

How to Start Your Publishing Business in Missouri

If you are a self-publisher with your own company, you are a business owner. You will need to register with your state, county, and town and keep your business accounting separate from personal accounting. The Secretary of State website contains information about forming a business. Be sure to read the FAQ section. The Missouri Business Portal and the IRS.gov website also explain how to start a business. Below are the basic steps needed.

Determine type of company: Many authors choose a **sole proprietor** form of company as it is the simplest to register. Sole proprietors are single owners and use their social security number as their tax id. If you are a sole proprietor, you can still give your spouse access to your bank account (just in case). A **limited liability company** (LLC) offers some degree of protection of personal assets in case someone sues you, such as for defamation or if they are upset about your business services. An LLC will cost more to register and requires more paperwork. Read about these types of companies, including **Partnerships** (general or limited liability), on the Secretary of State website.

Determine your company name: You will need a business name—either your real name or a fictitious one. If you are a **sole proprietorship or general partnership**, register a fictitious or “DBA” (Doing Business As) company name by going online to your state’s Secretary of State website to the Business Services section. You will find a link to the “Registration of Fictitious Name” form. A small filing fee will be charged. You will receive a certificate in the mail stating your assigned business number. You can search for your chosen name to see if another company is already using it. This would be a good time to also buy a website domain name related to your business name. An LLC company will not need to file a fictitious name, rather you will simply register with the state.

Federal Employer Id Number (FEIN, also called EIN): If your company is a LLC, you will file with the Internal Revenue Service for an EIN, even if you have no employees. An EIN is required to open your business checking account. Go to the IRS.gov website under the Tools section to apply online or to download form SS-4. If applying online, you will receive your EIN immediately and should print out the notice and make copies. If mailing, allow 4 weeks processing time. Do not pay other companies to apply for you.

Register with the state: LLCs must register on the Secretary of State website, which requires completing an Articles of Organization form. Here you can enter a fictitious name (or use your own name). Your company will likely be vested in members (vs managers) and not be a series company. You will receive a Certificate of Organization in the mail which states your assigned business number.

Open a business checking account: If you are a sole proprietorship, bring your certificate of fictitious name along when you open your bank account. Your social security number is your Tax ID. If you are a LLC, bring your Certificate of Organization and your EIN notice to the bank.

Register for a state tax ID number: Download a Business Tax Registration form from the state’s Department of Revenue website, under the Business Tax section. This will require a bond,

either with a credit card if filing online or with a money order by mail. The bond is returnable after a specified number of years if you remember to request it. Once registered, each year your state will send you a Sales Tax Return form to complete stating your gross sales (total sales, minus sales tax charged) at each location within your state where you have collected book sales money. Sales tax rates per location are available through Sales Tax/Use Rates tables on the DOR website. For example, books you sell at a Clayton fair will be assessed the Clayton sales tax. Note: If your books are printed by a Missouri printer, show them your retail sales tax license so you will not have to pay sales tax when paying for your books; Instead you will collect sales tax from your customers within the state. (You do not collect sales tax from out-of-state sales.)

Apply for local business licenses: Register with both your county and your town or city and pay the small fees. If you live in St. Louis County, the right sidebar of the St. Louis County Assessor's office website has a link to a Business Personal Property Registration/Merchant License form to complete. When you register at your city hall, if you operate your business from your home, another form may be required, and if you live in an unincorporated area, check with the county Department of Public Works for regulations about operating a business from home. After registering, each year your county and town will send you license renewal forms and request fees.

Keep good records and save copies of the forms you complete while noting payments and mailing dates so you can refer back to them if necessary. It pays to keep a list of annual filings required and dates due... if by chance you do not receive any of the forms through the mail, call the appropriate government department. If you are delinquent in your payments for any reason, you will be blamed and have to pay a late fee.

For any state, you may search online for "starting a business in ..." and include your state name, or search for your state's Secretary of State website or business portal. Missouri and Illinois, for example, have business portals well worth reading.