



# The Candle Business

*A \$4 pour that sells for \$26, buyers who restock eight times a year, and a wholesale ladder most makers never climb. The maker business with real margins.*

\$600-1,400  
START LEAN

14-30 days  
FIRST DOLLAR

60-75%  
TYPICAL MARGIN

# Is this your business?

Candles are the rare product business you can launch from a kitchen table and scale into wholesale: materials run \$3-5 per candle, a finished one sells for \$18-32, and the skill ceiling (clean burns, true scent throw) is real enough to keep hobbyists from eating your market. Sell direct and margins live at 60-75%. Every craft market is a paid focus group, and every happy buyer repurchases on a schedule.

\$600-1,400

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$1,800-3,500

STANDARD BUILD

14-30 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

60-75%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes (kitchen table)

HOME-BASED

## BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE CRAFTSMAN

THE STORYTELLER

2/5 difficulty

### THE HONEST FIT TEST

You will weigh wax to the gram, burn-test every wick and vessel combination for hours, and stand behind a market table on Saturdays explaining hot throw versus cold throw. If you want a passive template store, walk on. If you like craft, patience, and a product people gift and repurchase all year, light it up.

# Who pays, and why now.

Home fragrance is a multibillion-dollar category in the US, and candles are its anchor. Seven in ten households burn them, the core buyer goes through several a year, and almost every purchase doubles as a gift option. That last part matters more than new founders realize: a candle is the default \$25-35 gift for hostesses, teachers, closings, and holidays, which means your product gets bought by people who have never smelled it, on the strength of label, story, and price point alone.

Demand is seasonal in your favor. The fourth quarter routinely accounts for a third to half of a small maker's annual sales, with a second bump around Mother's Day and wedding season. Between those peaks, repeat buyers and wholesale accounts smooth the curve. A boutique that reorders two cases a month is worth more than any viral post, because the purchase order arrives whether or not you posted that week.

The competition looks infinite and mostly is not. Etsy is saturated, and its stacked fees plus paid-placement costs quietly take 20-25% of a sale, which is why experienced makers treat it as a discovery channel, not a business. The real game is fought at local markets and on boutique shelves, where most sellers have inconsistent burns, clip-art labels, and no reorder system. A maker with documented burn tests, a tight scent identity, and professional labels stands out immediately.

Your edge is depth, not breadth. The makers who win pick a lane (a scent family, an aesthetic, a place-based brand) and go deep: six core scents poured perfectly beat thirty poured adequately. Buyers come back for a specific candle by name. Give them a name worth remembering.

| WHO BUYS                              | WHAT THEY PAY                             | WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT                                     |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Gift shoppers</b>                  | \$24-35 per candle, \$60-75 gift sets     | A beautiful label and story they can hand over with pride   |
| <b>Repeat home burners</b>            | \$18-32 per candle, several times a year  | A clean, even burn and a scent that actually fills the room |
| <b>Boutiques and gift shops</b>       | 50% of retail per unit, 24-48 unit orders | Reliable restocks, retail-ready packaging, keystone margin  |
| <b>Realtors and corporate gifting</b> | \$15-22 per unit in bulk, branded         | Closing gifts and client thank-yous with a local story      |

US HOUSEHOLDS BURN CANDLES

7 in 10

This is not a niche product hunting for buyers: it is a household staple bought on repeat and gifted by default. The work is not creating demand. It is giving an existing, recurring purchase a reason to choose you by name.

# Every dollar, before you spend it.

Everything below fits in a kitchen and a closet. Buy wax and vessels by the case, not the unit, and your per-candle cost drops by a third immediately. The one line you cannot skip is product liability insurance: you are selling an open flame.

| THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE                      | WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE   | COST                      |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| <b>Soy or coconut-soy wax (~90 lb, 2 cases)</b>  | Enough for 130+ candles; case pricing beats small bags by 30%            | \$140-220                 |
| <b>Fragrance oils (4 core scents + testers)</b>  | Buy from reputable suppliers with IFRA documents, never craft-store oils | \$90-160                  |
| <b>Wicks, wick stickers, centering tools</b>     | Buy three wick sizes per vessel; testing decides the winner              | \$40-70                   |
| <b>Vessels (case of 8 oz jars, ~72 units)</b>    | Stick to one vessel at launch; every new vessel restarts burn testing    | \$130-200                 |
| <b>Labels + ASTM warning stickers</b>            | Front label sells it, the bottom warning label protects you              | \$60-120                  |
| <b>Digital scale, thermometer, pour pots</b>     | Wax is chemistry; measuring by eye is how bad burns happen               | \$60-100                  |
| <b>Product liability insurance (first month)</b> | Maker-focused policies are affordable; see the legal page                | \$30-60/mo                |
| <b>LLC + seller's permit</b>                     | Your liability wall plus legal sales tax collection                      | \$50-470                  |
| <b>Lean total</b>                                |  | <b>\$600-1,400 all-in</b> |

| THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE              | WHAT IT UNLOCKS   | COST      |
|---|---|-----------|
| <b>Electric wax melter (17+ lb)</b>                       | Cuts a pour day in half and holds temperature precisely     | \$180-350 |
| <b>Market booth kit (tent, table, displays)</b>           | Your storefront; a clean booth outsells a card table 3 to 1 | \$250-500 |
| <b>Retail packaging upgrade (boxes, tissue, stickers)</b> | What turns a \$22 candle into a \$32 candle on a shelf      | \$100-250 |
| <b>Simple web store + label printer</b>                   | Reorders and gifting happen online between markets          | \$150-300 |

## THE RULE

Pour your first hundred candles in one vessel, one wax, and no more than six scents. Every new variable (vessel, wax blend, fragrance load) restarts your burn-test matrix from zero. Constraint is not a budget compromise here: it is what makes your quality consistent enough to charge full price.

# Clean from day one.

Candles are lightly regulated to make and heavily consequential to make badly: you are selling a controlled fire for someone's nightstand. The checklist below keeps you clean and, more importantly, defensible.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at irs.gov, open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- Seller's permit and sales tax:** Physical products mean collecting and remitting sales tax in your state, including at markets. Most states issue the permit free or cheap; market organizers increasingly check for it.
- Product liability insurance:** A candle-caused fire claim lands on the maker. Maker-focused policies (annual or per-event) run far less than general commercial coverage and most craft markets require a certificate to give you a booth.
- ASTM warning labels on every unit:** The industry-standard cautionary label (burn within sight, keep from flammables, keep from children) follows ASTM F2058. The three-icon sticker costs pennies and is your first line of defense in any claim.
- IFRA fragrance compliance:** Every legitimate fragrance oil ships with IFRA documentation stating maximum safe load for candles. Stay inside it: overloading fragrance past the limit is both a safety issue and the main cause of sooting, sweating candles.
- Document your burn tests:** Date, vessel, wax, wick, fragrance load, full burn results, photos. This file is your proof of diligence if anything ever goes wrong, and your recipe book when a supplier changes a component.
- Home business and open-flame awareness:** Check local zoning for home production rules and tell your home insurer what you are doing. Production with hot wax is usually fine; undisclosed business activity can void a homeowner's claim.

## INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

Product liability is the floor, and maker-oriented programs price it for small batches rather than factories. Add coverage for your inventory and booth gear once a single market load passes a couple thousand dollars in value, and confirm every market's certificate requirement before you pay for the booth.

## WATCH FOR

The wax and wick mismatch. An overwicked candle burns hot enough to crack glass; an underwicked one tunnels and gets you refund requests and bad reviews. The discipline that separates professionals from hobbyists is the full burn test: every vessel, wick, and fragrance combination burned to the bottom, in four-hour intervals, before a single unit is sold. Skip it and you are shipping prototypes to strangers.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

# Three doors. Real numbers.

Price from your costs up, never from Etsy comps down. The maker's rule of thumb: retail at 4x your landed materials cost, wholesale at 2x (which is 50% of retail). A \$4.50 candle retails at \$24-28 and wholesales at \$12-14, and both numbers leave real margin.

## DOOR ONE

### The Single

\$24-28 8 oz candle

- Small-batch soy, 40-45 hour burn
- One of six signature scents
- Retail-ready label and warning compliance
- Care card with first-burn instructions

## RECOMMEND

## DOOR TWO

### The Trio

\$62-72 most-booked

- Three candles in a gift-ready box
- Mix-and-match scents or a curated set
- Free wax melt sample included
- Gift note handwritten on request
- Priced to be the default gift answer

## DOOR THREE

### The Wholesale Shelf

\$12-14 per unit, 24 minimum

- Keystone margin for the retailer
- Case-packed, display-ready units
- Net-15 terms after the first prepaid order
- Reorder by text, restock within a week
- Optional shop-exclusive scent at 48+ units

## PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Hold the 4x floor on retail. At 2x materials you are paying yourself nothing for labor, testing, booth time, or growth.
- Charge real shipping or build it in: a \$26 candle with \$9 of underpriced shipping quietly becomes a \$17 candle.
- Wholesale below 50% of retail breaks your own direct channel; protect the price ladder or boutiques will undercut your website.
- When a scent sells through twice as fast as the rest, raise its price \$2 before you raise production.

## THE UPSSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

Wax melts. They are poured from the same batches (including the remainder wax that would otherwise be waste), cost almost nothing marginal, retail at \$8-12, and convert at the register: 'want a melt of the scent you almost picked?' A melts line also recruits buyers who do not burn open flames, which is a customer your candles can never reach.

# Names, not strategies.

Your first ten customers are a launch party, one market booth, and three boutique conversations away. Candles sell on smell and story, which means your job is to put the physical product under real noses fast.

## 1 **The launch list (friends, coworkers, neighbors)**

A simple launch night or order form with founding pricing. You are not asking for favors; you are offering first access. Ten launch sales fund your first market booth.

## 2 **One farmers or craft market booth**

The highest-value real estate in this business: a hundred strangers smell your product in four hours and tell you instantly which scents and price points work. Treat every market as paid research.

## 3 **Three local boutiques**

Walk in on a weekday morning with two finished candles and a one-page wholesale sheet. Shops are hungry for local product with real margins; many will start with a small prepaid order the same week.

## 4 **Realtors and small offices**

Closing gifts and client thank-yous are a standing budget looking for a local story. One realtor who gifts two closings a month is a 24-candle annuity.

## 5 **Local Facebook groups and Instagram**

Post the pour, the burn, the label close-up. Process video is the genre that sells candles online, and neighborhood groups light up for 'made two streets over.'

### THE EXACT ASK

*"Hi, I'm [name]: I make small-batch soy candles here in [town] under the name [brand]. Every combination is burn-tested to the bottom before it sells, which most makers skip. I'm taking ten founding customers this month: \$5 off any candle, first pick of seasonal drops, in exchange for your honest take on the scents. Can I show you the three bestsellers?"*

### THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

First ten customers: \$5 off plus a free wax melt, in exchange for honest scent feedback and a review if they love it. Then retire the deal loudly: 'founding pricing closed, ten spots filled.' The deadline being real is what makes the next offer believable.

# Owned, earned, then paid.

Candles are bought with the eyes online and the nose in person, so your engine runs on both: process content that makes people crave the product, and physical touchpoints (markets, shelves) where the scent closes the sale. Email does the repeat work.

| CHANNEL, RANKED                              | WHY IT WORKS HERE   | THE FIRST MOVE   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Instagram + TikTok process content</b>    | Pours, wick trims, and label peels are inherently watchable; the format sells the craft   | Three short process clips a week, one scent story; film every pour day     |
| <b>Craft and farmers markets</b>             | Scent cannot be shipped through a screen; markets convert cold strangers at retail prices | Two markets a month minimum; collect emails at the table with a QR code    |
| <b>Email list with a drop model</b>          | Seasonal scent drops to a list create launch-day spikes you control                       | Every buyer joins the list; announce drops to email 48 hours before social |
| <b>Boutique wholesale outreach</b>           | A shelf sells for you every day with zero ad spend  | Pitch two shops a month with samples and a one-page line sheet             |
| <b>Google Business Profile + local press</b> | 'Candles made in [town]' and gift-guide roundups send high-intent buyers                  | Claim the profile, then pitch local gift guides every October              |

## FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- The full pour, start to finish, in 45 seconds (the workhorse format of the niche)
- Why your candle tunnels: the first-burn rule nobody tells you
- Burn test diary: what it takes before a scent earns a label
- How we built our fall drop: three scents, one story
- The \$26 candle vs the \$9 big-box candle, burned side by side

## THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask when they reorder, because a reorder is the review moment in this business: 'You came back for Cedar + Smoke, that makes my week. Would you drop that in a Google review? I'll text the link.' Photo reviews of burning candles in real homes are the strongest social proof a maker can own.

# One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one candle sold direct actually nets you, and what a steady solo month of markets, online orders, and one boutique account looks like. Materials assume case pricing, not craft-store unit pricing.

| ONE UNIT: ONE 8 OZ CANDLE AT \$26, SOLD DIRECT | AMOUNT  | A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 2 MARKETS + ONLINE + 1 BOUTIQUE | AMOUNT  |
|--|---------|--|---------|
| Revenue  | \$26.00 | Revenue (~190 candles, blended)                        | \$4,200 |
| Wax, fragrance, wick                           | -\$2.70 | Materials (wax, oils, vessels, labels)                 | -\$840  |
| Vessel, label, packaging                       | -\$2.55 | Packaging + shipping supplies                          | -\$280  |
| Payment processing                             | -\$0.75 | Market booth fees                                      | -\$300  |
| Booth fee share                                | -\$2.00 | Insurance, software, card fees                         | -\$95   |
| Gross profit                                   | \$18.00 | Marketing  | -\$120  |
| Tax reserve (27%)                              | -\$4.85 | Pre-tax profit   | \$2,565 |
| Yours, per candle                              | \$13.15 | Tax reserve (27%)                                      | -\$695  |
|  |         | Owner take-home  | \$1,870 |

BREAK-EVEN

## 50-90 candles

The lean build is recovered inside your first two or three markets if you hold retail pricing. The real startup cost is not money: it is the two to three weeks of burn testing and cure time before your first sellable batch, which is exactly the moat most impatient competitors refuse to build.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

# Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

## WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- Seller's permit applied for; insurance quote requested
- Supplies ordered: one vessel, one wax, four scents
- First test batch poured; burn-test log started
- Brand name, label direction, and price floor decided

## WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Burn tests running to the bottom of every combo
- Labels and ASTM warning stickers finalized and printed
- Instagram live with first process clips
- Founding offer defined; launch list of 30 names built
- Market applications submitted for weeks 3-4

## WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- First sellable batch poured, cured, and labeled
- Launch night or order form opened to the list
- First market booth worked; emails collected at the table
- Every sale photographed; first reviews requested
- Two boutiques pitched with samples and line sheet

## WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- Restock the two bestsellers; cut the slowest scent
- Founding pricing retired publicly
- Wax melts added at the register and online
- First wholesale order or trial placement closed
- Month-one P&L done; pick one channel to double

### DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 40+ candles sold, one market that beat \$400, a boutique conversation moving toward an order. Yellow: sales but no repeats or reviews yet: tighten scent lineup and follow-up, not production. Red: under 15 candles sold despite a market and 30+ real asks: your scents, label, or price point missed; rework with the feedback you collected before pouring another case.

# How this business fails, and how it grows.

## THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Pricing at 2x materials**  
It feels generous and it is: to everyone but you. At 2x you cannot afford insurance, booths, or your own hours. Hold 4x retail, 2x wholesale, from day one.

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- ✗ **Skipping or shortcutting burn tests**  
A candle that tunnels, soots, or cracks glass in a customer's home undoes a hundred good pours. Test every combination to the bottom before it earns a label.

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- ✗ **Building the business on Etsy alone**  
Stacked fees and ad costs take a fifth of every sale, and the platform owns your customer. Use it for discovery; move buyers to your list and your own checkout.

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- ✗ **Scent sprawl**  
Twenty SKUs means twenty burn-test matrices, twenty label runs, and a confusing booth. Six core scents plus one rotating seasonal beats a fragrance wall every time.

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- ✗ **Selling without labels and liability coverage**  
An open flame with no warning label and no policy behind it is a personal financial risk, not a business. Both cost little; neither is optional.

## THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The wholesale ladder**  
Ten to twenty boutique accounts reordering monthly turns production into a predictable schedule and revenue into a baseline you can plan around. Land them two a month with samples and ruthless restock reliability.

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- 2 **Corporate and private label**  
Realtor closing gifts, hotel lobby scents, branded client gifts: bulk orders at \$15-22 a unit with no booth time. One recurring corporate account can outearn a month of markets.

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- 3 **The drop and subscription model**  
Seasonal scent drops to an email list, plus a quarterly subscription box, converts your audience into pre-sold production runs. You pour what is already purchased: inventory risk inverts.

## YOUR FIRST HIRE

A pour-day and booth assistant for 8-10 hours a week once you are producing 200+ candles a month. Production is checklist work if your burn-test log is real: wax weights, temps, and pour times are already written down. If a helper cannot follow your recipe sheet unattended, the sheet is not finished yet.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

# The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

*"There is no right age. There is only the decision."*



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