

24–36 Month Timeline Guide for a Successful Business Exit



A strategic planning guide from George & Company for business owners considering a transition

A successful business exit is rarely the result of a last-minute decision. The strongest outcomes—higher valuations, smoother diligence, and better buyer alignment—are typically achieved when owners begin preparing well in advance. At George & Company, we often see the greatest value created in the 24 to 36 months before a sale.

This timeline is not a rigid formula. Rather, it is a practical roadmap that helps owners understand what to focus on, when, and how early preparation creates options, leverage, and control.

24–36 Months Before Exit: Laying the Foundation

This phase is about honest assessment and strategic positioning. Decisions made here have the greatest long-term impact on value.

Key Objectives

- Understand what truly drives value in your business
- Identify risks that could limit valuation or derail a deal
- Begin shifting the business from owner-reliant to buyer-ready

George & Company Focus Areas

- Initial readiness assessment and goal alignment
- Review of historical financial performance and trends
- Identification of earnings normalization adjustments
- Evaluation of customer, employee, and owner concentration
- Assessment of management depth and operational transferability
- High-level discussion of exit timing, structure, and post-sale goals

»» Owner Actions

- Commit to clean, consistent financial reporting
- Begin documenting key processes and institutional knowledge
- Address known issues rather than deferring them
- Reduce dependence on the owner where possible

18–24 Months Before Exit: Strengthening the Business

With a foundation in place, the focus shifts to improving quality and predictability—the factors buyers reward with stronger multiples.

Key Objectives

- Improve earnings quality and consistency
- Reduce perceived risk
- Build credibility with future buyers

George & Company Focus Areas

- Financial clarity and normalization support
- Identification of value enhancement opportunities
- Guidance on improving margin stability and cash flow
- Review of contracts, leases, and key agreements
- Management and succession planning support

»» Owner Actions

- Lock in key customers and suppliers where possible
- Strengthen second-tier management
- Address customer or revenue concentration
- Ensure compliance, legal, and insurance matters are current

12–18 Months Before Exit: Preparing for Market

This phase is about positioning and proof. Buyers will soon test everything that has been built.

Key Objectives

- Present a clear, defensible financial and operational story
- Ensure the business is ready for scrutiny
- Align expectations around value and deal structure

George & Company Focus Areas

- Preliminary valuation discussions and expectation setting
- Identification of likely buyer profiles (strategic vs. financial)
- Guidance on working capital expectations
- Early diligence preparation and issue resolution
- Confidentiality and process planning

➤➤ Owner Actions

- Maintain performance discipline—no shortcuts
- Avoid major unvetted changes to the business
- Prepare mentally for buyer questions and negotiations

6–12 Months Before Exit: Going to Market

At this stage, preparation turns into execution. Discipline and consistency are critical.

Key Objectives

- Protect confidentiality
- Create competitive buyer interest
- Maintain business momentum during the sale process

George & Company Focus Areas

- Development of confidential marketing materials
- Targeted outreach to qualified buyers
- Buyer screening and process management
- Negotiation support and offer evaluation
- Coordination with legal and tax advisors

➤➤ Owner Actions

- Stay focused on running the business
- Support diligence requests promptly and accurately
- Maintain consistent messaging and expectations

Closing & Transition: Protecting the Outcome

The final phase is not just about closing—it is about ensuring the deal sticks.

Key Objectives

- Minimize last-minute surprises
- Ensure a smooth ownership transition
- Protect value post-closing

George & Company Focus Areas

- Diligence and closing support
- Transition and communication planning
- Post-close expectations and handoff

The George & Company Perspective

Owners who begin planning 24 to 36 months in advance consistently achieve better outcomes than those who wait. Early preparation creates leverage, reduces stress, and preserves optionality.

At George & Company, our role is not just to sell businesses—it is to help owners exit on their terms, with clarity, confidence, and results.



George & Company

Boutique Business Brokerage | Mergers, Acquisitions & Exit Planning
6 Lancaster County Rd Suite A, Harvard, MA 01451 **Phone:** (508) 753-1400

We specialize in representing privately held businesses, ensuring confidentiality, alignment with seller goals, and successful outcomes.