TRACE THE RATER

BUSINESS PLAN | 2026–2028

Independent media • Entertainment journalism • Community reporting • Creator-led storytelling

Wichita, Kansas | tracetherater.github.io

Strategic working plan • Prepared October 2026

Planning document — proposed targets and scenarios are not verified results or guaranteed earnings.

Contents

01 Executive Summary

02 Company Description & Editorial Identity

03 Products & Services

04 Target Audience & Market Positioning

05 Market & Competitor Analysis

06 Marketing & Growth Strategy

07 Revenue Model & Monetization

08 Operations & Management

09 Financial Plan & Startup Budget

10 Milestones & Long-Term Goals

Appendix A Quarterly business scorecard

Appendix B Planning assumptions and next steps

1. Executive Summary

Trace The Rater is an emerging, founder-led digital media brand based in Wichita, Kansas. Its hybrid model combines an independent publishing operation with the founder's career as a journalist, reviewer, interviewer, video producer, and on-camera creator. The central publishing destination is https://tracetherater.github.io.

Mission

To inform, entertain, and connect audiences through original entertainment journalism, responsible community reporting, thoughtful reviews, and authentic creator-led storytelling.

Vision

To build a recognizable, credible, and financially sustainable independent media business that creates useful work for audiences and professional opportunities for its founder and collaborators.

Strategic priorities

- Balance three editorial divisions: Entertainment & Pop Culture; News & Community Journalism; Personal Commentary & Creator Stories.
- Reach audiences by interests rather than fixed age brackets.
- Publish to flexible monthly targets, protecting quality and academic/work commitments.
- Grow through organic discovery, collaborations, networking, and only selective affordable paid promotion.
- Diversify revenue through freelance services, advertising, sponsorships, and optional audience support.

The 2026–2028 roadmap moves from foundation to expansion to sustainability. This plan is a strategy, not a claim that the business is registered, staffed, profitable, or already monetized.

2. Company Description & Editorial Identity

Trace The Rater will function initially as a founder-led independent digital publishing venture. Formal legal structure, registrations, insurance, and tax arrangements will be reviewed as commercial activity develops. The founder retains editorial and creative direction, while occasional contributors may be engaged for defined projects.

Three editorial divisions

- Entertainment & Pop Culture — film, television, animation, music, streaming, reviews, industry explainers, and creator interviews.
- News & Community Journalism — Wichita-area culture, student life, local events, interviews, and human-interest reporting.
- Personal Commentary & Creator Stories — media literacy, creative development, personal essays, and reflections on social experiences.

Editorial commitments

Verify factual claims, attribute sources, correct material errors, distinguish news from opinion, disclose material sponsorships and conflicts, and obtain appropriate interview or recording permissions. Sponsors cannot purchase favorable reviews or dictate independent reporting conclusions.

3. Products & Services

Audience-facing content

- Written articles: original reports, entertainment reviews, explainers, interviews, and essays.
- Long-form video: in-depth reviews, commentary, interviews, and multimedia features.
- Short-form video: concise explainers, excerpts, announcements, and original commentary.
- Community and creator coverage: event features and interviews when access, consent, and resources permit.

Commercial services

Potential services include freelance writing, editorial research, interviewing, scriptwriting, on-camera hosting, editing, and commissioned multimedia production. Work will be accepted according to capability, scope, schedule, and fair compensation.

Publishing cadence

Use monthly targets rather than mandatory weekly quotas. An initial planning range is 3–6 articles, 1–2 long-form videos, 3–6 shorts, and 0–2 interviews or event features per month. These are optional capacity guidelines, not guaranteed output. Seek roughly equal attention across the three divisions over a quarter, rather than equal counts every week.

4. Target Audience & Market Positioning

Audience strategy will be interest-led, not age-led. Analytics may reveal useful demographic patterns later, but age is not the primary organizing principle.

Core audience groups

- Entertainment enthusiasts seeking reviews, analysis, media history, and industry news.
- Wichita residents, students, community groups, and local creators seeking relevant reporting and stories.
- Independent creators and aspiring media professionals interested in digital publishing, personal commentary, and creator development.

Secondary stakeholders

Media employers, collaborators, potential clients, sponsors, talent representatives, and educational or community organizations may engage with the brand for professional reasons. Wichita reporting is locally rooted; entertainment and creator content may travel nationally or internationally.

Positioning statement

Trace The Rater connects entertainment criticism, community journalism, and creator-led perspectives through original written and video content, anchored by a recognizable editorial voice and an accessible central website.

5. Market & Competitor Analysis

The business operates across overlapping attention markets. Established organizations are useful benchmarks, but not all are direct competitors at the same scale.

Market	Illustrative benchmarks	Differentiation opportunity
Wichita journalism	KWCH, KAKE, The Community Voice, The Sunflower	Smaller community features, student perspectives, creator interviews
National entertainment	Screen Rant, IGN, Collider	Classic and current media analysis across writing and video
Independent creators	YouTube reviewers, podcasters, newsletter writers	Creator personality combined with structured reporting and a home website

Competitive strengths and constraints

Potential advantages include a flexible format mix, broad editorial interests, local community access, and direct founder-audience relationships. Constraints include limited time, limited resources, developing credentials, uneven audience discovery, and competition for attention. These advantages are hypotheses to test, not proven market superiority.

Cooperation as strategy

Pursue interviews, freelance assignments, mentorship, guest contributions, and appropriate cross-promotion with other creators and media organizations. Evaluate each relationship for mutual value, fair terms, editorial independence, and rights clearance.

6. Marketing & Growth Strategy

Organic discovery

Use the official website as the canonical portfolio and publishing hub. Create descriptive titles, clear article categories, accessible captions, internal links, and sensible search metadata. Share stories across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, Substack, Reddit, and other relevant channels as capacity permits, adapting presentation to each platform.

Collaboration and networking

Seek interviews, guest contributions, joint discussions, and relationships with Wichita organizations, journalists, independent creators, media employers, and potential representatives. Maintain a professional media kit and concise outreach portfolio; track replies and follow-ups without excessive contact.

Selective promotion

Paid promotion is optional and should begin only with money that can be safely spent. Test a small campaign with a clear purpose, such as relevant website visits or qualified inquiries; review outcomes before repeating. Do not buy followers or use misleading engagement tactics.

Measurement

- Reach and retention: website visits, returning readers, watch time, and meaningful engagement.
- Professional outcomes: relevant inquiries, collaborations, assignments, and repeat contacts.
- Marketing efficiency: qualified results compared with time and cash spent.

7. Revenue Model & Monetization

Revenue will be diversified but introduced gradually. Early attention should favor achievable, appropriately scoped freelance assignments while owned-audience monetization develops.

Stream	Potential offer	Conditions
Freelance services	Articles, interviews, scripts, editing, hosting	Clear scope, deadlines, rights, and payment terms
Advertising	Eligible video or website ad programs	Audience scale and platform eligibility
Sponsorships	Disclosed integrations or promotional placements	No purchased editorial conclusions
Audience support	Optional subscriptions or contributions	Deliverable benefits and sustainable workload

Revenue integrity

Label sponsored work clearly; disclose relevant relationships; separate advertising decisions from editorial judgments. Track gross income, direct costs, time spent, net operating result, and payment status. Never treat proposed assignments or monetization eligibility as confirmed income.

Contracts and rights

Before accepting paid work, review ownership, licensing, revisions, cancellation terms, payment timing, exclusivity, and use of the founder's likeness. Talent representation, if pursued, requires careful evaluation of commissions, duration, scope, and termination terms.

8. Operations & Management

Founder-led structure

The founder serves as the primary editor, writer, creator, publisher, and business coordinator. Occasional freelance contributors, interview guests, designers, editors, or representatives may support individual projects without automatically becoming employees or co-owners.

Editorial workflow

- Select topic and define audience need.
- Research using credible primary and secondary sources; organize interview notes and permissions.
- Draft article or script in an original editorial voice.
- Check factual accuracy, attribution, fairness, privacy, copyright, and disclosure requirements.
- Record, edit, caption, and publish in appropriate formats.
- Review audience response and document lessons for future work.

Tools and operating capacity

Use existing laptop and smartphone, GitHub Pages, VS Code/Git, Canva, CapCut, and suitable productivity tools where available. Evaluate any paid software or equipment against a specific bottleneck. Plan content monthly around college, employment, transit, and personal responsibilities. Avoid committing to deadlines that cannot be met reliably.

Responsible AI use

AI may assist brainstorming, outlines, organization, or technical troubleshooting, but published claims require independent verification. Protect private interview material and distinguish synthetic or materially altered content when relevant. The founder retains final editorial responsibility.

Administration

Maintain project files, a rights/permissions log, invoices, expense records, backups, and a simple editorial calendar. Review appropriate legal structure, business registration, tax treatment, and insurance with qualified professionals as operations expand.

9. Financial Plan & Startup Budget

The initial financial policy is low-cost startup operation: use existing equipment, free tools, and no debt-financed expansion. Preserve the ability to publish even when income is inconsistent.

Illustrative monthly allowances

Item	Planning allowance
GitHub Pages hosting	$0
Free-tier design and editing	$0
Optional software	$0–$10
Optional custom domain (monthly equivalent)	$0–$2

Optional paid promotion	$0–$10
Miscellaneous production	$0–$15
Illustrative total	$0–$37

These allowances are not verified bills and exclude taxes, travel, registration, insurance, existing paid subscriptions, and collaborator fees. A custom domain is optional. No revenue or profit is assumed.

Financial controls

- Record actual revenue, expenses, payment dates, and time spent per project.
- Distinguish business receipts from personal earnings and maintain appropriate records for tax and benefits reporting where applicable.
- Approve discretionary purchases only when cash is available and a clear benefit is identified.
- Set aside appropriate amounts for taxes and obligations after receiving individualized guidance.
- Reinvest cautiously in equipment, accessibility, editing, website improvements, or marketing after essential costs are covered.

Forecast method

Create a rolling 12-month forecast only after baseline costs and likely client work are known. Use conservative, base, and upside scenarios with explicit assumptions. Cash collected is not the same as invoiced revenue, and operating surplus is not automatically personal take-home pay.

10. Milestones & Long-Term Goals

Period	Focus	Proposed evidence of progress
Late 2026 — Foundation	Improve articles hub, editorial workflows, portfolio, outreach, bookkeeping	Live article archive, completed original work, organized records
2027 — Expansion	Repeat publishing formats, partnerships, freelance work, measured monetization tests	Returning readers, paid assignments, repeat collaborators
2028 — Sustainability	Reliable operations, repeat clients, financial resilience, possible contributor support	Tracked recurring income, manageable costs, sustainable workload

Three balanced success pillars

- Audience growth — returning readers, video retention, constructive engagement, and community trust.
- Professional career development — published portfolio, completed assignments, skills, interviews, and relationships.
- Financial sustainability — paid work, recurring clients, cash discipline, and responsible reinvestment.

Quarterly review

Review all three pillars quarterly. Compare results with prior periods, identify which formats are effective, update workload expectations, and choose one or two operational improvements. Numeric targets should be set from actual baseline analytics rather than invented forecasts.

Appendix A. Quarterly Business Scorecard

Dimension	Measure	Baseline / target / result
Audience	Returning readers, watch time, engaged visits	To establish
Editorial balance	Published work across three divisions	To establish
Portfolio	Completed articles, videos, interviews	To establish
Career	Paid assignments and relevant contacts	To establish
Finance	Revenue, expenses, cash collected	To establish
Operations	Hours invested and missed deadlines	To establish

Appendix B. Assumptions & Immediate Next Steps

- Confirm business/legal status and any registration requirements before describing Trace The Rater as an incorporated company.
- Record current website and platform analytics to establish credible baseline targets.
- Collect actual subscription, transit, and production expenses to replace illustrative budget allowances.
- Create a concise media kit and a portfolio page featuring strongest original writing and video samples.
- Maintain a simple monthly editorial calendar and quarterly review log.
- Before paid work, verify tax, contract, intellectual-property, and any public-benefits implications relevant to the founder.

End of strategic business plan • Prepared for planning and professional discussion • October 2026