How Business Owners Can Reduce Tax Burdens Using a 401(k) Plan

A guide for business owners to help reduce business and personal tax burdens.

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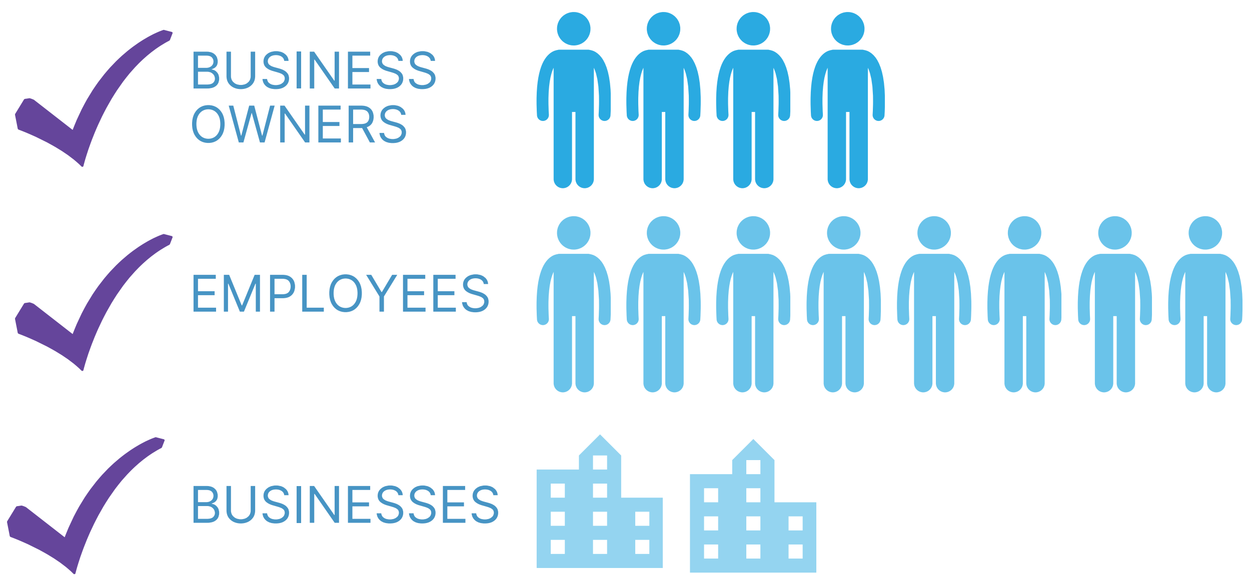
Often Overlooked Tax Benefits of
A 401(K) PLAN

Whether you are just starting or have been in business for decades, a 401(k) may be an excellent addition to your business.

That's because a 401(k) comes with various benefits, from tax deductions and credits to increased employee retention and satisfaction.

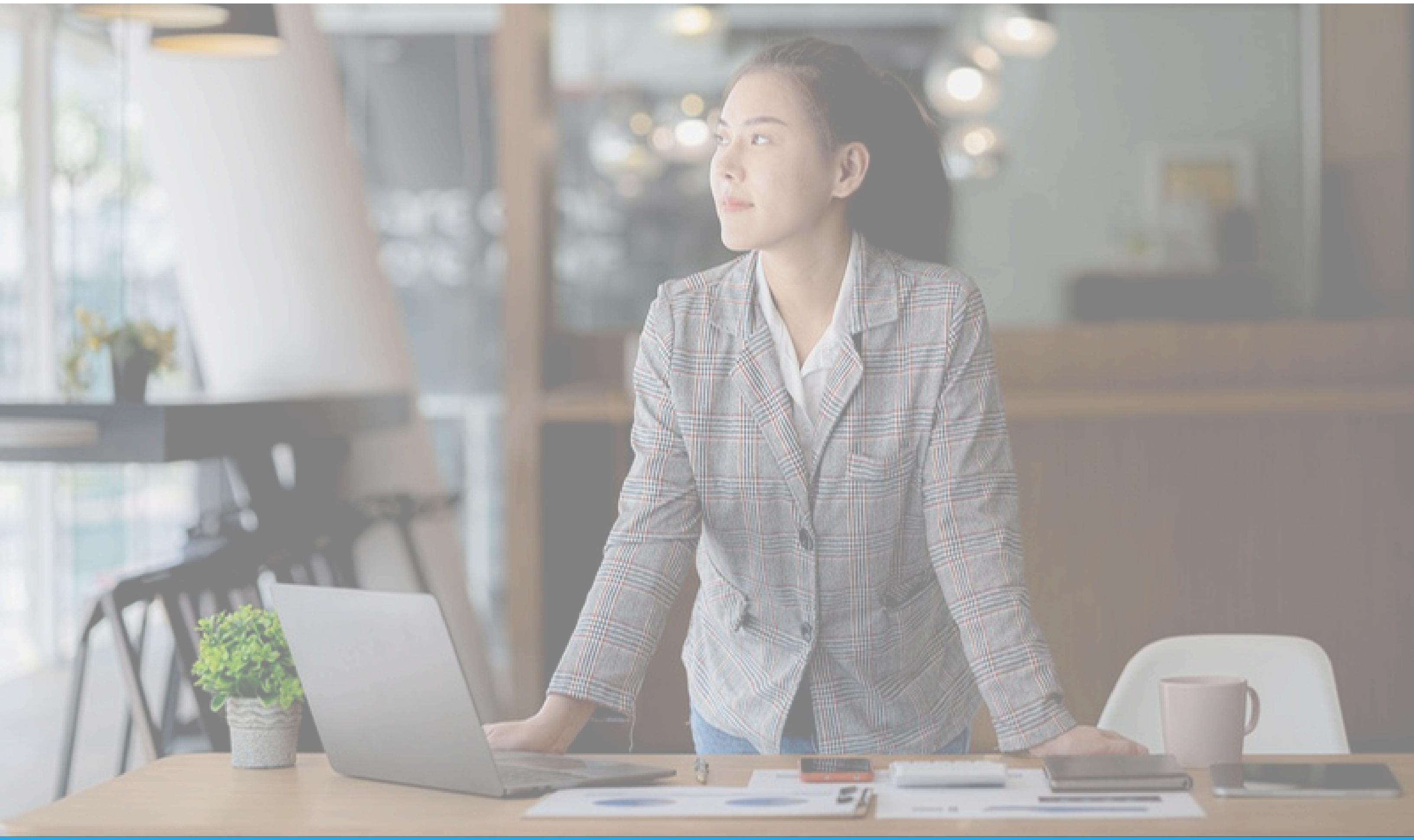


In this paper, we'll explore how a 401(k) can reduce taxes both for businesses and for their owners.

Personal Benefits

FOR BUSINESS OWNERS AND EMPLOYEES

One of the best advantages of a 401(k) is it allows both owners and employees to easily save for retirement. Retirement accounts like 401(k)s come with some unique tax advantages that separate them from a regular investment accounts.



Let's explore two primary tax-saving contribution options with a 401(k).

PERSONAL TAX BENEFITS

Pre-tax contributions

A traditional 401(k) means all contributions happen *before* taxes.

This allows both owners and employees to contribute to their 401(k) without paying federal or state income taxes on those contributions. That can create significant tax savings now by lowering their[1] taxable income. Then, traditional 401(k) funds grow tax-free until retirement, and distributions are taxed as ordinary income during retirement.

It’s important to know that there are annual contribution limits for participants and employers, with special catch-up provisions for employees and owners over age 50. Be sure to check the latest guidance from the IRS, as these contribution limits change over time.

TOTAL INCOME

401(k) contributions | taxable income

CONTRIBUTION LIMIT **$24,500***

$8,000* **CATCH-UP FOR THOSE 50+**

$11,250* **CATCH-UP FOR THOSE 60-63**

Pre-tax contributions lower your taxable income.

*for 2026

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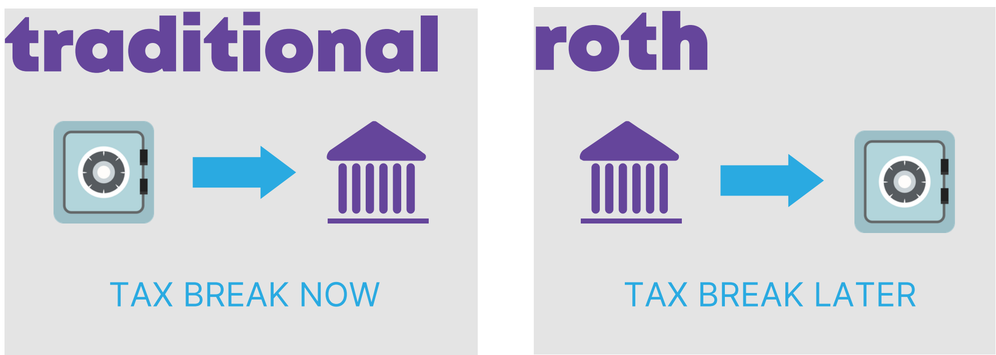
PERSONAL TAX BENEFITS

Roth (after-tax) contributions

With a Roth 401(k), all contributions are made *after* taxes.

This means that instead of creating a tax reduction now, participants pay taxes today in exchange for tax-free growth and tax-free distributions in[2] retirement. This can be very appealing for participants or owners who anticipate being in a higher tax bracket during retirement and want to lock in their favorable tax rate now.



While this does not reduce taxable income like a traditional 401(k), it can be a great way to diversify tax treatment. In addition, just like traditional 401(k)s, Roth 401(k)s have annual contribution limits for the participant and employer, with special catch-up provisions for participants age 50 or over.

Remember to check the annual contribution limits directly on the IRS website.

Additionally, with SECURE 2.0 legislation that passed at the end of 2022, employees are able to choose to have their employer contributions treated as Roth*. This is good news for workers who expect to have a higher income after retirement than they do currently, because it allows them to pay taxes on the matching funds now, and avoid paying taxes on them later.

After-tax contributions provide tax-free distributions in retirement.

*if allowed by the plan

Understanding Roth Employer Contributions

One of the SECURE Act 2.0 updates allows fully-vested employer contributions to be designated as Roth for tax purposes. Previously, all employer contributions were made pre-tax.

This provision is a welcome one for employees that are already benefitting from their own Roth contributions. 401(k) contributions can be taxed before they enter the retirement account (traditional) or when they leave the account (Roth), but it must be one or the other.

Employer Roth contributions are complicated because the employee is responsible for the taxes on the employer contribution. To resolve this issue, the IRS guidance requires that the employer Roth contributions be reported on Form 1099-R for the year they are allocated to the participant's account.

Businesses should take these steps to ensure smooth running of this valuable provision.

assess

Choose both a recordkeeper and a payroll provider that are able and willing to handle Roth employer contributions. Tracking and making changes can be difficult, putting extra responsibility on providers.

educate

Educate employees about their options as well as the implications. Participants who do not expect the 1099-R may be unhappy to discover the additional tax burden at the end of the year.

Roth employer matching contributions are complex.

Business Benefits
TAX SAVINGS FOR BUSINESS ENTITIES

In addition to the tax savings and advantages as a participant, there are substantial business tax savings opportunities to consider.

The tax savings provided by a retirement benefit is often the biggest reason businesses choose to offer it.

Let's explore three primary tax-saving channels for businesses.

Deductible expenses

administration

recordkeeping

auditing

consulting

Since a 401(k) is an employee benefit, the costs associated are deductible expenses.

This includes contributions you make to employee accounts and any administrative costs that come with establishing and maintaining your 401(k) plan.

For example, many 401(k) plans include fees for:

- third-party administration
- recordkeeping
- auditing
- hiring outside consultants

These deductible expenses are a great way to save money at tax time while offering a high-quality benefit to your employees.

Deductible expenses help businesses save money at tax time.

BUSINESS TAX BENEFITS

Profit-sharing (non-elective) contributions

In addition to the typical matching contributions, businesses can choose to offer profit-sharing contributions to their participants. These contributions are tax-deductible for the *previous* tax year. This means businesses have time to determine how much they can afford to provide, and they can even elect to make no contribution for a year.

Participants tend to prefer this type of benefit, because it doesn't increase their taxable income, and it is invested rather than provided in cash, often making it more valuable than a bonus payment. It also doesn't count toward the IRS deferral limit, making it particularly helpful for highly compensated employees who may have their 401(k) contributions maxed.

integrated
Based on social security tax levels

age-weighted
Older employees receive more

pro-rata
Equal percentage of salary

new comparability
Based on unique benefit groups

While there are several different profit sharing methods available, many business owners can benefit from using the new comparability calculation. It typically provides more compensation for those who are older and make more money, which can give owners the ability to maximize the contributions to their own accounts.

Profit-sharing benefits can be more valuable than a bonus payment.

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Tax credits

Lastly, specific tax credits are available to businesses to help offset the costs of establishing a retirement plan like a 401(k).

It's important to note that you can either claim the tax credit or deduct the startup expenses, but you cannot do both. SECURE 2.0 created some new and expanded tax credits to make retirement plans more affordable for small businesses. Be aware of three credits.

AUTO-ENROLLMENT CREDIT

The credit is available for new plans that include an auto-enrollment feature,

$500 *per year*

for:

3 years

Be sure to work with your accountant or tax professional to verify eligibility and visit the IRS website for additional details.

Employers may qualify for tax credits of $500 x 3 years for auto-enrollment.

Tax credits through SECURE 2.0

SECURE Act 2.0 have expanded tax credits for small businesses that start a new 401(k).

Some key highlights of the bill include the expansion of the previous tax credit to cover 100% of start-up costs (up to $5,000) and creating a new tax credit that offers employers a credit for a percentage of plan contributions made for the first five years, up to a per-employee cap of $1,000 (with some restrictions).

ADMINISTRATIVE CREDITS:

100%
of start-up costs, up to $5000
for 3 years

For companies with fewer than 50 employees.

OR

50%
of start-up costs, up to $5000

For companies with 51-100 employees.

The maximum credit is reduced for very small companies. Those with fewer than 20 employees should use this calculation:

$250 x no. of NHCEs = max credit

NHCE = non-highly-compensated employee, exact definition here: https://www.irs.gov/retirement-plans/plan-participant-employee/definitions

SECURE 2.0 expands business tax benefits for small employers.

More tax credits through SECURE 2.0

The contribution credit is particularly valuable for companies, helping to reduce the burden of providing employee contributions for 5 years.

CONTRIBUTION CREDITS:

up to **$1000** per eligible employee* per year *for* **5 years**

For businesses with 50 or fewer employees. Credits are available on a diminishing scale, reduced by 25% per year starting year 3.

Tax credit schedule

Year 1:	100%
Year 2:	100%
Year 3:	75%
Year 4:	50%
Year 5:	25%

*Eligible employees are those that are paid no more than $100,000.

Businesses with 51 - 100 employees

A sliding scale is used to calculate the tax credit for businesses with 51-100 employees. The percentage is reduced by 2 points for every employee over 50. The 5-year tax credit schedule is still applied.

EXAMPLE: A business has 70 employees

number over 50= 20
20 x 2 points = 40% reduction
(or 60% total)

Year 1:	100% x 60%
Year 2:	100% x 60%
Year 3:	75% x 60%
Year 4:	50% x 60%
Year 5:	25% x 60%

Looking for even more tax benefits?

For business owners who are dedicated to preparing a large amount of funds for retirement, who are looking for additional tax relief, and who have stable cash flow from year to year, we often recommend combining a profit-sharing 401(k) plan with a cash balance plan.

large contributions

By combining the two plan types, participants can often accrue much higher amounts than could be saved with a 401(k) alone.

guaranteed income

While 401(k) plans do not provide any guarantees, a cash balance plan will define what you get at the time of retirement.

tax benefits

The money invested in a cash balance plan grows tax-deferred, and contributions made by the company are tax deductible.

define participation

Benefit yourself, family members, or key employees beyond 401(k) and profit-sharing amounts.

Cash balance plans allow large, tax-deductible contributions to be made.

Business + Personal Benefits
FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED

If a business employs just one owner (and spouse, if applicable), a solo 401(k) plan is a great option. In addition to providing a vehicle for retirement savings for business owners, it also offers other tax and business benefits.

For businesses with just one owner, a solo 401(k) plan is a great option.

Solo-k benefits

large contributions

Plans allow up to $72,000/yr in contributions (in 2026) without restriction (+ $8000 in catch-up for those 50 and older).

easy administration

Plans are not subject to most qualification requirements or annual nondiscrimination testing. 401GO provides automation that manages many day-to-day tasks.

low fees

Because they cover few employees and require little administration, fees for solo plans are typically very affordable. Spouse accounts are often included at no extra charge.

plan options

You can choose your tax advantage: traditional plans reduce taxable income now, while Roth plans allow for tax-free distributions in retirement.

Solo 401(k) plans allow large annual contributions

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HERE TO HELP

With so many considerations associated with retirement planning, one cut-and-dried answer for everyone does not exist. It's important to think through these details carefully to ensure the best long-term benefits.

At 401GO, we provide 401(k) plans powered by an easy-to-use platform. Our streamlined approach allows you to get up and running in just minutes with simple and affordable pricing to fit your unique business.

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