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how to get an abn number

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

How to Get an ABN Number: A Step by Step Guide for Australian Entrepreneurs

Starting a business in Australia is an exciting journey, but before you can start selling, invoicing, or hiring employees, you need a crucial piece of identification: the Australian Business Number, or ABN. The ABN is a unique 11 digit identifier that links your business to the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and enables you to operate legally across the country. If you're wondering **how to get an ABN number**, this comprehensive guide will walk you through every requirement, step, and tip to ensure you receive your ABN quickly and without hassle.

Why an ABN Is Essential for Your Business

While it's possible to run a small operation without formal registration, obtaining an ABN offers several critical benefits:

- Legal Recognition – The ABN confirms that you're a legitimate business entity for tax, licensing, and regulatory purposes.
- Tax Compliance – With an ABN you can register for Goods and Services Tax (GST), lodge Business Activity Statements (BAS), and claim input tax credits.
- Credibility with Clients and Suppliers – Providing an ABN on invoices and contracts builds trust and shows professionalism.
- Access to Government Programs – Many grants, subsidies, and industry programs require an ABN as part of the application.
- Business Banking & Financing – Banks and lenders often require an ABN before opening a business account or approving loans.

In short, an ABN is the key that unlocks the full potential of your business.

Who Needs an ABN?

Not every business automatically requires an ABN, but most do. The ATO outlines specific circumstances where an ABN is mandatory:

1. Operating a sole trader or partnership that trades for profit.
2. Running a company, trust, or other corporate structure.
3. Providing services or goods that are taxable under GST.
4. Hiring employees or subcontractors.
5. Engaging in any form of commercial activity that generates revenue.

If you're unsure whether your activity qualifies, the ATO's online eligibility checker can clarify your situation in seconds.

Prerequisites Before Applying for an ABN

Before you click the "Apply" button, make sure you have the following ready:

- Personal Identification – A valid passport, driver's licence, or other government issued ID.
- Australian Address – A residential or business address that the ATO can use for correspondence.
- Contact Details – A phone number and email address that are monitored regularly.
- Business Details – A clear business name, structure (sole trader, partnership, company, etc.), and a brief description of your activities.
- Tax File Number (TFN) – If you're a sole trader, you'll need your personal TFN; if you're a company, you'll need a company TFN.

Having these items organized will speed up the application process and reduce the chances of delays.

Step 1: Determine Your Business Structure

The type of business entity you choose influences how you apply for an ABN. The most common structures are:

Sole Trader

Best suited for individuals running a small, single person operation. The application is straightforward, and you'll use your personal TFN.

Partnership

When two or more people share ownership and profits. Each partner must provide personal details, and the partnership will need its own ABN.

Company

Incorporated under the Corporations Act. Requires a registered office, directors, and a company TFN. The ABN application is slightly more involved.

Trust

Often used for family or charitable purposes. Trusts need a trustee's details and a trust deed.

Choose the structure that best fits your goals, but remember that each comes with different reporting obligations.

Step 2: Verify Eligibility Using the ATO's Online Tool

Before you invest time in the application, run the ATO's **Business Registration**eligibility checker. It asks a few quick questions about:

- Your business activities
- Estimated annual turnover
- Whether you plan to hire employees

The tool will confirm if you need an ABN, GST registration, or both. It also provides a clear timeline for how long the application typically takes.

Step 3: Gather All Required Documentation

Even though the ABN application is online, having the following documents on hand will help you answer questions quickly:

- Proof of identity (passport, driver's licence)
- Proof of address (utility bill, lease agreement)
- Business name registration (if applicable)

- Company documents (if forming a company)
- Partnership agreement (if applicable)
- Trust deed (if applicable)

While the ATO does not require you to upload these documents during the initial application, you may need them for subsequent steps.

Step 4: Apply for Your ABN Online

The ATO's online portal is the fastest and most convenient method. Follow these steps:

1. Navigate to the ATO's ABN registration page.
2. Click "Get an ABN" and sign in with myGov. If you don't have a myGov account, you'll need to create one and link it to the ATO.
3. Choose the correct business structure from the list of options.
4. Fill in your personal and business details accurately. The system will validate your TFN and address.
5. Answer the eligibility questions. The system will guide you through any additional requirements.
6. Review and submit your application.

After submission, you'll receive a confirmation email. If everything is in order, you should receive your ABN within 30 minutes to a few days, depending on the volume of applications.

Step 5: Confirm Your ABN and Update Your Records

Once you receive your ABN, take the following actions immediately:

- Update your invoices, receipts, and contracts to include the ABN.
- Notify clients and suppliers of your new ABN for accurate tax reporting.
- Register for GST if your turnover exceeds $75,000 annually.
- Set up a business bank account using your ABN.
- Register for payroll tax and other relevant taxes, depending on your industry.

Keeping your records up to date ensures compliance and helps avoid penalties.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Applying for an ABN

Even though the process is straightforward, many applicants encounter avoidable pitfalls:

Providing Incorrect Personal Information

Even a minor typo in your name or TFN can delay the application. Double check all entries before submitting.

Using a Non Australian Address

Only Australian addresses are accepted for ABN applications. If you operate internationally, you still need a local address.

Applying for an ABN for a Non Business Activity

Individuals who are hobbyists or occasionally sell items on platforms like eBay do not need an ABN unless they intend to run a regular business.

Forgetting to Link myGov to the ATO

Without a linked myGov account, you can't access the ABN application portal. Set this up ahead of time.

Neglecting to Register for GST When Required

If your turnover is expected to exceed $75,000, you must register for GST. Failure to do so can result in penalties.

What to Do if Your Application Is Rejected

Rejections are rare but can happen if:

- There is a mismatch between your TFN and your name.
- Inconsistent address details.
- Incomplete or incorrect business information.

If your application is rejected, you'll receive an email with a brief explanation and steps to correct the issue. Common fixes include:

1. Re entering the correct TFN and name.
2. Updating your address to match your ID.
3. Providing additional documentation if requested.

After making the corrections, resubmit the application. The turnaround time is usually within a few days.

Alternative Methods to Obtain an ABN

While the online portal is the most efficient route, there are other ways to get an ABN:

Phone Application

You can call the ATO's Business Registration line at **13 28 61**and apply over the phone. This method is slower and requires you to speak with a representative.

Paper Application

Paper forms are available from the ATO but are rarely used. They can be mailed to the ATO, but processing times are longer.

Using a Registered Agent or Accountant

Many businesses prefer to delegate ABN registration to an accountant or a company formation agent. This can be especially useful if you're also setting up a company or trust.

After You Get Your ABN: Ongoing Obligations

Obtaining an ABN is just the first step. You must also keep up with ongoing compliance:

Annual Tax Return

All businesses must lodge an annual income tax return. Sole traders report business income on a personal return, while companies file a separate corporate return.

Business Activity Statements (BAS)

If you're registered for GST, you'll need to lodge BAS quarterly (or monthly, depending on your turnover). This includes reporting GST collected and paid.

Record Keeping

Maintain accurate records of income, expenses, and invoices for at least five years. The ATO may audit you at any time.

Updating Business Details

Any changes to your business name, address, or structure must be reported to the ATO within 28 days.

Frequently Asked Questions About Getting an ABN

Do I need an ABN if I’m a sole trader?

Yes, if you plan to trade for profit. The ABN is required for tax reporting, GST registration, and invoicing.

Can I use a trade name without registering it?

You can use a trade name, but you’ll need to register it with the relevant state or territory authority. The

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