

## WHAT I TYPICALLY HEAR...

“It feels like there’s a million things I should be doing.

I know that only a small fraction of things will actually help me find PMF.

I often feel like I’m wasting my time and scattered.

**What am I doing wrong?”**



**What I felt like as a first-time founder...**



BDRs & AEs!  
 Cold calls!  
 Cold emails!  
 Cold LinkedIn!  
 Cold turkey? 🦃  
 AI-driven outreach  
 Intent data  
 Challenger sales  
 Founder sales  
 Social selling  
 Outreach sequences  
 Build an email list  
 Build a lead database  
 Buy an email list  
 Use LinkedIn automations  
 Write an eBook  
 Give up 🦴  
 Facebook ads  
 LinkedIn ads  
 Instagram ads  
 TikTok ads  
 (Is Snapchat still around?)  
 Trade shows  
 API-first  
 Positioning  
 Growth loops  
 Data science  
 Communities  
 Ask VCs for more 💰  
 Hire & pray  
 Move to the Bahamas  
 NETWORK EFFECTS  
 "Paul Graham says..."  
 "Google's approach is..."  
 Start a podcast  
 Reddit posts  
 ProductHunt  
 Build a personal brand  
 Quora  
 Category creation  
 Build a brand brand  
 Inbound marketing?  
 Dark social! Word of Mouth  
 Google ads  
 Start an email newsletter  
 Bing ads?  
 Product-led growth! 🥰  
 Freemium  
 Influencer marketing  
 Messaging  
 Positioning

**“WHAT DO I DO?”**

**The “list of things I probably should do”**

# MY EXPERIENCE

## **Raised pre-seed in 2018**

- Product built
- Big vision
- 3x pilot customers (unpaid)
- Time to scale!



# MY EXPERIENCE

## Pivoted in 2019

- Why? Customers weren't representative (HBS)
- To what? *"Simpler version of the vision"* - 100% of shifts filled!
- Agile, SOC II, process!
- ~\$100k ARR in Jan 2020, but not repeatable



# MY EXPERIENCE

## 2020 (Covid)

- Our only customers were cleaners of office buildings
- ...damn (back to zero)
- But! Raised seed round just before Covid... now what?



# MY EXPERIENCE

## 2020 (Covid) – part 2

- Just sold what a fast-food franchisee wanted to buy (“help recruiting”)
- I did everything manually in Google sheets
- YOLO



# MY EXPERIENCE

## 2020-2022

- 0 & no product -> \$5M ARR
- 10,000+ stores as customers
- Series A & beyond





# MY PMF MODEL (CUTS ALL THE BS)

**When you have PMF, you'll say:**

*I know that people like {ICP} need to accomplish {use case}.*

*I have one effective, scalable way to schedule lots of sales meetings with this ICP*

*I know what, why, and how they want to buy, and sales meetings create happy customers*

## **ALL YOU NEED:**

- 1 x ICP & use case
- 1 x demand-gen channel
- 1 x "hell yes" customer experience - what, why & how the ICP buys & finds success



*Everything else is a trap!*



# TWO MASSIVE IMPLICATIONS...

1. **Lean into *WHO* works:** Focus EXCLUSIVELY on customers “in the bullseye,” rather than trying to serve different kinds of people
2. **Lean into *WHAT* works:** Make consolidated, high-conviction bets in product & GTM, rather than trying to “diversify”



# “WHAT MAKES A GOOD ICP?”

**I usually recommend starting with SMB / mid-market buyers.**

You can learn faster & fail with fewer repercussions. Hard (but not impossible) to find repeatable ways to sell to big companies, government, universities.

## **5 characteristics of great ICPs:**

1. Many of them across many VERY SIMILAR businesses
2. Have money & can make fast purchase decisions
3. NEED to accomplish something (or else)
4. Underserved + in unsexy industries
5. Easily found + contacted





# TRAP #1: THE "VISION/VENTURE" TRAP

## The "Vision/Venture" Trap

***We think that our grand vision - and the things that VCs find interesting - matter.***

This leads to a juggling act... how do you prioritize the vision, the sexy things VCs like, and things customers actually need?

*"How do we incorporate AI into our product?"  
...our customers are just trying to get their employees to show up to work in pants.*

## The Solution

***Focus on building a real business by focusing on customers.***

A vision is useful for recruiting, and fundraising... not for building a real business. You'll rewrite it when you're successful.

*"We'll add AI in the product when it's right."  
In the meantime, let's count our revenue and see how many inbound VC requests we get.*

We closed our Series A *super fast* because we had a lot of revenue and THEN layered on a powerful story (the story wouldn't have mattered without revenue)





# TRAP #2: THE "SELL PRODUCT" TRAP

## The "Sell Product" Trap

***We think people care about our product, and that people want to buy software.***

This leads to product-centric outreach, marketing, and sales processes that don't resonate with buyers.

*"Do you want to hear about our category-defining software?"*

*No, no I don't. I have shit to do.*

## The Solution

***Focus on helping buyers accomplish something that's really important to them.***

Your product is a piece of how they accomplish that important thing, but your product is almost never the main character.

*"Do you want to hear about how someone just like you accomplished X?"*

*Oh, that actually sounds useful. Let's chat.*

A friend's company 5x'ed ARR in 2 months (after being stuck for 12 months) by changing their sales process from "sell product" to "help buyers"





# TRAP #3: THE "OPTIONALITY" TRAP

## The "Optionality" Trap

***Trying to solve for multiple customer types ensures you fail for all of them.***

Founders try to "preserve optionality" and sell to multiple different kinds of customers. They wind up resonating with nobody.

*"How do we make sure we don't get pigeonholed?"*

*You have to survive for that to matter*

## The Solution

***Focus today creates optionality tomorrow. Design for ONE perfect-fit customer only.***

Sell to your perfect-fit customer and everybody like them. You'll learn along the way what's next.

*"Which of these awesome opportunities should we pursue?"*

*Much easier question to answer when we have customers, revenue, and proof*

We primarily served McD's franchisees until \$2M+ revenue, then figured out what to do next. Narrowness is good.

