

Chat: Industry of your startup?

“Reverse Pitch” Workshop to Tell Your Product, Tech, and AI Story



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July 27, 2026

200+ AI Diligence | 150+ Mentor | Advisor



Today: Show, Tell

Disclaimer:

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual start-ups is purely coincidental.

Q: Industry of our fictional start-up?

Q: Vague challenge we're trying to solve?

(Pre)Seed Pitch Deck

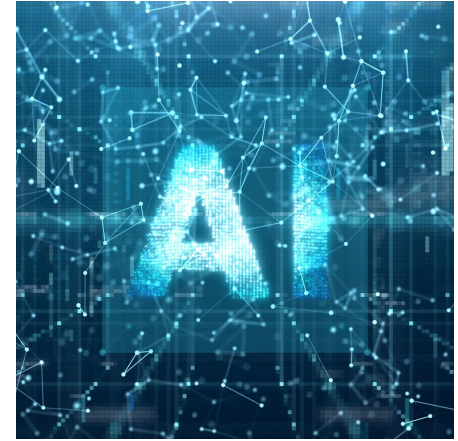
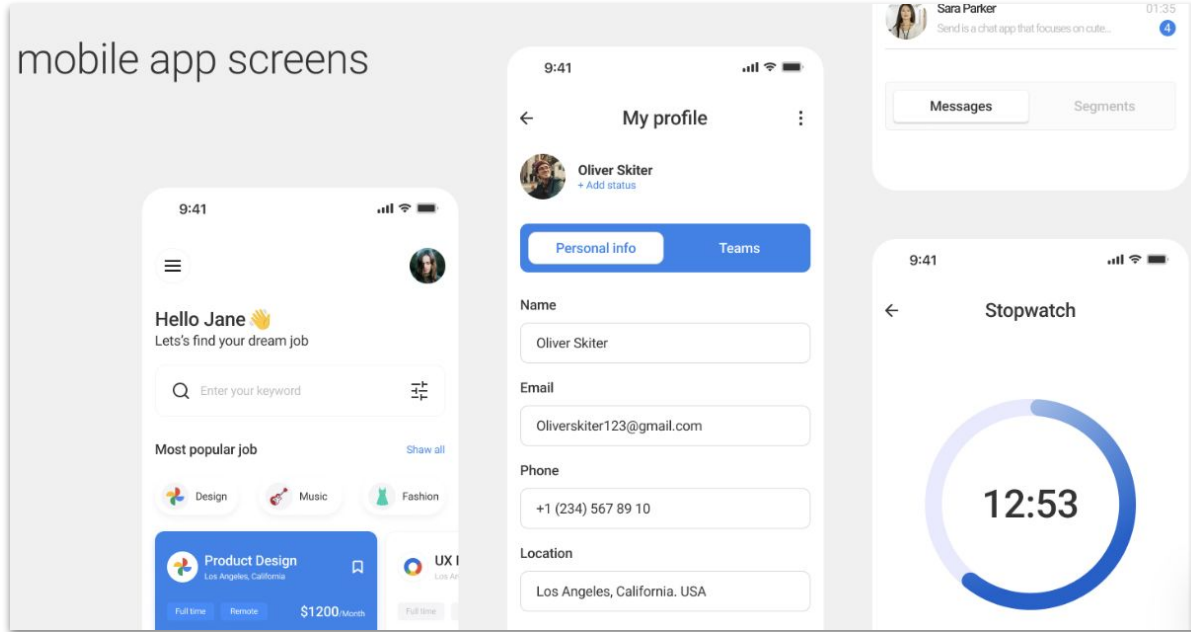
Outline following* [search result #1](#) for “startup pitch deck”

Problem

<Our vague challenge>

Solution

mobile app screens



[\[ref\]](#)

[\[Figma Mockups\]](#)

Revenue Model

\$10/mo subscription

Competition

None

Competition (alternative)

Competitive landscape



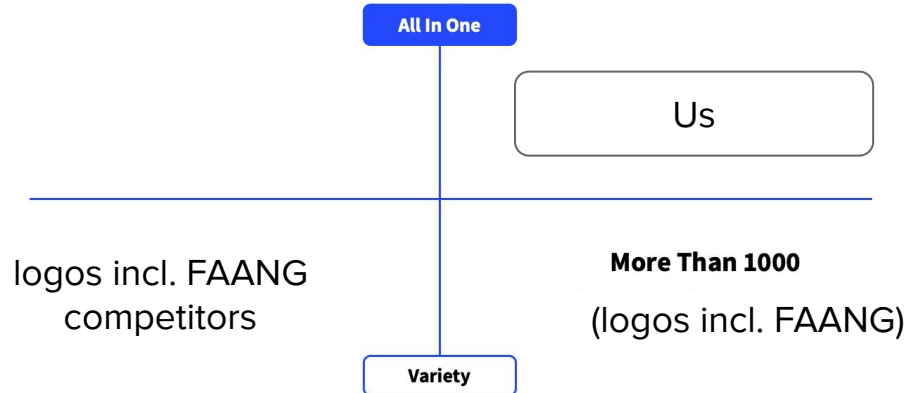
growth insights	✓	✓	✓	✓
generous free version	✓	✓	✓	✓
No podcast	✓		✓	
Not a solopreneur	✓			
somewhat unhinged	✓			
Lives in Boston	✓			
Wears glasses	✓			

Competition (alternative)

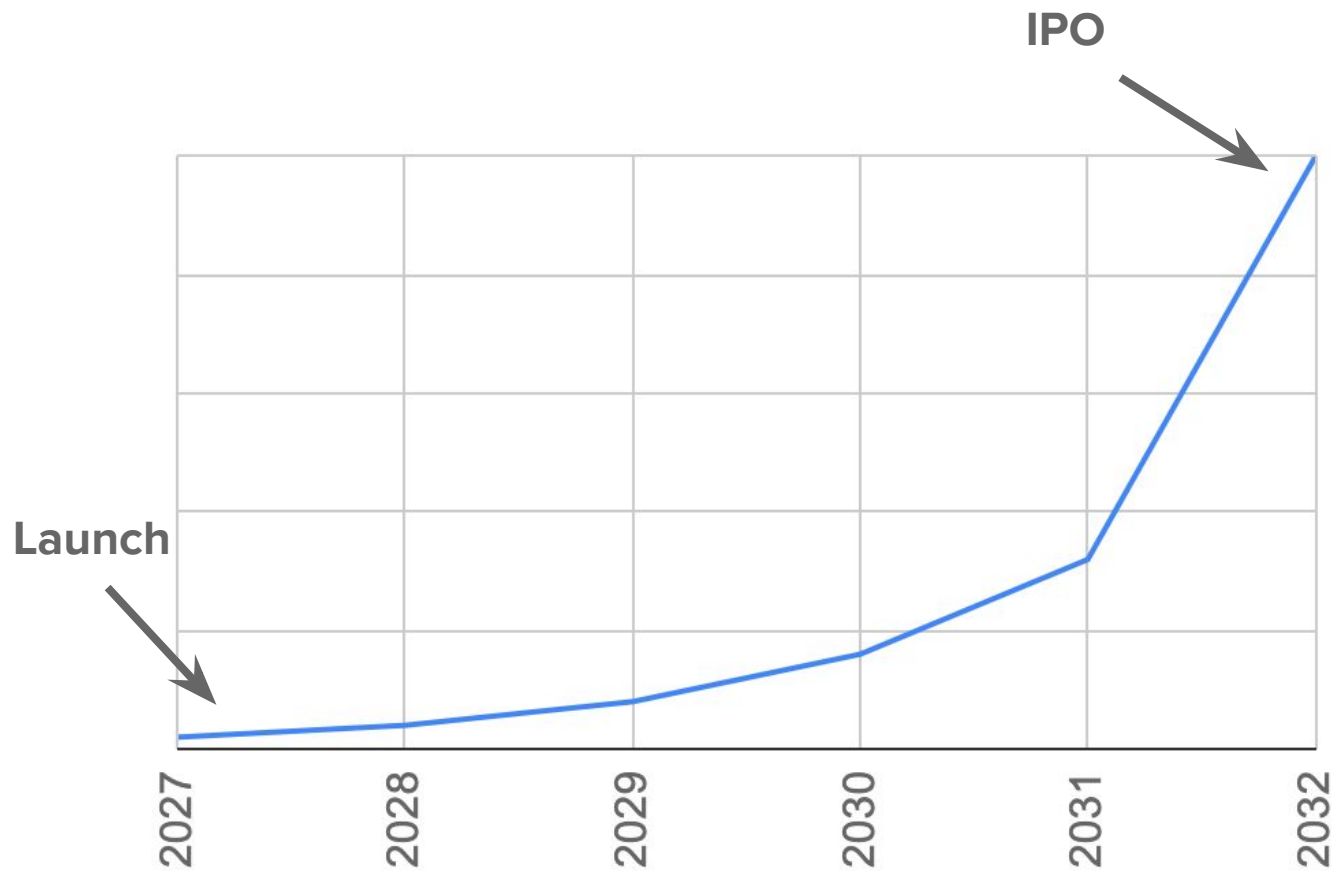
[\[ref\]](#)

Competition

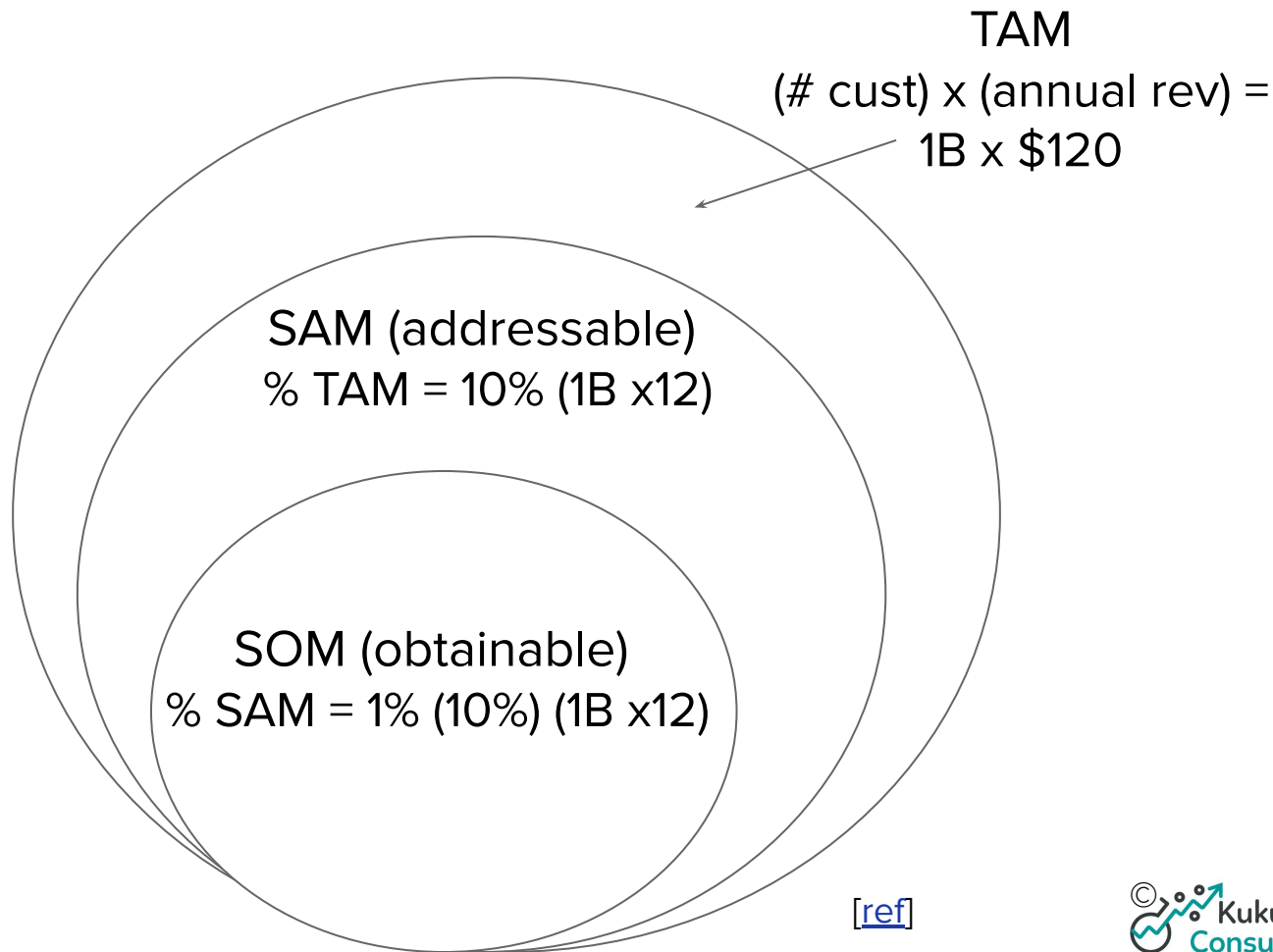
Our product is unique and doesn't have direct competitors



Traction



Market



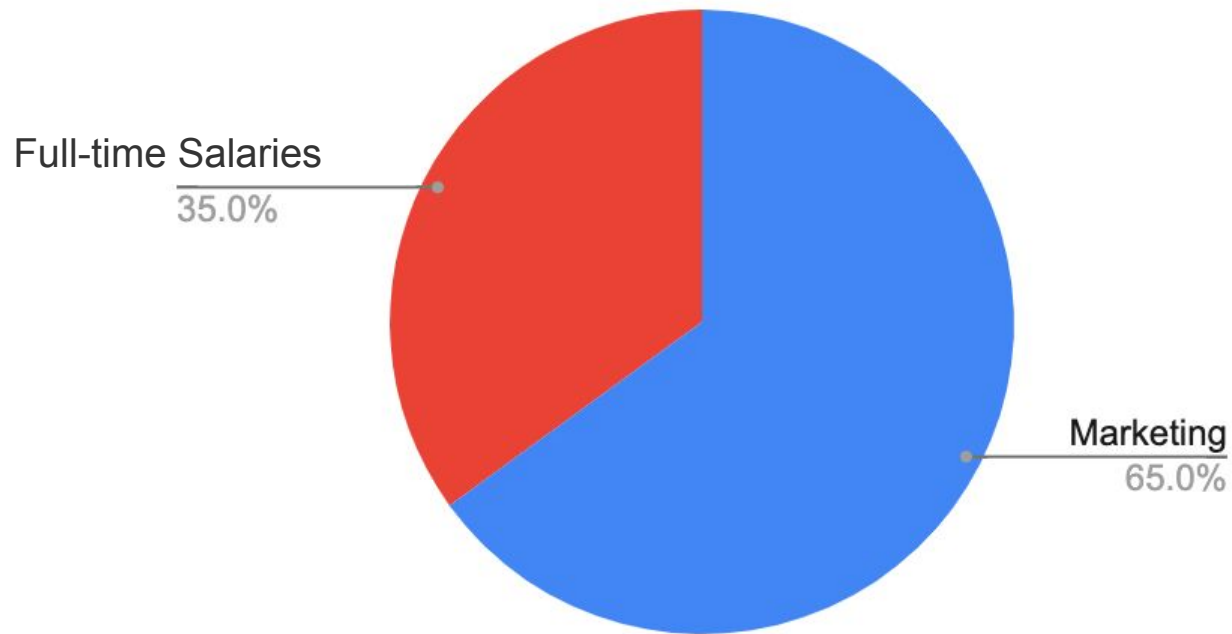
Team



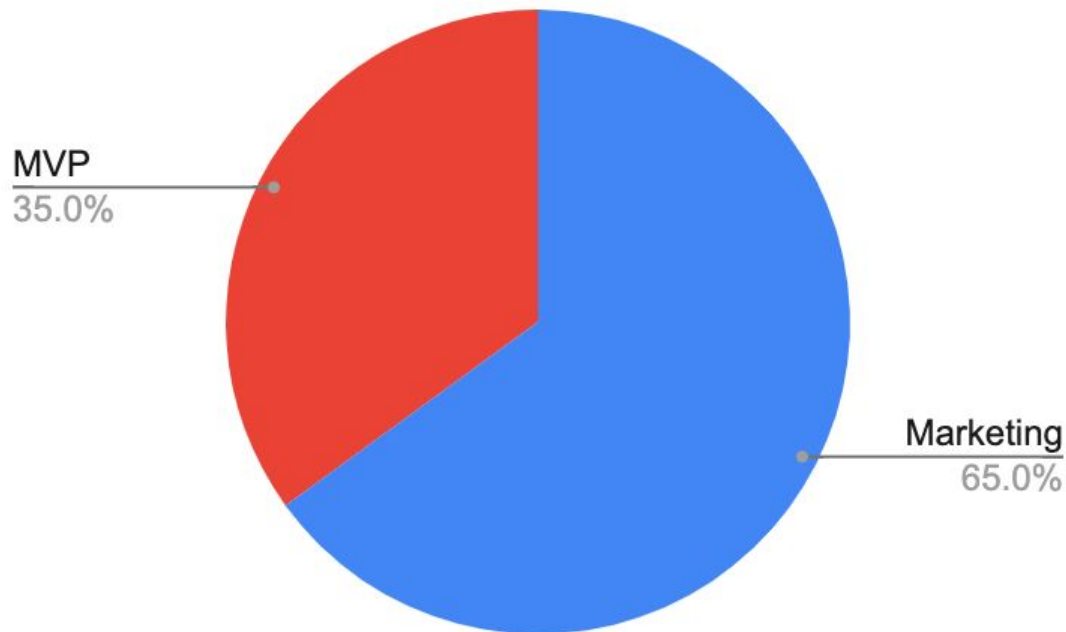
M-FACTOR



Ask



Ask (alternative)





Who'll invest?

>>> 90% of pitch decks (!)

>>> 90% of pitch decks (!)

10+ investors agree (!)

Q: Where did we go wrong?

Aside: VC Context

- *From Pitch to Paycheck: Preparing for Due Diligence*
- Q: How long do investors review deck?
- <Slide order>

Problem (v2)

Problem

<Our vague challenge> + Technical terms

Problem

Jargon/Acronyms

Math/chemical equations

ML/AI algos

<Our vague challenge> + Technical terms

Videos of surgeries

Database names

Anatomical diagrams

Problem

~~Jargon/Acronyms~~

~~Math/chemical equations~~

~~ML/AI algos~~

~~<Our vague challenge> + Technical terms~~

~~Videos of surgeries~~

~~Database names~~

~~Anatomical diagrams~~

Problem: Get 8-yr old Excited!

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Array Independent Component Analysis with Application to
Remote Sensing

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Study Pictures of Jupiter to Learn about its Weather

Problem: Get 8-yr old Excited!

~~Array Independent Component Analysis with Application to
Remote Sensing~~

Study Pictures of Jupiter to Learn about its Weather

→ *If can't understand, can't introduce*

Problem: Get 8-yr old Excited!

Pitching to diverse audience:

- Novice
- Expert
- (Different) Experience
- ...

→ Pitch to *shared experience*

Problem: Get 8-yr old Excited!

Pitching to diverse audience:

- Novice
- Expert
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- ...

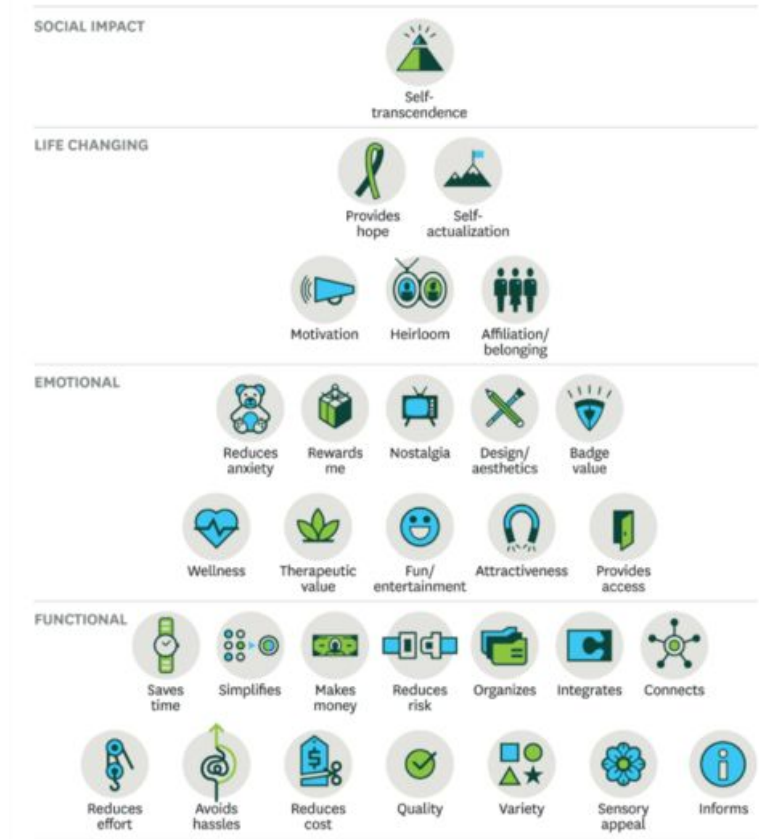
→ Pitch to 8-year old novice

Problem: Get 8-yr old Excited!

< EX 2: “Cabinet” >

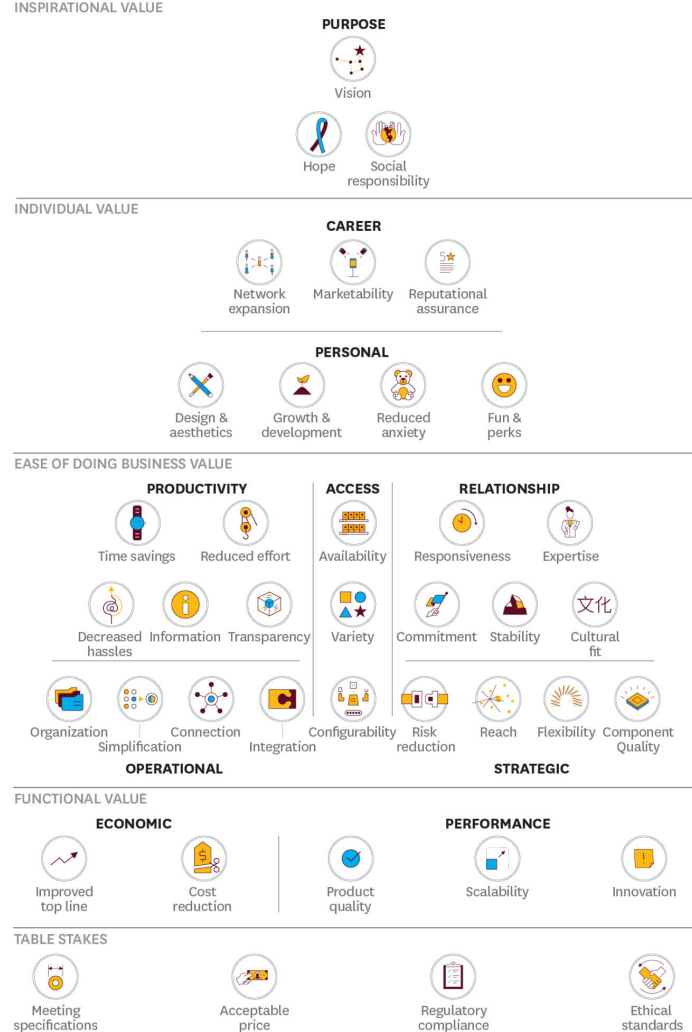
Problem: Customer Value

- D2C: 1+ of 30 ways



Problem: Customer Value

- B2B: 1+ of 40



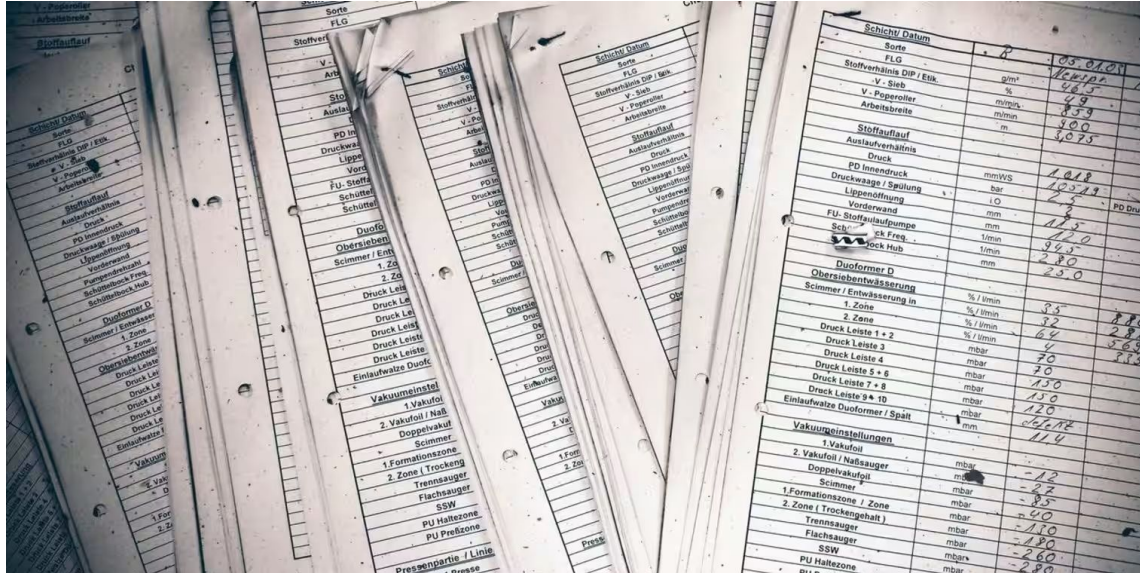
Problem: Customer Value

Q: Our customer value?

[illegible]

- [ref]

Problem: Specific



- Manual
 - Disjoint
 - Broken
- **Painful (!!!)**

[ref]

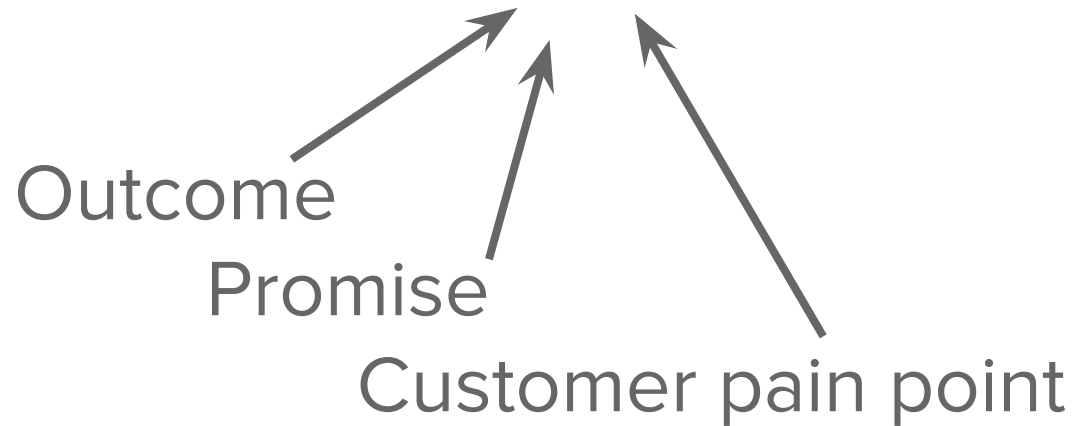
→ Bonus: use customers' words

Checkpoint

Q: Is this a ***big*** problem, ***now***?

Problem: Specific

<Name> is <adjective> <characteristic>
trying to do <customer value>.



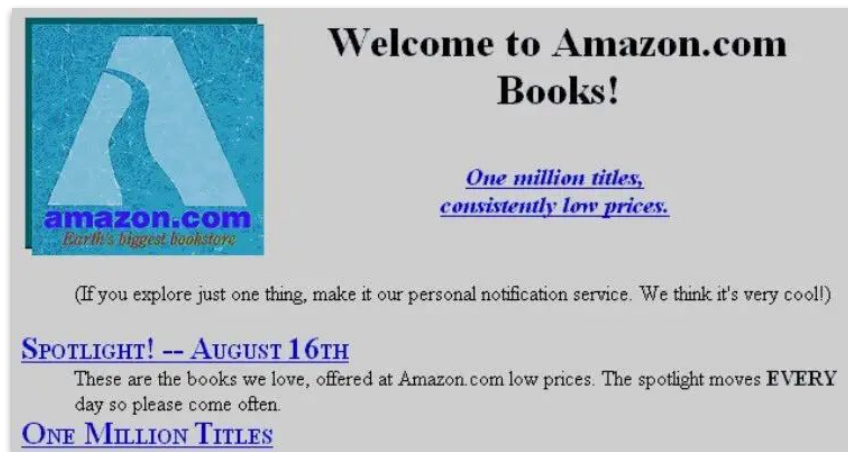
Problem: Specific

<Name> is <customer persona> trying to
<customer value>.

Q: Our **1** specific customer?

→ Bonus: **GTM**

Problem: Specific → GTM



20 → 5 → books → “Earth’s Biggest Bookstore” (1M titles + how)

~~Problem: Specific → GTM~~

amazon

WHOLE
FOODS
MARKET + amazon

prime

aws

amazon
kindle

List of Amazon's Products and Services



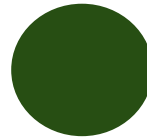
Q: Put yourself in customer's shoes?

Q: If not, what else do we need?



(Bonus) Prospective customers?

Platform Play *Narrative*



Competition (v2)

Competition/Alternatives

<Current customer habits>

Competition/Alternatives: Industry

Q: What are our customers doing *now*?

TIP: Plain Language + 8-yr old Excited!

EX: <Vague problem>: *Databases*

- <Typical Pitch>: ... differ from InfluxDB ...

Q: Who knows about this?

TIP: Plain Language + 8-yr old Excited!

EX: <Vague problem>: Databases

— <Typical Pitch>: ... InfluxDB... (expert)

→ search by date

Q: Who knows about this?

TIP: Plain Language + 8-yr old Excited!

EX: <Vague problem>: Databases

~~—<Typical Pitch>: ... InfluxDB... (expert)~~

~~→ search by date (intermediate)~~

RARE → go to store on M + W, Legos available?

Competition/Alternatives: Industry

<visualization>: gaps in alternatives

Q: 1 way to show difference?

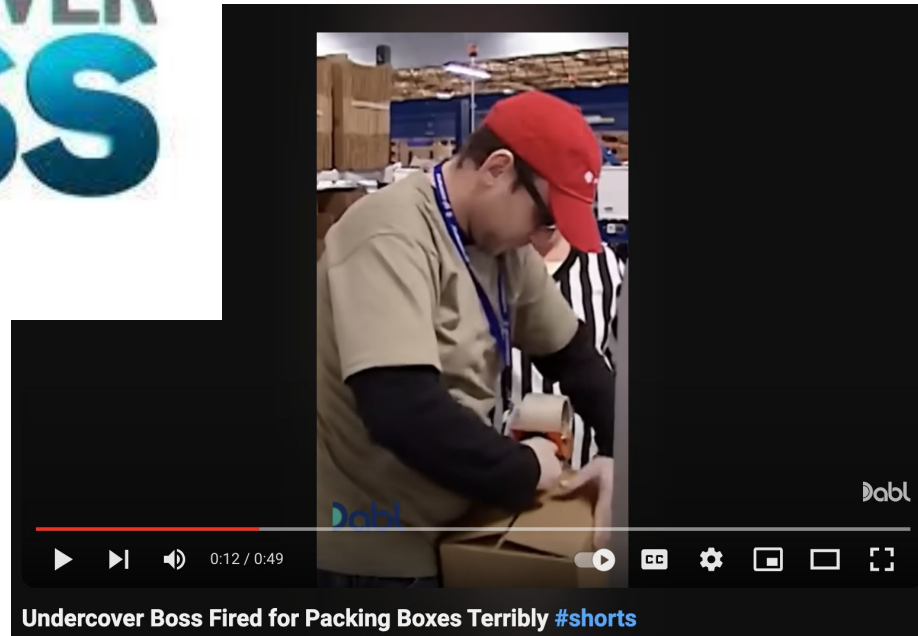
Solution (v2)

Solution

~~←Screenshots for sake of screenshots→~~

Solution: Tie into Customer Habits!

UNDERCOVER
BOSS



[[ref](#)]

Solution: Tie into Customer Habits!



- End-to-end:
Customer problem to customer value
- (High-level)
Visualization
- (Appendix) On-boarding

[ref]

Solution: Tie into Customer Habits!

Bonus: No friction from...

- *Change* customer behavior
- *Educate* customers



Solution: Tie into Customer Habits!

Q: How to tie our solution into
our customer habits?

Solution: Tie into Customer Habits!

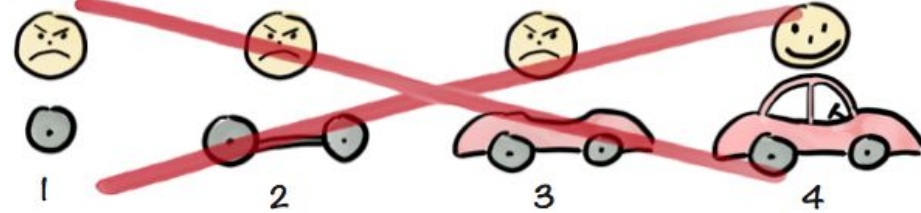
Q: Did we *close loop* on promise?

Product (v2)

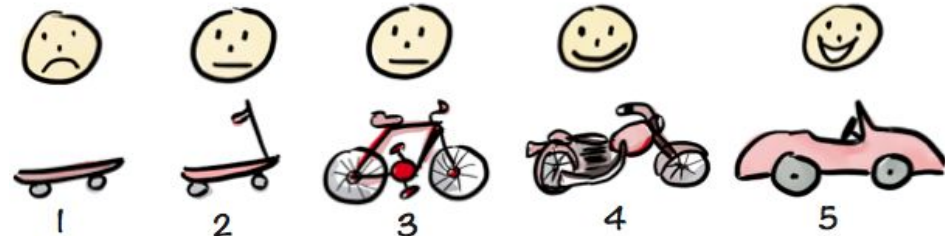
Product (v2)

- [Now] What exists?
 - Idea, MPV, Beta, etc.
- ~~[Future] At/near scale?~~
- ~~[Stages] MVT~~

Not like this....



Like this!



[ref]

Business (v2)

Business Model (v2)

- **Who** pays (esp. Health/MedTech)?
- **Ability** to pay? (Then) Willingness?

Business Model (v2)

- (Common) Pricing models (B2B, SaaS), per:
 - User
 - Usage
 - Tiered features (w/ or w/o freemium)
 - Flat-fee
 - ~~○ (SaaS) Ad-free versions~~

Business Model (v2)

- (Common) Pricing models (B2B, SaaS), per:
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 - ~~○ (SaaS) Ad-free versions~~
- *TIP*: Projections 2-6 quarters out*

Traction (v2)

- Waitlist?
- LOIs?
- Conversions?
- Engagement?
- Revenue?
- < metrics by stage > ([SaaS EX](#))

Team (v2)

(Unfair Advantage*)

Team (v2)*

2x-<Industry>

<Industry expertise: Name(s), logos>

<Business strategy: Name(s), logos>

<Technical strategy: Name(s), logos>

Exit to <Co>

*Advisors, fractionals OK

Team (v2) + Problem: *Why you + Why now?*

Motivation???

Legislation???

Personal???

Q: *Why hasn't + can't anyone else offer your product?*

Team (v2) + Problem: *Why you + Why now?*

Motivation???

Legislation???

Personal???

→ <***Opening Hook***>

Checkpoint

- <Whom for> ???
- <Why problem exists> ???
- <What's been done (previously)> ???
- <How solution can be used> ???

Ask (v2)

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

Tied to Growth!

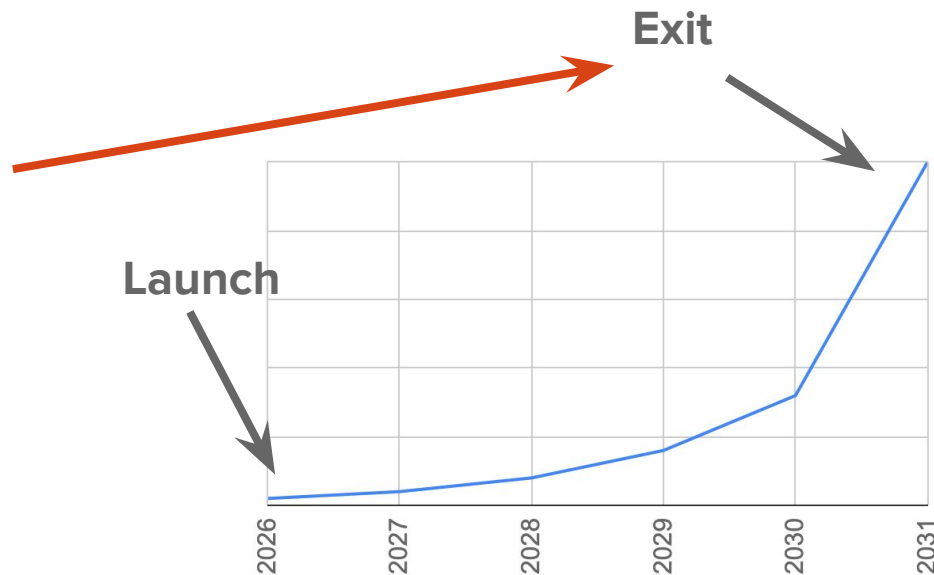


[ref]

OnStartups.com

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

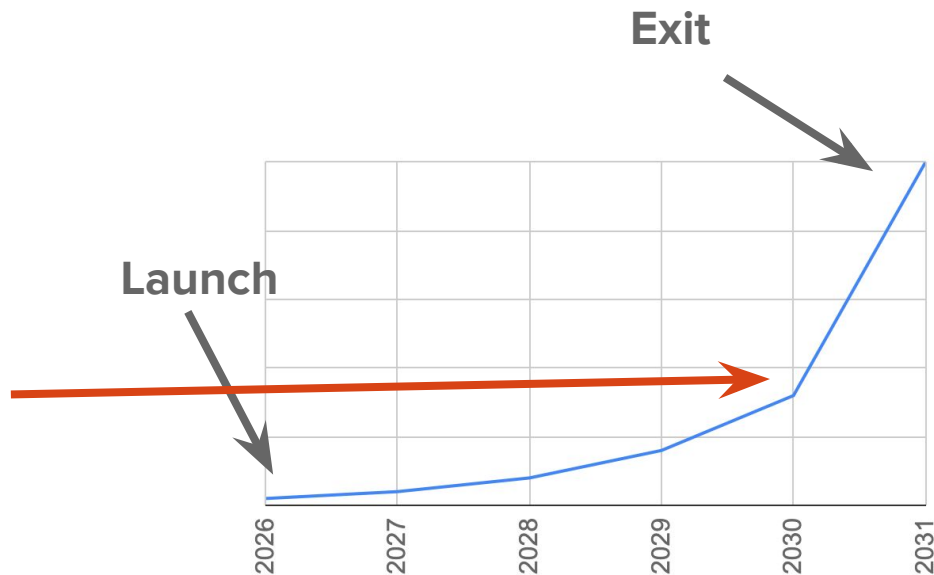
Tied to Growth!



*From Pitch to Paycheck: Preparing
for Due Diligence*

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

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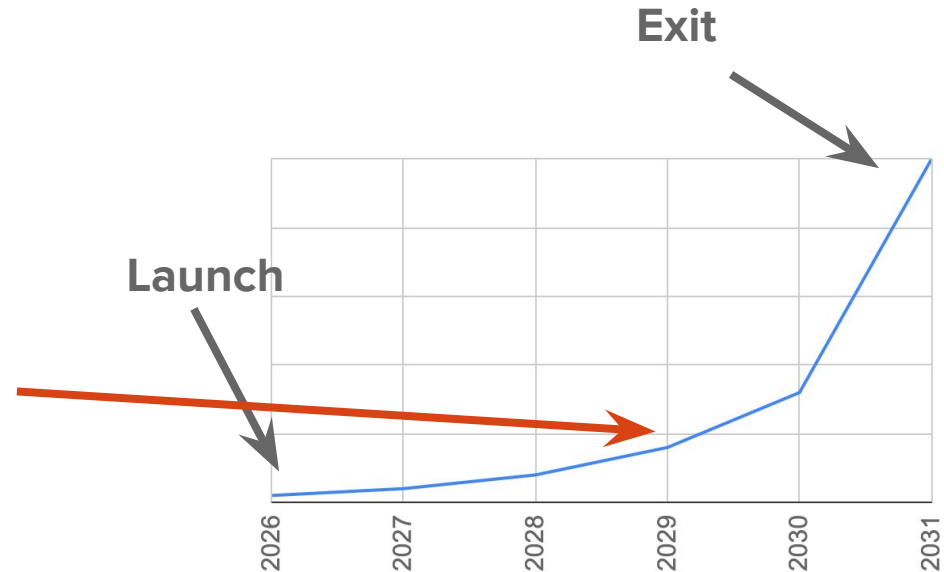


*From Pitch to Paycheck: Preparing
for Due Diligence*

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

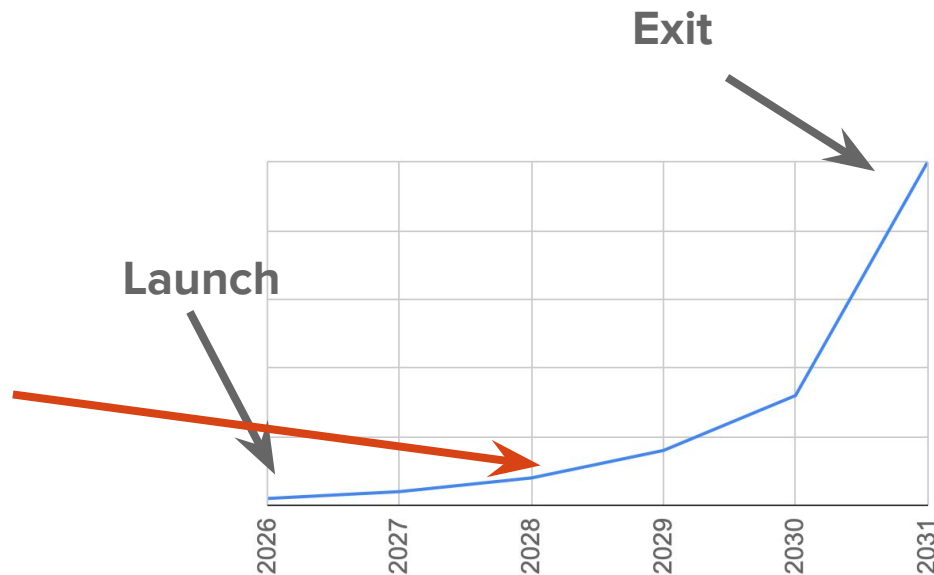
Tied to Growth!

*From Pitch to Paycheck: Preparing
for Due Diligence*



Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

Tied to Growth!



*From Pitch to Paycheck: Preparing
for Due Diligence*

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

Tied to Growth!

Q: Our next milestone?

Ask: Milestones, Milestones, Milestones!

Q: Milestone to get us to next round?



Who'll take a meeting?

<<< 10% of pitch decks (!)

Pitch Deck (v3)

Problem (v3)

Problem (v3)

Q: 1 GTM persona?

Business Model (v3)

Business Model

Q: \$\$\$ of current customer habits?

Business Model

Impact [[ref](#)] your solution provides:

- increases revenue?
- increases efficiency?
- reduces risk?
- improves quality?



\$\$\$

Business Model

Q: \$\$\$ product saves/makes? How often?

→ Bonus: **“No brainer” Pricing Strategy** that aligns incentives

Business Model → Market Opportunity

(# Sell) x (Cost) x (Gross Margin) = \$100M+/year [[NFX](#)]

Growth Flywheel (Unfair Advantage*)

12 Killer Wedges (NFX)

Network Effects

Goals:

- Shorten time-to-value
- Growth
- SOM

Flywheel (v0.1): ~~NPS~~

- → Referral link



Network Effects

Q: 1 additional flywheel?

Hint: Where do your customers hangout now?

Network Effects

Goals (cont'd):

RARE Growth +
↓ CAC +
↑ LTV >>> CAC



[ref]

Traction/Metrics

Traction/Metrics

Goal: Summarize how de-risking investment

- <# quarters> from profitability → <Opening Hook>
- Time-to-value → CAC + LTV
- Partnerships

Q: What value does our product bring? → OMTM

Competition (v3)

Competition/Alternatives: Fundraise

(*in + across*) verticals + **everyone** else

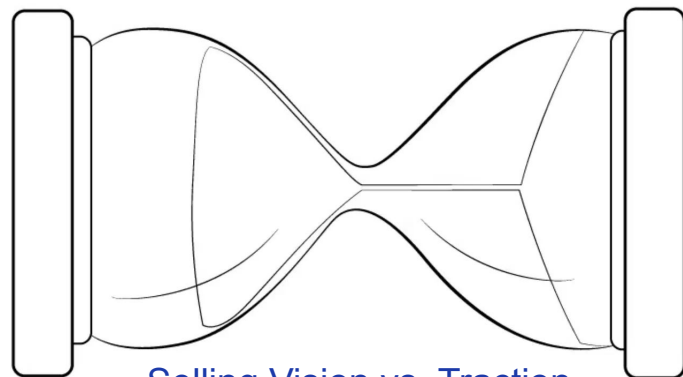


[ref]

Putting It All Together (v1) to (v3)

Putting It All Together

- Hook
- <\$100M+/year opportunity> [[NFX](#)] OR [this](#)
- <Specific problem>
- <end-to-end solution> + business model tied to customer habits
- Growth flywheel
- Traction/metrics to support above
- <Competition>
- Team
- Ask tied to milestones



[Selling Vision vs. Traction](#)

<<< 1% of pitch decks (!)



Potential customer?



Learned something new?

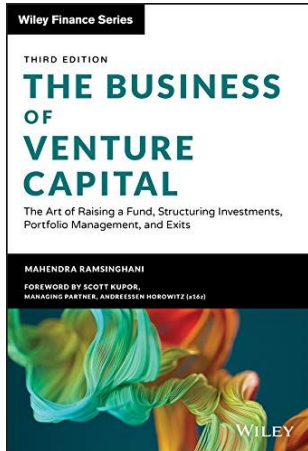
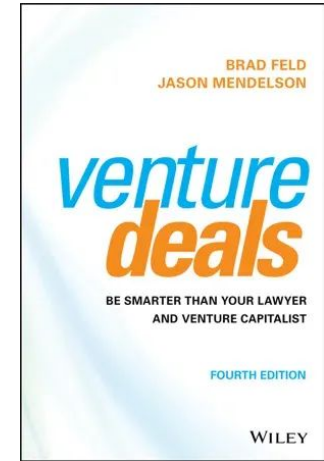


Who'll take a meeting?

Q: Where did AI go?!?!

Q: Anything else missing?

More Advice



More Advice (cont'd)

- Focus: story, not design
 - Start without slides + write out story
 - Each slide:
 - Information no one else can say!
 - 1 idea per slide
 - Show, ~~Tell~~
 - 1 storyline *anyone* can follow along

More Advice

- 3 minutes → Tailor to ***your*** story!
- Focus: de-risked investment:
 - $(\# \text{ Sell}) \times (\text{Cost}) \times (\text{Gross Margin}) = \$100\text{M+}/\text{year}$ [NFX]
 - Market size (TAM/SAM/SOM) vs Market opportunity
- Appendix: common objections

More Advice (cont'd)

- Attend pitch(es) in different industry → what's resonating?
- No NDAs
- Pitch as if you *are* the unicorn! –Neal Sarraf ([Forum Ventures](#))
 - → Better (**in** + **across**) verticals + **everyone** else
- Let [Claude* reject](#) your pitch deck

Questions?

ikukuyeva.com/community/presentations/reverse-pitch-workshop

More Advice (cont'd)

- Flywheel Resources

- [The Flywheel of Growth – A Strategic Innovation Framework](#) (with examples)
- [Slack PLG example](#)
- [The Product-Led Growth Flywheel](#)
- [Flywheel Marketing: The New Growth & Revenue Model for Businesses](#)
- [Building a Product-Led Growth Flywheel: How to Make Results Soar](#) (with metrics)
- [Aligning Product, Marketing, Sales, and Support Flywheels](#)

- Traction

- *Dear Advisor:* [What metrics to include in my pitch deck?](#) + No traction?
- [Hustle Fund](#), incl [“How to sell to 1st 50 customers if prod barely exists”](#)

Frameworks

- Get started + Not Miss Something → Start w/ outcome to try to move needle on
 - [My framework \(and worksheets\) for getting started and iterating on data strategy from very beginning, to improve your product-market fit](#)
 - [My framework for how to uncover the business question](#)
- Google's AI Guidebook: <https://pair.withgoogle.com/guidebook/>
- Planning + Asking Questions:
 - [My advice for how to prioritize on what to work on next](#)
 - Viz + spec before development (esp if non-technical founder)
- My advice for [preparing for AI due diligence](#) + [AI AMA: Horror Stories, Wins, Advice](#)

Additional Resources

- Newsletters:
 - [Lenny's Newsletter](#)
 - [Elena Verna](#) (PLG and PL Sales)
 - [NFX*](#) ([AI Litmus Test](#), [my hot take on "5 Levels of AI Spectrum"](#), [AI is Like Water](#))
- Tactical webinars:
 - [Founder Institute events](#), including:
 - ["Phil Libin presents his Model to Answer All Startup Growth Questions"](#)
 - ["Unlocking the Secrets of Product Market Fit for Your Startup \[Idea\]"](#)
 - [FemTech Lab](#), incl ["Emerging GTM models for women's health startups"](#)

Additional Resources (cont'd)

- NFX's advice on [Stackable Business Models in the Age of AI](#)
- [Advice on fundraising](#)
- [Lists of VCs in Los Angeles](#) by Espree Devora

Non-Dilutive Funding Sources



STARBURST

Non-Dilutive Fundraising Resources

Grants

- SBIR
- STTR
- SBIR/NASA
- America's Seed Fund - Space Grant
- NASA's Space Technology Research Grants Program (STRGP)
- Small Business Association (SBA)
- National Science Foundation (NSF)
- Defense Innovation Unit (DIU)
- Activate Fellows

Loans

- SBA Microloans
- FundingCircle
- OnDeck
- ForaFinancial
- Pacific Western Bank
- Mercury
- Bank of America
- JP Morgan
- Chase Bank
- TD Bank
- Stifel Bank
- US Bank
- PNC Bank
- American Express (AMEX) Business Line of Credit

Tax Credits

- R&D Tax Credits
- Aerospace Engineering R&D Tax Credits
- Health care tax credit
- Work opportunity tax credit
- Paid family and medical leave credit
- The Employee Retention Credit (ERC)

Venture Debt

- First Citizen
- Runway Growth Capital
- TriplePoint Venture Growth
- Hercules
- Columbia Lake
- Trinity Capital
- Aegon Climate Capital
- Horizon Technology

Research Programs

- Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Agency (IARPA)
- Space Ventures Coalition

SBIR:

<https://seedfund.nsf.gov/>

(free) Training on SBIR by Texas A&M: [YouTube](#)

[4]