THE LAB TCG

The Pokémon Card Business Blueprint

by The Lab TCG

How to start and run a Pokémon card business in the US, online or in a shop: worked examples, dated fees, and the workbooks to run it.

Free sample

US edition

Version 2026-10-31

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Laws, taxes, fees and prices change. They also differ from state to state, and no two businesses are the same. Each chapter shows the date its facts were last checked, and some will be out of date by the time you read them. Before a decision that matters, such as choosing a business structure, registering for tax, signing a lease, hiring staff or putting serious money into stock, check your own situation with a qualified professional and the official sources the book cites.

The worked examples, including Example Card Co., show how the numbers can work. Illustrative example. Figures are invented for teaching purposes. They are not predictions or promises, and your results will be different. Cards and sealed product can lose value, any business can lose money, and nothing in the book recommends buying cards, sealed product or shares as an investment.

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READ THIS ONCE

Start here

If I could talk to myself on day one of the business, I'd say you must, must, must document everything you do. Track your purchases and sales in detail, and plan what your goals are for the business. That gives you a direction, a way to track against it and records you can report properly for taxes. Treat the business like a real business.

This book shows you how to do that with a Pokémon card business in the US. It's long, 86 chapters with the appendices, and you won't need most of it this week. Read Part 0 first, which takes about an hour. Then find the row below that sounds like you, read its three chapters, open its workbook and do the job in the last column. The rest can wait until you reach the stage it covers.

Where to start, by goal

YOU ARE	AFTER PART 0, READ	OPEN THIS WORKBOOK	THIS WEEK
Still deciding, with nothing sold yet	2.07, 2.01, 3.01	Startup Cost & Break-even Planner	Put your starting budget into the Planner and see how many months the cash lasts
Starting a side hustle next to a job	3.08, 3.03, 9.02	Shop Money Tracker	Open a separate bank account and enter your first purchase in the Tracker
Planning to go full time	2.08, 2.03, 9.01	13-Week Cash Flow Forecast	Work out how many months your household could run with no income from the business
Opening a store	2.01, 6.01, 6.02	Startup Cost & Break-even Planner	Price the fit-out and six months of fixed costs, and sign nothing until you've read 6.02
Busy enough to need help	6.07, 9.04, 9.01	Weekly Scorecard	Log a week of your hours by task. Sorting, picking and packing are the first jobs to hand to a machine or a person
Already selling, and something's wrong	Skip Part 0 for now. Use the symptom table in 0.06, then 10.01	Shop Money Tracker	Close last month in the Tracker (9.02) and check it against your bank balance

Not sure which row is yours? The six-question self-check in 0.05 sorts it out in a few minutes. Chapter 0.06 then lists every chapter as "First", "Later" or "Skip" for your goal.

Your first 90 days

Start anything with a wait attached in the first three weeks. A distributor or a Play! Pokémon store application can take weeks to come back, and you can set up the rest while you wait. Chapter 0.03 has the full plan, and A.07 turns it into a checklist.

WEEKS	DO THIS	CHAPTERS
1	Pick your goal and model, fill in the Vision & 3-Year Plan, run the Planner, get your EIN	0.05, 0.02, 3.01

WEEKS	DO THIS	CHAPTERS
2	Open a business bank account, set up the Shop Money Tracker and apply for your seller's permit	3.02, 3.03
3	Apply to distributors if your model needs sealed product at wholesale. Buy supplies in bulk	4.01, 7.03
4	Put insurance in place, give suppliers your resale certificate and put up your first listings, stream or show	3.06, 3.03
5 to 8	Log every sale and every buy, and close your first month	9.02
9 to 12	Write a buylist policy, close a second month and compare sales with your break-even	4.03, 4.04, 2.02
13	Review day 90 against your goal, and decide on a second channel	0.03, 0.05

A store adds its Play! Pokémon application and league setup between weeks 4 and 10 (4.02). Two habits run through all 13 weeks. Set tax aside from the first month, and never take preorder money for stock you don't have in your hands.

How the book works

Everything here is written for selling in the US, with amounts in dollars. If you sell from somewhere else, start with A.08.

Fees and thresholds change, so each chapter shows the date its facts were last checked. The small numbers in the text lead to notes at the end of each chapter, which say where every fact came from, and A.06 lists all the sources in one place. If a platform's or a government's own page says something different, go with the page. The Blueprint is updated every quarter for 12 months after you buy it.

You'll find the workbooks in the workbooks folder of your download, with a How-To Guide that explains each one. They open in Excel, Google Sheets or LibreOffice Calc. Save your own copy before you type in one, and only type in the cream boxes with gold text.

Links to tools go through our own site, so we can keep them working when a tool's site moves. A link marked #ad or affiliate may earn The Lab TCG a commission, at no cost to you. We pick tools on merit first.

The Blueprint is guidance, and we aren't licensed professionals. None of it is legal, tax, accounting or investment advice. When the money involved is big, or the rules for your state are unclear, check with a qualified accountant or lawyer.

The Important notice at the front of the book has the details.

Notes and tool links in this PDF are clickable.

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0.04 Revenue vs profit: why "$1M business" videos mislead

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One YouTube video about building a $1,000,000 Pokémon card business from home has close to a quarter of a million views.[1] The million is sales. Nothing in the video's description or its chapters says how much of it was left as profit.

Most YouTube videos only quote revenue, because it's the biggest number they have. A figure like $100,000 or $1,000,000 gets people to click. Saying you actually made $20,000 in profit is a lot less exciting than the $100,000 salary most people are dreaming of. If nobody explains the difference between revenue and profit, viewers come away thinking the business is far more lucrative than it is, with no idea how much they'd need to sell to make a living.

Revenue is what customers paid you. Profit is what's left after the cards and the fees are paid for, and then postage, tax and a wage for you come off too. Example Card Co., an illustrative shop selling at a pace of about $260,000 a year kept between about $26,500 and $42,500 of profit in its first nine months. Which of those two figures you believe depends on how you count the stock still sitting on its shelves.

Where $100 of sales goes

About $20 of every $100 of sales is left as real profit once everything is paid. Most people expect more, but 10-20% is typical. Buy a $100 card at 60%, for $60. Shipping can easily take $10-15, and platform fees another $10-15, which leaves roughly $10-20 of actual profit from a $100 sale.

That's why turnover matters so much. You want your cash to snowball, buying more and turning it over fast. Let it get stuck in inventory and you can't make enough money to keep the business going.

The biggest headlines are sales figures

HEADLINE	WHAT THE NUMBER IS	NOTE
A video about a million-dollar Pokémon card business run from home (about 250,000 views)	Sales	1
A video on going from nothing to six figures alongside a day job	Sales: $55K in a test year, then $150K	2
A "7-figure online Pokémon card business"	Sales	1 YouTube video, 2025-02-23-2 YouTube video, 2026-07-14-9 Card Value, how to build a Pokémon card vendor business, 2026-02-18">3

Of the 117 Pokémon and card-business videos we reviewed in September 2026, only 6 showed the creator's own profit anywhere in the title, description or chapter list.[4] That doesn't make the creators dishonest. It does mean the money figure in a title tells you how busy a business is, and you have to work out the profit yourself.

The "$260,000" shop that made $26,500

Figure 0.04.1 shows the monthly sales of Example Card Co., and the table after it walks from those sales down to profit.

> **Example Card Co.** Illustrative example. Figures are invented for teaching purposes.

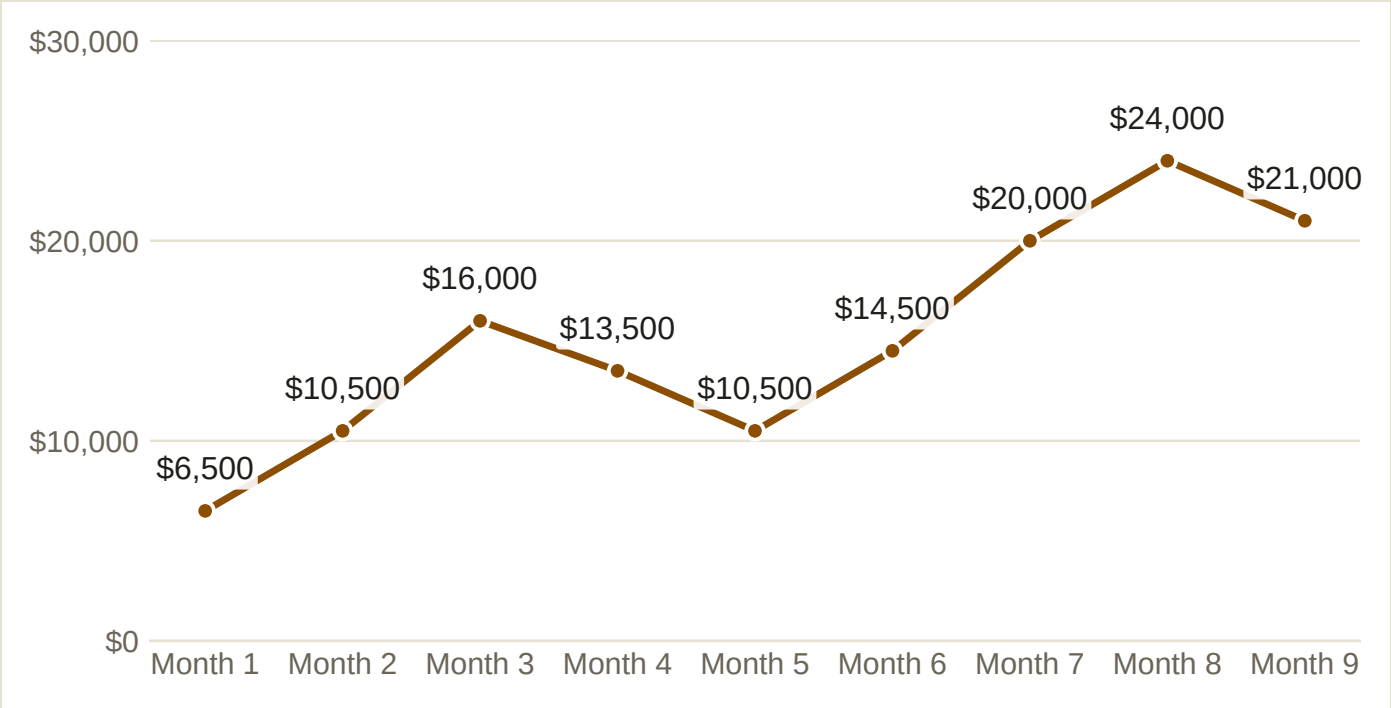


Figure 0.04.1. Sales climbed from $6,500 in the first part month to $24,000 in month 8, with a dip in months 4 and 5 after a December peak.[5]

MEASURE	FIGURE	HOW IT'S WORKED OUT
Run rate by months 7-9	~$260,000 a year	Months 7-9 totalled $65,000, about $21,700 a month, × 12[5]
Actual sales, months 1-9	~$136,500	The nine months added up[5]
Profit, cash basis	~$26,500	Every inventory purchase counted as a cost when paid[5]
Operating profit, stock counted	~$42,500	The same, plus the inventory built up and still on the shelves[5]
Owner wage inside those profits	Not normalized	Some months had no owner wage[5]

MEASURE	FIGURE	HOW IT'S WORKED OUT
Operating margin after a full wage and utilities	~15-20%	Normalized[6]
Game stores in general	5-10% net	Industry reference[6]

The "$260,000 business" had sold about $136,500 in its first nine months. A run rate takes a strong recent stretch and multiplies it by twelve, so it says nothing about the slow months on either side. This shop took $16,000 in its December and $10,500 two months later.[5] Plan your spending on your best month's pace and February will catch you short.

An unpaid owner flatters the result too. With a full wage put back in, the shop's operating margin was about 15-20%.[6] On a $260,000 run rate that's about $39,000 to $52,000 a year before tax, on top of the owner's wage. That's our arithmetic on one shop's numbers, and your own will differ.

How you count stock can move profit by $16,000

On the same sales, the shop's profit moves by about $16,000 depending on how its inventory is counted. $26,500 is about 19% of $136,500, and $42,500 is about 31%. The gap is stock the shop had paid for and still held.[5] That stock only turns into profit if it sells at the prices assumed, and the Example Card Co. worked example names unsold buy-ins as the trap to avoid.[7] If your profit looks good and your bank balance doesn't, count the shelves.

In the early days of The Lab TCG I posted YouTube videos walking through my own profit and loss statement. It was super helpful for seeing where my money came from, what it was costing me and how much I was making. Even so, it took me until after my first year to notice I'd been recording inventory wrongly. Every card I bought went down as a cost of goods sold the moment I paid for it, so the statement showed a loss every month while I knew the business was making money. I was putting all the cash straight back into inventory, and the mistake messed up my tax paperwork too. Going through the statements with an accountant is what showed me how to fix the way I recorded everything.

Margin depends on what you sell

CATEGORY	GROSS MARGIN (INDUSTRY REFERENCE)	NOTE
Sealed product at distributor prices	15-20%	6
Singles	45%+	6
Accessories	50%+	6
Example Card Co., mature months (cash basis)	50-55%	6

The shop's margin was high because it bought singles and second-hand collections as well as sealed boxes at distributor prices.[6] Buy sealed at distributor prices, sell it at retail, and the math barely works. The margin comes from singles and bulk bought well.

Events and play space were under 1% of that shop's income. At community stores that line is often 10-20% of income, so it was the biggest thing the shop wasn't selling.[8]

A $50 card on Whatnot keeps $14.25 before anything else comes out

Figure 0.04.2 follows one sale. The card was bought at 60% of market, the low end of what show vendors pay for mid-range singles.[9]

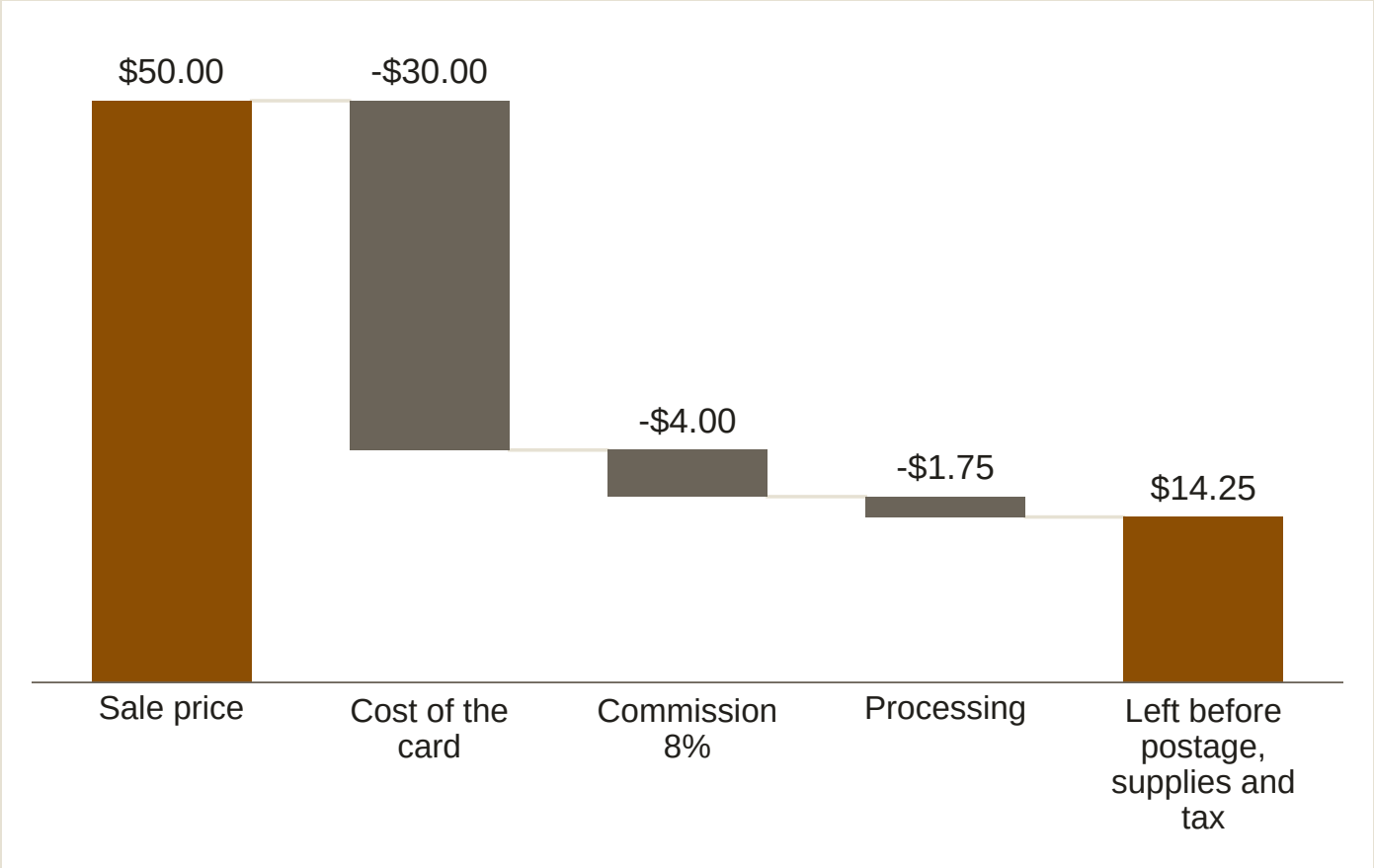


Figure 0.04.2. After the card and Whatnot's fees, a $50 sale leaves $14.25, and everything else (postage, mailers, giveaways, tax) still comes out of that.[10,9]

LINE	AMOUNT	WORKING
Sale price	$50.00	
Cost of the card	$30.00	60% of the sale price[9]
Whatnot commission	$4.00	8%, as of 2026-09-21[10]
Processing	$1.75	2.9% + $0.30[10]
Left after the card and fees	$14.25 (28.5%)	$50.00 − $30.00 − $4.00 − $1.75

Whatnot charges its 2.9% + $0.30 processing on the shipping and the sales tax as well as the item,[10] so you pay a fee on money that was never yours. Whatnot's own 2026 report data shows how thin margins get once giveaways and shipping are counted.[11]

Two kinds of tax sit inside your sales

Sales tax you collect belongs to the state. On marketplace sales the platform usually collects it, and on direct sales (your website, your counter, a show table) you do (chapter 3.03). Either way it isn't revenue, and it shouldn't sit in the account you spend from.

Then there's tax on the profit itself. Self-employment tax alone is 15.3% on 92.35% of net earnings once they reach $400,[12] before any income tax. Nobody withholds it for you, so the IRS expects estimated payments during the year on set dates.[13] Plan for both taxes in your first year.

Seven questions for any income claim

1. Is it sales or profit? If the claim doesn't say, it's sales.
2. Is it actual, or a run rate? A run rate multiplies a good recent period.
3. Which months? Example Card Co.'s month 3 was a December peak.[5]
4. Is the owner paid? If not, add a fair wage back as a cost.
5. How is stock counted? The same shop's profit moved by about $20,000 on this alone.[5]
6. Are fees and postage in, giveaways included? On live platforms they decide the result.[11]
7. Is tax in? Sales tax collected isn't income, and self-employment tax comes off profit.

Five numbers to watch instead of sales

NUMBER	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	WHERE IT LIVES IN THE KIT
Gross profit and gross margin	What sales leave after the cost of stock	Shop Money Tracker: "Money made on sales (gross profit)" on Shop Profit, and "Gross margin, this month so far" on My Dashboard
Net per channel after fees	Which channel actually pays	Channel Net Calculator
Profit after a real owner wage	Whether the business pays you	Shop Money Tracker, Shop Profit, and the owner wage line in the Planner's Monthly Costs
Cash in the bank and the register	Whether you can pay next month's bills	The reality check on the Shop Money Tracker's What the Shop Owns & Owes, and the 13-Week Cash Flow Forecast
Tax set aside	Money that isn't yours to spend	"Tax set aside so far" on My Dashboard

Try it in the demo file

1. Open the Shop Money Tracker demo file (sample data) and go to the Shop Profit tab.

2. Find the row "Stock you built up this month (+)". The third month (August 2026 in the demo) holds 1,200.
3. Type 0 in that cell. "Money made on sales (gross profit)" for that month falls by 1,200, and profit falls with it.
4. Type 1,200 back. The sales and the cash were the same both times, and the only thing you changed was the value of stock still on the shelf. That's Example Card Co.'s $26,500 against $42,500 in miniature.

Pay yourself profit first

The Profit First system turns the usual formula around, so that sales minus profit equals expenses. It splits your money four ways, into profit, owner's pay, tax and operating expenses, with transfers on the 10th and 25th of each month.[14] In a card business its main job is to stop every dollar disappearing into stock. Chapter 2.04 sets it up.

Traps in your own numbers

A headline makes a bad benchmark. Measure yourself against a $1,000,000 video and a perfectly good first year looks like failure, and it's tempting to buy stock to chase a number that was never profit. Set the target from the take-home you want instead, and chapter 0.05 does the arithmetic.

Your own pay is the other trap. I never paid myself. Instead I turned the business into an investment portfolio, kept all the inventory in it, and it appreciated over time. That works while a salary covers your bills. If this business is meant to pay you, put a wage in the Planner's Monthly Costs from month one, even if you don't draw it yet, so the profit you see is what's left after your time.

Two workbooks to start with

Start with the Shop Money Tracker, and its demo file, from your first sale. Month by month it tracks sales by channel against what the stock cost, then carries running costs and tax set aside down to profit after tax. It isn't filing software, and your accountant may still want QuickBooks or Xero (chapter 3.02).

The Channel Net Calculator compares what a $50 sale leaves on each platform, with its fee rates dated on the Fees sheet. Part 5 uses it chapter by chapter.

Checklist

- [ ] Run the seven questions on the next income claim you see.
- [ ] Open the Shop Money Tracker demo and try the "Stock you built up" exercise.
- [ ] Set up your own Shop Money Tracker and type a tax percentage on Setup (ask your accountant what to use).
- [ ] Put a real owner wage in the Planner's Monthly Costs, even if you won't draw it yet.

- [ ] Find out where you must collect sales tax yourself (chapter 3.03).
- [ ] Read chapter 2.04 and open separate accounts for tax and profit.

Notes

1. YouTube video, 23 Feb 2025
2. YouTube video, 14 Jul 2026
3. YouTube video, 2026-01-05- CM-4 YouTube video, 2025-02-23- CM-6 YouTube video, 2026-07-14- CM-29 Card Value, how to build a Pokémon card vendor business, 2026-02-18
4. The Lab TCG, content audit of 117 videos and 70 articles on running a card business, September 2026
5. Example Card Co. worked example, section 2: How sales grew (illustrative)
6. Example Card Co. worked example, section 3: Margins and costs (illustrative)
7. Example Card Co. worked example, section 5: Buying collections (illustrative)
8. Example Card Co. worked example, section 4: When the money comes in (illustrative)
9. Card Value, 18 Feb 2026
10. Value Added Resource, "Whatnot cuts fees for high-volume sellers", 2026-09-17
11. Value Added Resource, Whatnot 2026 live selling report, 2026-01-30
12. IRS, Topic no. 554, Self-employment tax, updated 2026-09-24, accessed 2026-09-27
13. IRS, Estimated tax FAQs for individuals, accessed 2026-09-27
14. Mike Michalowicz, Profit First

The rest of the Blueprint

That was chapter 0.04. The full US edition is 548 pages, with 78 chapters in eleven parts and eight appendices, one of them the Example Card Co. worked example of a shop's first nine months. The contents at the front of this sample list every chapter.

It comes with the 11 workbooks the chapters use, as Excel files that also open in Google Sheets, and with the whole book as web pages.

Everything about the full book, including the price, is at thelabtcg.com/pokemon-card-business/blueprint.

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