

The Founder's IP Checklist

Every step in the book, in order, as a working list. The sequence is the strategy: each item protects the one before it.

1 · PROVE THE INVENTION IS YOURS

- Decide **what is new** — the design, the function, or both.
- Document everything from day one: dated sketches, photographs, notes, and a bound or time-stamped record.
- Run a **prior-art search** before you spend a dollar filing.

2 · PROTECT IT BEFORE YOU SHOW IT

- Share materials, tech packs, and samples only under an **NDA or NNN**.
- Build a prototype, and keep the records that make it evidence.
- File a **provisional application** to secure your date and claim patent pending.
- File a **design patent** before you launch or publicly reveal the look.

3 · OWN YOUR NAME, YOUR ART, AND YOUR LOOK

- Clear and register your **trademark** — the word mark first, then the logo.
- Register **copyright** on your original prints, patterns, and artwork.
- Identify and protect any distinctive overall look as **trade dress**.

4 · BUILD THE BUSINESS

- Form the entity (usually an **LLC**) before you sell anything, and assign all IP into it.
- Govern your manufacturer with the **three-contract system**: the NNN; the product-development & IP-assignment agreement; the manufacturing agreement.
- Build a pricing model that survives direct, wholesale, and international margins.

5 · GO TO MARKET

- Launch **direct**, into demand you built yourself.
- Enter **wholesale** on your terms, with a minimum advertised price policy.
- Expand abroad only with margins and registrations in place — file in a country before you sell in it.

6 · MONETIZE THE BRAND

- Treat **licensing** as the scalable endgame.
- Draft licenses around the **eight essential terms**: net sales, payment, minimum guarantee, territory, exclusivity, quality control, audit rights, term & termination.
- Build the nine-slide pitch deck and pursue a term sheet.

7 · DEFEND AND COMPOUND THE ASSET

- Monitor and **enforce** your trademark, and document every action.
- Docket and pay patent **maintenance fees** at 3.5, 7.5, and 11.5 years; re-verify entity status each time.
- Manage everything as a **portfolio**: clean chain of title, continuation strategy, trade-secret discipline, documentation.
- Protect and license eco-innovation before you disclose it.

*If you can check every box, you have done what most founders never do. **You own the label.***