payments quickly, especially early on.

Cost: No monthly fee; transaction fees apply

Website: <https://www.paypal.com/business>

06 AI & PRODUCTIVITY



Key Insight: *AI tools do not replace your thinking. They remove the friction between your ideas and their execution. Use them to move faster and think deeper.*

Claude (Anthropic)

Purpose: AI assistant for writing, strategy, brainstorming, document creation, and complex problem-solving.

Why It Matters: I use Claude for drafting proposals, structuring documents, refining my messaging, and working through business challenges. Thoughtful, nuanced, and exceptionally capable for professional work.

Cost: Free plan available; Pro at \$20/month

Website: <https://claude.ai>

ChatGPT

Purpose: Research, content creation, brainstorming, planning, and productivity.

Why It Matters: One of the most versatile AI tools available. Excellent for generating first drafts, exploring ideas, and getting quick answers. It has become my personal assistant.

Cost: Free plan available

Website: <https://chatgpt.com>

Grammarly

Purpose: Writing support, grammar checking, and editing.

Why It Matters: Before any client-facing document goes out, Grammarly reviews it. It catches what spell-check misses and helps ensure your writing is polished and professional.

Cost: Free plan available; Pro at ~\$12/month

Website: <https://www.grammarly.com>

07 FREE BUSINESS SUPPORT



Key Insight: *The resources in this section exist specifically for entrepreneurs like you. They are free, expert-led, and underused. Take full advantage.*

SCORE

Purpose: Free mentoring, workshops, and business education from experienced professionals.

Why It Matters: SCORE mentors are retired and active executives who volunteer their time to help entrepreneurs like you. Free one-on-one mentoring, webinars, and templates — no strings attached.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://www.score.org>

Georgia Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Purpose: Business consulting, coaching, and growth support for Georgia entrepreneurs.

Why It Matters: The SBDC provides no-cost, confidential consulting to help you start, grow, and sustain your business. From business planning to financial projections — this resource is exceptional.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://georgiasbdc.org>

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Purpose: Business planning resources, funding information, and educational materials.

Why It Matters: The SBA is the federal resource for small business owners. Use it for learning about loan programs, grants, business planning tools, and government contracting opportunities.

Cost: Free

Website: <https://www.sba.gov>

One Last Thing

The tools in this guide are only as powerful as your willingness to use them. The most sophisticated platform in the world cannot replace the decision to begin.

Start somewhere. Start imperfectly. Start now.

A Note About These Resources

The resources included in this guide are intended to provide a practical starting point as you explore, launch, and grow your business. Some are tools and services I have personally used, while others were included because they are commonly recommended, widely available, or may address needs frequently encountered by entrepreneurs and business owners.

As with any business decision, take time to determine what works best for your unique goals, priorities, and circumstances.

Wherever your journey leads next, I would love to hear from you. Connect with me and share what you are working on. Meaningful things happen when we pour into one another.

Ershla Johnson

Founder & Managing Principal
8 Strategies

Let's Stay Connected

Website: eightstrategies.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ershlajohnson/>

Email: ershla@eightstrategies.com

Phone: 470.222.3583