

The Dependency Audit

Every category your business stands on, run through the same two questions, all the way through.

I ran this audit against my own warehouse lines about twenty years too late. Two billion dollars a year in loans, and none of it sat on money we controlled. I thought we owned those lines because we had earned the terms. We hadn't. We were borrowing, and I had no way to catch the mistake before it caught me.

This is the version of that audit you can run against your own business, before someone else runs it for you. Seven categories, the same three questions against every item, and a blank line for your answer. Not a feeling. A classification: owned, rented, or borrowed - and how much of the business is actually standing on it.

Finish the walk and you will have a short list of borrowed, load-bearing items ranked by damage. That list is the whole point. It tells you where to start.

01 Run the gate on each item

Three questions, in order, against everything the business stands on - a client, a platform, a person, a lease, a dollar of credit. Skip nothing because it feels permanent. That feeling is exactly what this audit checks.

- ☐ **Q0 - Ownership.** Can anyone take this from me by deciding to? If no one can, it is owned. Write "owned" and move to the next item.
- ☐ **Q1 - Permission.** If this disappeared tomorrow, by someone else's decision, does the business survive without serious damage?
- ☐ **Q2 - Replacement.** If no to Q1, can I replace it on my own initiative, at market terms, in time to survive the loss - with no single counterparty holding the only key?

Yes to Q1: not load-bearing. Note it and move on. No to Q1, yes to Q2: rented load. No to Q1, no to Q2: borrowed load. That is the whole classifier. The work below is running it against everything, not just the one thing that already worries you.

02 List every dependency, by category

Work down the table category by category. For each line, write your Q1 and Q2 answers, the classification, and the percentage of the business that leg is actually carrying - revenue, cost, or hours, whichever applies. Add rows for anything specific to your business that is not listed.

CATEGORY	WHAT TO CHECK	Q1 / Q2 ANSWERS	CLASS	% OF BUSINESS
Revenue	Largest client or account; any client past roughly a quarter of revenue; the top three by dollar volume			
Platforms	Payroll, project management, communication, the software your team cannot work without for a day			
Money	Lines of credit, loans, personally guaranteed debt, any funding the business depends on to cover the gap between paying out and getting paid			
People and knowledge	The one person who knows what nobody else does; any account or system that runs on one head, undocumented			
Data and tools	Client list, financials, work product - can you export it and take it with you today, in a format you can actually use			
Place	The lease; any location customers have to walk into for the business to function			
You	What happens to the business if you are out for six months - health, a bad accident, a decision you cannot make from a hospital bed			
(add your own)				

03 Rank the borrowed items by damage

Classifying everything is the first half. The second half is ordering it, because "borrowed" is not one emergency - a client at a quarter of revenue and a client at three quarters both fail Q1, and they are not the same fire.

1 **Pull every borrowed item.**

Copy every row above marked borrowed onto the ranking table below. Leave rented and owned where they are - this list is only the load-bearing walls that live at someone else's pleasure.

2 **Confirm the percentage.**

Next to each, write what share of revenue, cost, or operating capacity that one leg carries. Guessing here is the mistake the audit exists to end - pull the real number from the books.

3 **Order by percentage, highest first.**

The item carrying the most weight goes to the top, regardless of how long you have depended on it or how it feels to rank it there.

4 **Name the damage.**

For the top three, write one sentence: what specifically happens the day this is taken, in what order, starting with payroll.

5 **Circle one.**

Pick the item that is both high on the list and most likely to happen soonest. That is the one you fix first. Not all of them. One.

RANK	DEPENDENCY	CATEGORY	% OF BUSINESS	WHAT HAPPENS THE DAY IT'S GONE
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

04 What this audit does and does not tell you

TRUE OF THIS AUDIT

- ✓ Tells you exactly where the trouble comes from first, and in what order the walls come down if nothing changes.
 - ✓ Turns a feeling ("that client makes me nervous") into a number you can act on.
 - ✓ Works as a yearly rerun - the ranking moves as the business does.
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It does not tell you to fire anyone, drop a client, or panic about a credit line. Borrowed is not a moral failure - almost every business starts borrowed somewhere. It only tells you where to look first. What you do about the top of your list is the next chapter's work, not this one.

How to use this. This is a thinking tool built to help you reason about your own business. It is not legal, tax, or financial advice, and it does not replace a conversation with your own accountant, attorney, or lender. Where money, credit, or contractor status shows up in your list, the rules governing them shift - verify current guidance before relying on anything here. As of July 2026, confirm the specifics with your own advisor before you act.

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