

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
Airbnb	Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.	5	"As they were starting out in the summer of 2008, the founders needed a way to raise money. They bought a ton of cereal and designed special edition election-themed boxes, released that fall—Obama O's and Cap'n McCain's, which they sold at convention parties for \$40 a box. They sold 500 boxes of each cereal, helping them to raise around \$30k for Airbed & Breakfast."	<a href="https://growthhackers.com/growth-studies/airbnb/">https://growthhackers.com/growth-studies/airbnb/</a>
Doordash	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	5	<p>"Over the course of the next few weeks, we talked to around 150 to 200 small business owners, and when we brought up this idea of delivery, they kept agreeing with us; they would say, "You know, we don't have delivery infrastructure. It's such a huge pain for us. There aren't any good solutions out there." This led us to wonder, delivery is such a common thing, such an obvious thing; why hasn't anyone solved this yet? Like, we must be missing something here right? We thought it was maybe because people had already tried this in the past, but they failed because there wasn't consumer demand for this. We asked ourselves, "How can we test this hypothesis?" We were just a bunch of college kids at the time. We didn't own trucks or delivery infrastructure or anything like that; we couldn't just build a delivery company overnight right? So how could we test this assumption we had?</p> <p>We decided to create a simple experiment with restaurant delivery. We spent about an afternoon just putting together a quick landing page. When I went on the Internet, I found some PDF menus of restaurants in Palo Alto. We stuck it up there and added a phone number at the bottom, which was actually our personal cell phone number. And that was it. We put up the landing page and called it PaloAltoDelivery.com. This is actually what it looked like (PowerPoint slide): It was super simple, ugly, and honestly we weren't really expecting anything - we just launched it. What we wanted to see was just would we receive phone calls, and if we got enough phone calls, then maybe this delivery idea was worth pursuing.</p> <p>So we put it up there; we weren't really expecting anything, and all of a sudden we got a phone call. Someone called! They wanted to order Thai food. And we're like, "This is a real order; we're going to have to do something about it." So we're in our cars and we're like, "We're not doing anything right now, might as well swing by, pick up some Pad Thai, and let's try to see how this whole delivery thing works." And we did. We delivered it to some guy up on Alpine Road I remember. We asked him, "How did you hear about us, what do you do?" He told us he was a scholar, and then he handed me his business card and told me he was the author of a book called Weed the People. That was our first ever delivery. It was like the best delivery/worst delivery you could ever ask for."</p>	<a href="https://startupclass.samaltman.com/courses/lec08/">https://startupclass.samaltman.com/courses/lec08/</a> <a href="https://hackernoon.com/do-things-that-dont-scale-4-inspirational-startup-examples-a2ab3a5c4926">https://hackernoon.com/do-things-that-dont-scale-4-inspirational-startup-examples-a2ab3a5c4926</a>
Levels.fyi	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	5	<p>"Levels.fyi has become the career site for professionals. Our users today span the entire globe and as of now roughly 1-2 million unique users visit the site every month. We started back in 2017 with a humble vision of helping professionals get paid, not played, and within a couple of years, the site became a primary resource for US tech professionals looking for jobs, salaries and to get negotiation help.</p> <p><i>But, what if I told you that the initial version of the site did not have a backend?</i></p> <p>It seems like a pretty counterintuitive idea for a site with our traffic volume to not have a backend or any fancy infrastructure, but our philosophy to building products has always been, start simple and iterate. This allows us to move fast and focus on what's important.</p> <p>It seems like a pretty counterintuitive idea for a site with our traffic volume to not have a backend or any fancy infrastructure, but our philosophy to building products has always been, start simple and iterate. This allows us to move fast and focus on what's important.</p> <p>Why did we start without a backend?</p> <p>To focus more on the product/idea fit. Google Forms + Google Sheets allowed us to move fast in releasing the initial version                  Save effort and money on setting up a API and database server on AWS                  Save effort on operational maintenance of a API and database server"</p>	<a href="https://www.levels.fyi/blog/scaling-to-millions-with-google-sheets.html">https://www.levels.fyi/blog/scaling-to-millions-with-google-sheets.html</a>
Pandora	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	5	<p><i>Text AI-transcribed from MFM video:</i></p> <p>"It's kinda like musical DNA and it's a gigantic list where we wrote it out and hired a few dozen musicians to come in and listen to songs one at a time and manually analyze them, attribute by attribute, assign a number to every song to collect musical DNA, and hired a set of computer scientists to attach to that essentially an algorithm that could use that information to connect songs based on their musical proximity. We began to that turns about a year to build the first prototype and we literally did it on pencil and paper at first I kid you not we had ultimately about 75 musicians scribbling on paper and then we transferred that into Microsoft Excel.</p> <p>And a year into our this project we built our prototype we had analyzed about 10,000 songs and our founding CTO Will Glaser had written an Excel macro that would allow us to compute the distance between any of these 10,000 songs the way it worked is you would pick one of the songs enter it into the search box and hit rank and the the macro would rank order least 10,000 songs by proximity about musical proximity to your source song.</p> <p>We had not figured out how to make any money at it but we had built this really cool piece of IP this gigantic musical taxonomy and this matching engine that was a really killer you type in a song and it would send you back five tunes that were just remarkably similar and maybe three or four which you'd never heard before so it was like it's magical discovery box and then we what set about sort of figuring out what to do next and that's when the company took a big right-hand turn and repurposed that whole underlying technology and built this brand new thing that we came to call Pandora and we've launched that in the fall of 2005."</p>	<a href="https://youtu.be/bTtq-M9iDHI">https://youtu.be/bTtq-M9iDHI</a> <a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=26086196">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=26086196</a>

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Tinder	Go directly wherever your customers are.  Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.	5	<p>"It all started at a launch party we threw (at my parents house, where I grew up, actually) with about 300 students from USC. In order to get in, you had to download Tinder. I actually stood at the door and told people they were not allowed in if they did not download the app. I think those were the first few hundred faces we had on the app.</p> <p>The following Monday, I went to all the sororities and fraternities at USC. I started with the sororities at the Monday night chapter meetings. I stood in line to make an announcement. My pitch was: 'Do any of you have any crushes on anyone at school, and are you too afraid to go up to them and strike up a conversation? Do you have someone in a class you kind of want to get to know but don't know if they feel the same way? Are you nervous that someone you like, doesn't like you back? Do you feel like you're seeing the same people every day and want to see new faces around here? Well, now is your chance! You can anonymously swipe on someone and if they feel the same, then it's a match! All the cool people are on it. All your crushes are waiting for you. You don't want to miss out, trust me!'</p> <p>Next we went to the fraternities, I would run, not walk, from house to house saying the same exact thing: 'Who wants to find out who likes you on campus? Who wants to see a ton of new faces? Where are the sorority girls on campus? They are on Tinder. It's not creepy, this is the new thing.'</p> <p>I actually remember standing on a piano at some point and hearing a round of applause after a speech I made at a frat. People were so excited. I remember calling Justin, the CMO at the time, and he was counting the downloads for me. It was working. I replicated this at SMU the next week (because I went there for a year before USC, and still had all my friends there). After SMU was UCLA and UCSB. A week or two later was my University tour in Boston. There are so many colleges in that small little area. Downloads were skyrocketing.</p> <p>All the while, I was creating the 'Tinder University Program'. We made it a program so that this exact recipe would take place at every school we picked, even if I could not be there myself. I would interview people, then choose a few influential students on every campus, send them a box of T-shirts, stickers, keychains, cups, you name it. Basically, a bunch of Tinder swag. And it was their job for that semester to be a tinder Brand Ambassador and to make Tinder popular on campus. I would measure their success with the percentage of people that would download the app within a certain area. It was a numbers game. The Tinder ambassadors would send me photos of events at every cool bar or club where they 'had to download tinder to get in'. It was amazing. Once I felt an area was saturated enough, I would add another university. I had about 15 universities at a time. It was a domino effect. The more people on the app, the more people wanted to be on it. Total chain reaction. Next up was finding ambassadors outside of the US in different countries."</p> <p>—Alexa Mateen Abdi, founding team and the head of US expansion</p>	<p><a href="https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-of-Paul-Grahams-advice-for-startups-and-entrepreneurs-quoted-as-do-things-that-dont-scale-How-will-it-inspire-them">https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-of-Paul-Grahams-advice-for-startups-and-entrepreneurs-quoted-as-do-things-that-dont-scale-How-will-it-inspire-them</a>  <a href="https://www.iennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.iennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Instacart	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	4	<p>"Instacart took their YC money and went to Trader Joe's and just bought 1 of every item at Trader Joe's. And over the weekend got access to a photography studio, took all the produce that they bought, took it to the studio and took pictures of it all, wrote down the prices, and on Monday morning put all of it online. And said we're Instacart - you can order anything from Trader Joe's.</p> <p>They struck deals with these grocery stores eventually after they got to scale. They use these hacky janky solutions to get to scale."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJPDljge81o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJPDljge81o</a>  <a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=26086196">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=26086196</a>  <a href="https://youtu.be/uV4lzz1Z0C8">https://youtu.be/uV4lzz1Z0C8</a></p>
Lugg	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	4	<p>"At Lugg, we did a few things that would not scale.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My co-founder and I did all the Luggs ourselves in trucks we rented through GetAround for the first 4 months</li> <li>- My co-founder and I's names, pictures, and phone numbers were hard coded into the app as the crew to fulfill the Lugg before we had crews or proper dispatching</li> <li>- We launched without payments and would charge customers with a Square reader at the door</li> <li>- Most mornings we would camp out in the IKEA parking lot in Emeryville, CA and approach their customers that were struggling to get their purchases in their cars and pitched them that we would deliver their items if they downloaded the app and made a request</li> <li>- In the early days we didn't have operating ours and anyone could request a Lugg at anytime and my co-founder and I would hop in our rented truck and do it</li> </ul> <p>A few months in we did a Lugg for someone that knew Sam Altman and made an intro to him for us. We met him for coffee, shortly after had a YC interview, and was later accepted in the S15 batch"</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a></p>
Reddit	Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.  Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	4	<p>"Reddit founders submitted links (wrote comments?) everyday using different usernames, to get the community going."</p> <p>"Following their graduation from Y-Combinator, Huffman and Ohanian continued to build Reddit.</p> <p>The initial product may of been bare bones but at least it was functional. At first there wasn't even enough user submitted content to fill out the website. This required Ohanian and Huffman to submit content on behalf of fake accounts, giving the impression that the site had more people on it.</p> <p>Slowly more and more contributors began to trickle in and the site was finally functioning on its own. Initially, Reddit users could only post links and then up or downvote those links. This simple use case slowly evolved to bring on the features for which we are familiar, like sub-Reddits and comments."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a>  <a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036">https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036</a>  <a href="https://trevorisonline.medium.com/alexis-ohanian-and-reddits-origin-story-2c01b9cc45e">https://trevorisonline.medium.com/alexis-ohanian-and-reddits-origin-story-2c01b9cc45e</a></p>
Stripe	Go directly wherever your customers are.  Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	4	<p>"Stripe is one of the most successful startups we've funded, and the problem they solved was an urgent one. If anyone could have sat back and waited for users, it was Stripe. But in fact they're famous within YC for aggressive early user acquisition.</p> <p>Startups building things for other startups have a big pool of potential users in the other companies we've funded, and none took better advantage of it than Stripe. At YC we use the term "Collision installation" for the technique they invented. More diffident founders ask "Will you try our beta?" and if the answer is yes, they say "Great, we'll send you a link." But the Collision brothers weren't going to wait. When anyone agreed to try Stripe they'd say "Right then, give me your laptop" and set them up on the spot."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://www.paulgraham.com/ds.html</a></p>

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tbh	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Go directly wherever your customers are.. Start a deliberately contained fire..</p>	4	<p>"Short timeline                      - On Aug 3, 2017, Nikita Bier and his team were close to bankruptcy. They had funds for another 2 weeks of work. That's when the tbh app was launched                      - On Aug 5, 2017, they chose to launch tbh in a high school in Georgia because it had the earliest semester start date.                      - Aug 7, 2017 - 40% of Georgia high schoolers had downloaded the app. The app has also spread to three more schools</p> <p>He did it by leveraging psychology in marketing via Instagram                      - They noticed teens often list their high school in their Instagram bio.                      - Tbh team would then create tbh Instagram accounts for each high school and follow all accounts that included the school's name                      - They made their own account private and left a mysterious CTA in their bio "You're invited to tbh at ANHS. Stay tuned." Teens were naturally curious and would send a follow request                      - At 4:00PM when high schoolers got out from school, Nikita and his team would add the App Store URL to the profile bio and made the profile Public. This notified all students at the same time that their Follow Request had been accepted. Curious students would follow the link from the bio to the app                      - By collecting users' interest first, and then contacting all of them simultaneously, they ensured critical mass during the launch hour. This was essential to get high in App Store rankings"</p>	<p><a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/Entrepreneur/comments/12rqnk6/nikita_bier_got_5m_users_in_2_months_with_a_0/">https://www.reddit.com/r/Entrepreneur/comments/12rqnk6/nikita_bier_got_5m_users_in_2_months_with_a_0/</a></p>
Vanta	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p>	4	<p>"Cacioppo had her heart set on starting a SaaS company, but before Vanta became software-as-a-service, it was a service without software. Before they wrote a line of code, Cacioppo and her team became SOC 2 consultants. In their first experiment, they went to Segment, a customer data platform, and interviewed its team to determine what the company's SOC 2 should look like and how far away it was from getting it.</p> <p>"We made them a gap assessment in a spreadsheet that was very custom to them and they could plan a roadmap against it if they wanted," she says.</p> <p>Cacioppo was running a test to answer two key questions: Could her team deliver something that was credible? Would Segment think that it was credible? The answer to both questions ended up being "yes." And thus, the first (low-tech) version of Vanta was born—as a spreadsheet. "It actually went quite well, so we moved on to a second company, a customer operations platform called Front," she says.</p> <p>For this experiment, Cacioppo wanted to test a new hypothesis: Could she give Front Segment's gap assessment but not tell them it was Segment's? Would they notice? "We used the same controls, the same rules and best practices, and still interviewed the Front team to see where Front was in their SOC 2 journey, so it was customized in that sense," she says. "But this test was pushing on the 'Can we productize it? Can we standardize this set of things?' And most importantly, 'Can they tell this spreadsheet was initially made for another company?'"</p> <p>They couldn't. And then, Cacioppo got an email that sealed the deal in terms of validating her idea."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fUKLEXcSoQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fUKLEXcSoQ</a>  <a href="https://review.firstround.com/vantas-path-to-product-market-fit/">https://review.firstround.com/vantas-path-to-product-market-fit/</a></p>
Gmail	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Go directly wherever your customers are. (or build for yourself)</p>	4	<p>"PB, as kind of a side project at Google, he invented something that 1.5 billion people on earth actively. And he literally did it doing things that didn't scale. PB was pissed about the email product he was using and so Google had this newsletter product - the first version of Gmail, he figured out how to put his email into this Google Groups UI. And as he tells the story, his eureka moment was when he could start reading his own email in this UI. And then from that point on, he stopped using his old email client. Every email feature that any human would want to use, he just started building from that point. "And then I wanted to write an email. And then I built writing emails!" And if you know PB, he could have gone a couple days reading emails without replying at all. He didn't need writing emails to start.</p> <p>I remember him telling the first time he got his coworker, his deskmate, to use it. His deskmate says "this thing is pretty good. IT loads pretty fast. It's really great. The only problem is PB it has your email in it. I want my email in it." "Oh shit, I gotta build that!". Then it started spreading throughout Google."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c</a></p>
Facebook	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.</p>	4	<p>"They had these super janky servers. I think there was maybe 8 of them when they first moved in. Super cheap, super microservers, wires hanging out, lights blinking fast. There were labels on every server and the labels were the name of each university. One for Stanford... One for Harvard...</p> <p>So then I watched every time we would go back to the data center they would have more servers in the rack with more colleges and it became increasingly obvious to me that the way they scaled Facebook was to have a completely separate PHP instance running for every school that they copy and pasted the code to. They would have a separate MySQL server for every school and they would have like a memcache instance for every school.</p> <p>So you'd see like the University of Oklahoma you know might you'd see the three servers next to each other and the way that they managed to scale Facebook was to just keep buying these crappy servers. They would launch each school and it would only talk to a single school database and they never had to worry about scaling a database across all the schools at once. Because again at the time, hardware was bad. MySQL was bad. The technology was not great.</p> <p>If they had to scale a single database a single user's table to hundreds of millions of people would have been impossible and so their hack was the 90/10 solution like PB used for gmail which is like... just don't do it.</p> <p>And so at the time if you were like a Harvard student and you wanted to log in you would it was hard-coded to the url, <a href="http://harvard.thefacebook.com">harvard.thefacebook.com</a>, and so if you try to go to <a href="http://stanford.facebook.com">stanford.facebook.com</a> it'd be like you know... error. That was just a separate database and so then they wrote code so you could bounce between schools and it actually took them years to build a global users table."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c</a></p>
inDinero	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p>	3	<p>"Jessica Mah (formerly inDinero) became a CPA in order to do accounting services for her startup. She would talk to customers and make sales during the day, and study for the certification at night."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2</a></p>

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Airbnb	Go directly wherever your customers are.	3	"Airbnb is a classic example of this technique. Marketplaces are so hard to get rolling that you should expect to take heroic measures at first. In Airbnb's case, these consisted of going door to door in New York, recruiting new users and helping existing ones improve their listings. When I remember the Airbnbs during YC, I picture them with rolly bags, because when they showed up for tuesday dinners they'd always just flown back from somewhere."	<a href="https://paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://paulgraham.com/ds.html</a>
Airbnb	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later. Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	3	"Brian and Joe were astonished to find, when establishing the company, that New York City, despite its tourist appeal, was underachieving." "The graphics were fairly horrible," co-founder Joe Gebbia recalls after browsing over their posts. People were taking Craigslist-style images with their phones. Surprise! No one was booking because you couldn't see what you were paying for." One of their early backers, Paul Grahman of YC, advised that the two attempt a low-tech, high-effort hack to boost bookings — but it was fast to deploy and was incredibly effective.  Chesky and Gebbia rented a \$500 camera and went door to door throughout the city, capturing as many listings as they could. They then compared the amount of reservations for the upgraded images listings to the rest of the Updated York ads and found that the updated photos led in two to three times more bookings, instantly doubling their profits from New York.  After establishing their concept, they extended it to Paris, London, Vancouver, and Miami, with similar results. As a response, Airbnb decided to create a photography service that would allow hosts to hire a professional photographer to come to their home and photograph it. It began in the summer of 2010 with 20 photographers and grew to over 2000 freelance photographers by 2012, documenting 13,000 listings across six continents."	<a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a> <a href="https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/">https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/</a>
Airbnb	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	"Instead of investing in paid ads, or social media, they started manually reaching out to people who would be the perfect client for their website/platform. Every time someone posted on Craigslist that they offered their home up for a bed and breakfast or for short-term lodging. They emailed them — asking them if they wanted to list their platform. This was manual, and this was tedious, but this worked. It was low-cost, and it worked.  After initial success, they coded up an automated tool that reached out to new Craigslist postings automatically. They refined the copy, made the onboarding and sign-up simpler and more user-friendly. This led to viral growth and was the start of the incredible story of a category redefining company."	<a href="https://hackernoon.com/how-airbnb-hacked-craigslist-for-viral-growth-24135eg">https://hackernoon.com/how-airbnb-hacked-craigslist-for-viral-growth-24135eg</a>
Antimetal	Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.	3	"Antimetal's solution was insane. And it was genius. Alongside the launch, they ran a guerrilla marketing campaign and delivered 1000+ boxes of pizza to startups & VCs in San Francisco and New York.  The boxes were branded with the name "Antimetal Pizza Co." My personal favorite part? The tagline—"Slices as a Service." A play on "software as a service." Like I said, so good I wish I came up with it.  As the boxes were delivered, the posts started hitting the timeline. The pizza was a smart play because it was both high-volume and high-creativity. These founders and VCs weren't expecting to get a pizza delivered to their doorstep. Classic surprise and delight (unless you're lactose intolerant, like me). The branding on the box was also thoughtfully done, and something "worth" taking a photo of for social.  But each individual pizza isn't expensive. This allowed Antimetal to run this influencer motion with a high volume of recipients—increasing the amount of posts that hit the timeline.  High-creativity → people want to post about it because it's unique High-volume → each individual gift unit is cheap enough give away enough to trigger tons of social posts  The flurry of pizza posts going live all had a trail leading back to Matt's pillar post (the video)."	<a href="https://www.readsocialfiles.com/p/antimetalplaybook">https://www.readsocialfiles.com/p/antimetalplaybook</a>
Brex	Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.	3	"The best outbound campaign we ever ran at Brex (75% demo rate, 75% demo to close): Brex launched in 2018 as the first corporate card for startups. After launch, when we were still ~30 employees and near 0 rev, we ran the most successful outbound campaign I've ever seen.  We ran a report in Pitchbook to determine seed through Series B startups in the Bay Area that raised a round in the last 6 months. We had a list of ~300 companies. We purchased 300 bottles of Veuve Clicquot at ~\$50/bottle. We delivered the bottles along with a handwritten note from our CEO (this can be automated) to the founders of the companies that raised. The note read something like "Congrats on your recent fundraiser! We know how hard it is to build a startup and we're rooting for you."  Shortly after delivery, our CEO followed up with an email asking if they'd be open to a demo. 75% said yes (or had the right person in their company take the demo) and 75% of the demos converted to customers.  300 x .75 = 225 demos. 225 x .75 = 169 new customers. The total spend was ~\$19k (15k for Champagne, 2k for handwritten notes, 2k for task rabbit delivery)."	<a href="https://x.com/samdblond/status/1612518983726424080?lang=en">https://x.com/samdblond/status/1612518983726424080?lang=en</a>
Caviar	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	"During the pivot to Caviar, we were very cash-strapped and had to do most of the deliveries, customer service, and restaurant ops ourselves. We did this growing from 50 orders a month to over 150+ orders a day, non-stop. If there was a mess-up, to save the cash bleed, I or one of the co-founders would hand-deliver the follow-up delivery ourselves, and apologize in-person. I would like to think our customers thought we literally went the extra-mile to ensure their satisfaction.  And because a lot of restaurants were set in their ways, if we had to send them a fax for a \$1,000 order or call them by hand and manually speak to them the order item-by-item, we would. There are many delivery companies, but only a handful of institutional, famous restaurateurs."	<a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a>
Crowdbooster	Consult while building the product.	3	"Ricky Yean (formerly Crowdbooster) struck a deal with an early customer/cafe owner to get paid in food, so they worked from the cafe all the time. They ended up building the cafe owner custom dashboards which later become their product."	<a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2</a>

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Cruise	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"When Cruise was in YC, and the v1 of the driverless car, Kyle and his tiny team built in 3 months. They retrofitted an Audi. To call it driverless would be an overstatement. 1, There was a big red button on the floor and driver seat and Kyle never explained what that button did. 2, it only worked on the highway. 3, it was basically adaptive cruise control that stayed in your lane. Nothing more fancy than that. 4, the moment I remember on my first test drive of Cruise that I'll never forget. I'm driving down 101 and Kyle says, "Oh, a shadow. Let's see how the car handles that."</p> <p>And that was v1! Google had cars on the road retrofitted with all kinds of fancy equipment and Kyle had his Audi that couldn't deal with shadows."</p>	<a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036">https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036</a>
Etsy	Go directly wherever your customers are.	3	<p>"We did something that works and is often overlooked. We got off the internet and there was a team out there across the U.S. and Canada attending art/craft shows nearly every weekend. Supporting potential sellers (we would buy them lunch, drop off 'craft show kits,' pass out handmade promos)—these were artists/crafters that were influential in the handmade world. We knew if they set up shop on Etsy, and were successful, others would follow.</p> <p>The community team went to a different show every single weekend all across the U.S. and Canada. Most sellers I knew did not have any other kind of online presence or activity on other sites."</p> <p>—Danielle Maveal, via Quora</p>	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a> <a href="https://archives.sfwEEKLY.com/exhibitionist/2012/07/20/irl-etsy-the-renegade-craft-fair-is-back">https://archives.sfwEEKLY.com/exhibitionist/2012/07/20/irl-etsy-the-renegade-craft-fair-is-back</a>
Farcaster	Start a deliberately contained fire. Go directly wherever your customers are.	3	<p>"You should be shipping a lot faster and you should be really just focused on how to get users. I onboarded the first 400 users to Farcaster via Zoom calls. Brutal days. 8-10 onboardings a day. And I did that a month and a half. And the reason is just getting beat up every day, people they say "oh this is great". You get them through onboarding. Onboarding is clunky. Okay improve that and then they don't come back to your product. Contact with reality and really understanding how to get your target customers is by far the most important thing."</p>	<a href="https://youtu.be/YOXO88iZEaE?si=ekByzCD6vtl0p-xJ&amp;t=2727">https://youtu.be/YOXO88iZEaE?si=ekByzCD6vtl0p-xJ&amp;t=2727</a>
Fleek	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later. Go directly wherever your customers are.	3	<p>"There's a company from the winter 22 batch that I worked with called Fleek and they are a marketplace for secondhand clothing connecting wholesalers, the people that get tons and tons of clothes from boxes all over the world, and secondhand clothing shops.</p> <p>When they started out, it was just 3 guys with an idea. They didn't have a website. They didn't have any clothes. They didn't have anything. They had to figure out how do we get a marketplace started with no clothing.</p> <p>They would go to the wholesalers in London, these giant warehouses full of clothes, and they would say, "Give us this box." And just pick a box of clothes and say "Give us 6 hours. Give us the box for free and we'll bring it back in 6 hours and either you'll have all the clothes back or you'll have a bunch of money." They would schlepp to all these shops around London and come back with 6,000 dollars for the store. And they would do that over and over and over again and go to these different wholesalers and eventually people knew them as these useful people in the wholesale community that were helping match buyers and sellers.</p> <p>They did that because they had to figure out what sells, what doesn't sell, when's the best time to bring clothing in there, how to price this stuff, how elastic is the demand for it. These are things you need in a marketplace but it's very very hard to figure that out by building a marketplace webpage and emailing people and then asking them to transact in it."</p>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljPDljge81o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljPDljge81o</a>
Groupon	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"Andrew Mason and the Groupon team debuted the initial iteration as a WordPress site. Everything else, apart from posting a transaction, was done by hand.</p> <p>It was completely ghetto. On the early version of Groupon, we would offer t-shirts. In the [write-up], we'd state, "This t-shirt will be available in red, size big." Please contact us if you want a different colour or size." We didn't have a form for that... It was sufficient to demonstrate the idea and demonstrate that it was something that people enjoyed... It got to the point where we'd sell 500 sushi vouchers in a day while also sending 500 PDFs to individuals through Apple Mail."</p>	<a href="https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/">https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/</a>
Looker	Consult while building the product.	3	<p>"The first 4 customers had 4 very different ways of delivering what I was building.</p> <p>The first customer I did was pure consulting - it was somebody who I worked with before. I said I was going to come in and do their data. They said "oh Lloyd is going to do my data?" Yes! I knew them from a prior life.</p> <p>The second person was somebody from one of the previous companies I was CTO at and said, "oh Lloyd you're doing a data company? I want you to come in and install your tool and teach our people how to build in the tool. So the second one was consulting. I was you know leading consulting and I taught a guy named Wilson how to program in this new language I had built.</p> <p>The third one was pure consulting. The fourth one, I just gave them the software. All of them worked. But the problem just giving them the software was they didn't get as much value out as the ones that were the combination. I realized I needed to be teaching how to do data as well as delivering product, so that's how we found our fit."</p>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T52RreyN4TE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T52RreyN4TE</a>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
Mob Kitchen	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"I launched Mob in October 2016. It was a Facebook page, onto which I posted 3 recipe videos a week, all feeding 4 people for under £10.</p> <p>I thought, very naively, and moronically, that these videos would go viral overnight, and I would build an enormous community.</p> <p>With this community, advertising revenue would start flowing in, and my growth trajectory would begin.</p> <p>Of course, this did not happen. 6 months post-launch, we had 10,000 followers on our Facebook page, and 4,000 Instagram followers.</p> <p>No brand partnerships. No advertising revenue.</p> <p>I needed to get the word out about Mob. I also needed cash. So I became a Deliveroo rider.</p> <p>I cycled around my hometown Oxford delivering pizza, burgers and noodles. It was great. I was moving. I was getting in shape. I was meeting people, delivering their food, and chatting to them about Mob. And I was making money.</p> <p>It was the perfect thing for me to do at that point in time, and it allowed me to get through those tough early start-up moments."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.linkedin.com/posts/benjamin-lebus-b32b3699_my-business-wasnt-working-so-i-became-activity-7205915884211617792-V7iu/">https://www.linkedin.com/posts/benjamin-lebus-b32b3699_my-business-wasnt-working-so-i-became-activity-7205915884211617792-V7iu/</a></p>
Pebble	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"Hardware startups face an obstacle that software startups don't. The minimum order for a factory production run is usually several hundred thousand dollars. Which can put you in a catch-22: without a product you can't generate the growth you need to raise the money to manufacture your product. Back when hardware startups had to rely on investors for money, you had to be pretty convincing to overcome this. The arrival of crowdfunding (or more precisely, preorders) has helped a lot. But even so I'd advise startups to pull a Meraki initially if they can. That's what Pebble did. The Pebbles assembled the first several hundred watches themselves. If they hadn't gone through that phase, they probably wouldn't have sold \$10 million worth of watches when they did go on Kickstarter.</p> <p>Like paying excessive attention to early customers, fabricating things yourself turns out to be valuable for hardware startups. You can tweak the design faster when you're the factory, and you learn things you'd never have known otherwise. Eric Migicovsky of Pebble said one of the things he learned was "how valuable it was to source good screws." Who knew?"</p>	<p><a href="https://paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://paulgraham.com/ds.html</a></p>
Pinterest	Go directly wherever your customers are.	3	<p>"We did all kinds of pretty desperate things, honestly. I used to walk by the Apple Store on the way home. I'd go in and change all the computers to say Pinterest, then just kind of stand in the back and be like, 'Wow, this Pinterest thing, it's really blowing up.' "</p>	<p><a href="https://www.ycombinator.com/blog/ben-silbermann-at-startup-school/">https://www.ycombinator.com/blog/ben-silbermann-at-startup-school/</a></p>
Seamless	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"The people at Seamless are said to have spent their first several months without a web product. They contacted legal firms in New York and inquired about their lunch preferences. They contacted the restaurant, made an order, oversaw delivery, and billed the companies at the end of the month."</p>	<p><a href="https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/">https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/</a></p>
Starbucks	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	3	<p>"TIL Starbucks MVP product was Pete's Coffee in Starbucks bags."</p> <p>"When the first Starbucks store opened near the Pike Place Market in 1971, most American coffee drinkers percolated inexpensive low-grade coffee, scooped out of a can and weakly brewed. The passionate, quality-driven approach of Starbucks's three founders -- Jerry Baldwin (b. 1942), Gordon Bowker (b. 1942) and Zev Siegl (b. 1942) -- helped change public perception of what a cup of coffee could be and set the stage for the company's development.</p> <p>They started by selling coffee beans roasted by Peet's, a gourmet coffee company in Berkeley, California, then began roasting their own. For a decade, the few Starbucks stores sold just beans and not coffee drinks, but those gourmet beans were popular and profitable. The first Starbucks to sell brewed coffee opened in 1982. Howard Schultz (b. 1953) was hired later that year, and at his urging Starbucks opened its first espresso bar in 1984."</p>	<p><a href="https://x.com/rrhoover/status/1798036287318028488?s=46">https://x.com/rrhoover/status/1798036287318028488?s=46</a>  <a href="https://www.historylink.org/file/20292">https://www.historylink.org/file/20292</a></p>
Viaweb	Consult while building the product.	3	<p>"Another consulting-like technique for recruiting initially lukewarm users is to use your software yourselves on their behalf. We did that at Viaweb. When we approached merchants asking if they wanted to use our software to make online stores, some said no, but they'd let us make one for them. Since we would do anything to get users, we did. We felt pretty lame at the time. Instead of organizing big strategic e-commerce partnerships, we were trying to sell luggage and pens and men's shirts. But in retrospect it was exactly the right thing to do, because it taught us how it would feel to merchants to use our software. Sometimes the feedback loop was near instantaneous: in the middle of building some merchant's site I'd find I needed a feature we didn't have, so I'd spend a couple hours implementing it and then resume building the site."</p>	<p><a href="https://paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://paulgraham.com/ds.html</a></p>
Zappos	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later..	3	<p>As an example, Ries noted that Zappos founder Nick Swinmurn wanted to test the hypothesis that customers were ready and willing to buy shoes online. Instead of building a website and a large database of footwear, Swinmurn approached local shoe stores, took pictures of their inventory, posted the pictures online, bought the shoes from the stores at full price after he'd made a sale, and then shipped them directly to customers. Swinmurn deduced that customer demand was present, and Zappos would eventually grow into a billion dollar business based on the model of selling shoes online.</p>	<p><a href="https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/">https://beecon-elite.com/insights/do-things-that-dont-scale-6-inspirational-startup-examples/</a></p>
99dresses	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"Nikki Durkin (formerly 99dresses) spent \$10,000 at a time on Nordstrom, listed the clothes on her clothing marketplace, and then returned anything that wasn't sold or traded to users within the 30-day return window."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2</a></p>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
Algolia	Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	2	<p>"We actually did that with Algolia too. I remember when we implemented Algolia in Producthunt before Producthunt became huge. Ryan, the founder, didn't have any resource to implement search himself. So we remembered the Stripe story and we did it. Like he gave us access to his Github and the first version of Algolia of search on Producthunt was us implementing it, submitting a pull request, and him pushing that.</p> <p>He was probably thrilled for the help at the time. He loved it and he couldn't have done it otherwise and so for him it was such a help. And of course it paid back for us a 1000x times. Now we have a connection with that customer that's so much stronger and we can ask him anything."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljPDljge81o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljPDljge81o</a></p>
Amazon	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"I think Bezos did something similar when he started Amazon. Every time they had a new book order they would buy it from a bookshop then ship it. Apparently they had a bell that would ring every time an order came in. They soon had to turn it off."</p> <p>"From Brad Stone's book, The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon, and memory, they bought primarily from two book distributors. By combining orders, they got a volume discount (think it was over ten books and also learned they could remove books after placing the order and still get the discount). Books were shipped to Jeff's garage where they unpacked them and repacked them for shipment to their customers. With sore backs and aching knees from being on the floor, Jeff Bezos admits to deciding that they needed to buy knee pads. Someone else came up with tables as the solution and the wood door desk was into the Amazon culture."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a>  <a href="https://www.quora.com/Where-did-Jeff-Bezos-and-Amazon-get-their-books-from-in-the-earliest-days-of-Amazon">https://www.quora.com/Where-did-Jeff-Bezos-and-Amazon-get-their-books-from-in-the-earliest-days-of-Amazon</a></p>
Amazon	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"Amazon same day delivery was supposedly bootstrapped by ordering ubers via burner phones. Bill Gurley (uber investor) happened to find out during an uber ride talking to his driver."</p> <p>"I'm riding in an Uber. I always talk to the drivers because I'm a shareholder. I'm asking him something about whether we can stop and he says, "Well, I've gotta get back down to San Jose by 2:30. I've got to meet at the Amazon warehouse." He goes, "Oh, they've got this new program they're running where you show up at 2:30 and they have all these burner phones and they load your car with packages and give you a manifest and then they book a ride over through Uber." And so this was the early days of same-day delivery."</p> <p>—Bill Gurley</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a>  <a href="https://youtu.be/HSVFZ2Qbv3I?si=7C0r2yS5WmO1WGD_&amp;t=5633">https://youtu.be/HSVFZ2Qbv3I?si=7C0r2yS5WmO1WGD_&amp;t=5633</a></p>
Blue Moon	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	<p>"When Blue Moon beer first came on the market, most Americans didn't really know the style, which was a twist on a Belgian style ale. The brewer made it with Valencia oranges and found that it paired well with a slice of orange. Beer bars didn't typically keep oranges in stock, and instead tried serving it with lemon. It wasn't good.</p> <p>The brewer decided to call in his biggest accounts, being oranges with him, and train the bartenders on how to serve and talk about his beer. That touch made all the difference and people started liking this new weird brew."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/startups/comments/dgn7f0/what_are_the_most_clever_do_things_that_dont/">https://www.reddit.com/r/startups/comments/dgn7f0/what_are_the_most_clever_do_things_that_dont/</a></p>
Buildspace	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	<p>"Let's make landing pages for every college. And then go to every college's CS Discord and then essentially onboard people from individual colleges into buildspace by essentially creating a college themed page for every college. This ended up working for us because our first users came from early CS Discords. This is working so let's do more of that and go directly to them."</p>	<p><a href="https://youtu.be/9e1KKORQcjQ?si=OhdWXvwrBXQUgPd&amp;t=1033">https://youtu.be/9e1KKORQcjQ?si=OhdWXvwrBXQUgPd&amp;t=1033</a></p>
Bumble	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	<p>"I kind of had a little bit of a playbook [from Tinder's launch]. I had maybe done it once before. I went right back to SMU, this time decked out in yellow. And I went back into all those sororities and I spoke from the heart. Listen, I have lived through the pain points of male-dominated relationships. I have felt it. I know what it feels like. And guess what? Every other woman in that sorority house, chances are she's felt it too. I'm speaking from the heart, and I'm speaking to them about how they can be empowered and they make the first move and they go after what they want.</p> <p>And me and my early team members—the girls are at my office right now; they're still with us—we went in there, and we took pizza boxes with stickers on it and offered a piece of pizza to the fraternity boys that would get on [the app]. We wrapped cookies in Bumble stickers. We took all sorts of goodies and we kind of growth-hacked our way to success."</p> <p>—Whitney Wolfe Herd, co-founder, via How I Built This</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>  <a href="https://www.npr.org/2019/04/12/712909267/bumble-whitney-wolfe">https://www.npr.org/2019/04/12/712909267/bumble-whitney-wolfe</a></p>
ClassPass	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"One of my favorite things about this time is that I didn't let technology drive or hinder my product development," says Kadakia. "We started building the product to do what it needed to for the customer. Most of the stuff on the backend was either done manually or didn't work. Someone would make a class reservation at this time, and I would get an email. Then I would go and make the reservation manually. Instead of building out the perfect booking system, what I needed to figure out at this point was what was going to motivate people to make a reservation and then go to class. The rest simply didn't matter.</p> <p>By taking on part of the reservation process manually, Kadakia internalized customer behavior in a visceral way. "That'll happen if you're doing the equivalent of sending confirmation emails for every customer. It helped me realize that technology is crucial, obviously. But it's still just a tool to get your solution into the world. Your software is not your answer in and of itself. Your insights into customers are your solution," says Kadakia. "The product became a product because of the insights and the learnings we got from directly interacting with our customers — on top of the technology. But we had to guide the technology with our thinking and our learning. Those many days I spent inputting reservations manually turned into another valuable stream of customer insights. I quickly learned not to book reservations right away, as half of cancellations came within 15 minutes of booking. That became an important part of the design of our cancellation policies."</p>	<p><a href="https://review.firstrand.com/classpass-founder-on-how-marketplace-startups-can-achieve-product-market-fit/">https://review.firstrand.com/classpass-founder-on-how-marketplace-startups-can-achieve-product-market-fit/</a></p>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
CommandBar	Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	2	"Despite having no customers, they got into YC. However, they struggled to get traction as they spent most of their time explaining what their product did.  The breakthrough came when they made a Chrome extension that visually showed their product working in potential customers' own websites.  James made Loom videos for each potential customer, showing Command Bar integrated with their app and how it could help. His cold emails had a whopping 30% response rate and helped land their first 10 customers."	<a href="https://saasclub.io/podcast/commandbar-james-evans-385/">https://saasclub.io/podcast/commandbar-james-evans-385/</a>
Doordash	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	Tony Xu (DoorDash) figured out that many early users were moms, and he would go and knock on their doors to ask them why they would use the product, and where other moms would hang out so they could get more signups. All of the founders also took shifts to drive for the app so they had to use it themselves.  "In the beginning it was me going door to door to convince restaurants to join. Thinking about how to convince them to join. I don't think there was anything else that could be substituted for that."  —Tony Xu, co-founder	<a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036">https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/y-combinator-startup-podcast/id1236907421?i=1000586605036</a> <a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>
Dropbox	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	"The challenge was that it was impossible to demonstrate the working software in a prototype form. The product required that they overcome significant technical hurdles; it also had an online service component that required high reliability and availability. To avoid the risk of waking up after years of development with a product nobody wanted, Drew did something unexpectedly easy: he made a video.  The video is banal, a simple three- minute demonstration of the technology as it is meant to work, but it was targeted at a community of technology early adopters. Drew narrates the video personally, and as he's narrating, the viewer is watching his screen. As he describes the kinds of files he'd like to synchronize, the viewer can watch his mouse manipulate his computer. Of course, if you're paying attention, you start to notice that the files he's moving around are full of in-jokes and humorous references that were appreciated by this community of early adopters.  Drew recounted, "It drove hundreds of thousands of people to the website. Our beta waiting list went from 5,000 people to 75,000 people literally overnight. It totally blew us away."	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxFLfy7_Gqw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxFLfy7_Gqw</a> <a href="https://techcrunch.com/2011/10/19/dropbox-minimal-viable-product/">https://techcrunch.com/2011/10/19/dropbox-minimal-viable-product/</a>
Finta	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	"Many of our customers know @Finta today as an automated accounting and tax solution for startups, but about a year ago, I manually categorized almost 10K transactions in a month for our customers. The learnings that came from it were absolutely invaluable."  — Andy Wang, founder	Internal YC Bookface comment
FlightCar	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	"Rujul Zaparde (formerly FlightCar) stood in front of a major airport parking lot for nearly 12 hours with a sign that said "ask us about free airport parking". He had the cops called on him three times that day."	<a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2</a>
Hipcamp	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	"I think our first 100 or so users came from sitting at a fold-up table in front of REI and handing out stickers. We'd have them test the website and make sure they added their email to the newsletter field. Then they told friends!"  —Alyssa Ravasio, co-founder	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>
Liquifi	Ask for help and referrals.  Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	2	They would give me a list of other AllianceDAO startups and ask me one at a time if I think they are a good fit as customers, and then reach out to them. By the way, a number of AllianceDAO startups acquired their first few customers through our community.  Robin and Oliver would also comb through all the public fundraising data such as Twitter, Messari, and Crunchbase, to find all the possible customers. They would ask every investor for warm intros to key decision makers. They would even jump into random Discords and literally ask everyone for intros.  Robin describes Liquifi's style of customer support as "unhealthily high touch". For example, the team would check the vesting schedule spreadsheets that their customers send to help reduce onboarding friction. His team has spotted tons of mistakes, and in one instance, proactively called out a scenario where someone was being underpaid for 2 years. Handling token vesting is such a sensitive topic, and this level of diligence helps customers feel comfortable with working with Liquifi.	<a href="https://medium.com/alliancedao/do-things-that-dont-scale-crypto-edition-a8d472828382">https://medium.com/alliancedao/do-things-that-dont-scale-crypto-edition-a8d472828382</a>
Lyft	Ask for help and referrals.  Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	"We asked everyone on our team to give us their list of contacts at startups, and we contacted them to ask their permission to come by with a free Bi-Rite ice cream sundae drop-off for their employees. They basically all said yes, because Bi-Rite is delicious. :) So we arranged a drop-off operation and had teams of staff with insulated bags taking ice cream sundae kits to all of the companies and giving them Lyft credits."  —Emily Castor Warren, early employee	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>
Meesho	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.  Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	Meesho started off as as a WhatsApp group: "When we started off, we were just enabling existing guys who were doing this, because we saw this behavior. A lot of people in Gujarat, then Karnataka, were running these WhatsApp stores even before us. They had gone out, met suppliers, figured out how to do courier. They figured out how to use tools on WhatsApp, et cetera. But they were few. Like, six, seven months, we onboarded a lot of them. And then, we did not know what to do. Then we changed our product completely, because we had to create users. We had to create that resellers. None of them are doing themselves. We changed that, and suddenly, so many people, like every tier two, tier three woman out there became our target customer."	<a href="https://www.ycombinator.com/library/6M-on-starting-and-scaling-indian-shopping-site-meesho">https://www.ycombinator.com/library/6M-on-starting-and-scaling-indian-shopping-site-meesho</a>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
<b>Meraki</b>	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"For hardware startups there's a variant of doing things that don't scale that we call "pulling a Meraki." Although we didn't fund Meraki, the founders were Robert Morris's grad students, so we know their history. They got started by doing something that really doesn't scale: assembling their routers themselves.</p> <p>Hardware startups face an obstacle that software startups don't. The minimum order for a factory production run is usually several hundred thousand dollars. Which can put you in a catch-22: without a product you can't generate the growth you need to raise the money to manufacture your product. Back when hardware startups had to rely on investors for money, you had to be pretty convincing to overcome this. The arrival of crowdfunding (or more precisely, preorders) has helped a lot. But even so I'd advise startups to pull a Meraki initially if they can."</p>	<a href="https://paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://paulgraham.com/ds.html</a>
<b>Morning Brew</b>	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	<p>"The model we used in our mind was this hub-and-spoke model. Who are the hubs that have access to all of these spokes—the spokes being the people we want reading our newsletter? What we decided was this was professors of business classes or it was presidents of business clubs. So Austin and I just pounded the pavement to get into every big business class in Michigan, [every] lecture with 75 to 500 people. We got into all the clubs, and we would basically give our spiel at the beginning.... We got a couple thousand people from Michigan."</p> <p>—Alex Lieberman and Austin Rief, founders, via How I Built This</p>	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a> <a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-i-built-this-with-guy-raz/id1150510297?i=1000511527443">https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-i-built-this-with-guy-raz/id1150510297?i=1000511527443</a>
<b>Netflix</b>	Go directly wherever your customers are.	2	<p>"We realized early on the only way to find DVD owners was in the fringe communities of the internet: user groups, bulletin boards, web forums, and all of the other digital watering holes where enthusiasts met up.... Posing as a home theater enthusiast or cinephile, [Corey Bridges] would join the conversation in communities geared toward DVD fanatics and movie buffs, befriend the major players, and slowly, over time, alert the most respected commenters, moderators, and website owners about this great new site called Netflix. We were months from launch, but he was planting seeds that would pay off ... big time."</p> <p>—Marc Randolph, via That Will Never Work</p>	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a> <a href="https://medium.com/@bharath.bkj/the-story-of-netflix-d80826d372de">https://medium.com/@bharath.bkj/the-story-of-netflix-d80826d372de</a>
<b>Producthunt</b>	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Ask for help and referrals.</p>	2	<p>"Product Hunt began as an email list. I threw it together one early morning, invited some friends to contribute, and shared it online. I posted it on Quibb and received positive feedback from fellow entrepreneurs and investors. That was encouraging.</p> <p>While Nathan was at his parents' house over Thanksgiving break, we hopped on Skype and bounced around ideas, sharing sketches of what Product Hunt might look like.</p> <p>But before building the site, we reached out to friends and early users of the email list, asking for feedback. Ben Yoskovitz and many others were kind to help. Nathan spent his afternoons and late nights, designing and coding our humble little Rails app. Within five days, we had a functional site and began sharing it with a small group of close friends."</p>	<a href="https://medium.com/on-startups/the-artifacts-of-product-hunt-11682e9e01dd">https://medium.com/on-startups/the-artifacts-of-product-hunt-11682e9e01dd</a> <a href="https://hackernoon.com/do-things-that-dont-scale-4-inspirational-startup-examples-a2ab3a5c4926">https://hackernoon.com/do-things-that-dont-scale-4-inspirational-startup-examples-a2ab3a5c4926</a>
<b>Quickbooks</b>	Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.	2	<p>"Years ago QuickBooks let users upload receipts and then "AI" would identify the expense amount and category automatically. Sometimes it worked fast and sometimes it took hours.</p> <p>It was actually just workers in the Philippines, and it took awhile sometimes because they were asleep"</p>	<a href="https://x.com/flyosity/status/1798333443673301080?s=46">https://x.com/flyosity/status/1798333443673301080?s=46</a>
<b>Rent the Runway</b>	Validate the problem manually	2	<p>"We held trial trunk shows on college campuses, met with everyone we could talk to in order to gather feedback and suggestions, and adapted along the way."</p> <p>—Jennifer Fleiss, co-founder, via Forbes</p>	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a> <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2013/04/01/rent-the-runway-brings-the-catwalk-to-your-closet/?sh=669a54191f4a">https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2013/04/01/rent-the-runway-brings-the-catwalk-to-your-closet/?sh=669a54191f4a</a>
<b>Substack</b>	<p>Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.</p> <p>Ask for help and referrals.</p>	2	<p>"It all started with Bill Bishop, author of Sinocism, who I knew from my days as a reporter in Hong Kong (and later, a visiting reporter in China). He had been publishing Sinocism as a free newsletter for five years, and I was a reader. In 2017 he started telling his readers he was going to put up a paywall. This was around the time that Chris [Best] and I were talking about starting Substack. I asked Bill if he'd be interested in being Substack's first publisher, and he said 'Sure!' So we built the first version of the product to suit his needs and iterated from there. Through suggestions from friends, and friends of friends, I also recruited Kelly Dwyer, formerly of Yahoo Sports and now author of The Second Arrangement, and Daniel Lavery, one of the founders of The Toast and now author of The Shatner Chatner. They were the first three publishers on Substack. And from there, I kept asking smart friends, many of whom worked in media, for writer recommendations, and then in each call or meeting with a writer, I'd ask that writer for more recommendations."</p> <p>—Hamish McKenzie, co-founder</p>	<a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>
<b>Teespring</b>	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.</p>	2	<p>"Walker Williams (formerly Teespring) drove an hour and a half to Petaluma in order to pack and ship bobbleheads for a long-term client that wanted to sell something other than t-shirts, despite the fact that the company... only sold t-shirts."</p> <p>"So this is Teespring in 2012 (PowerPoint). When we first launched, the business couldn't have looked worse. It took days of meetings; we had to offer free designs, and days of revisions back-and-forth, we'd have to launch the product ourselves, we'd have to do the social media, all to sell about 50 shirts to a local nonprofit and generate about \$1000 of revenue. Anybody looking in would've said, "You guys have to give up, this is a terrible idea." But as time went on, those users started to add up, and I think something you have to understand is when you first launch a company, just by virtue of the fact that it's a new product, you're going to be bad at selling it right? You've got no idea what the pain points of customers really are. You've never sold that before. You don't have any success stories to point to, or testimonials. Those first users are always going to be the hardest."</p>	<a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=3801092&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=3801092&amp;p=2</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQOC-qy-GDY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQOC-qy-GDY</a>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
Tensor	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Go directly wherever your customers are.</p>	2	<p>"Tensor is the #1 NFT marketplace on Solana.</p> <p>Ilja and Richard used an onchain tracking website to identify all the Solana NFT whales, find their Twitter handle, DM'ed everyone of them, and got on a call with the few that responded.</p> <p>But this wasn't enough. At the time they were fighting an uphill battle against Magic Eden which had orders of magnitude more distribution. So they built an alliance with other NFT marketplaces. Notably, they struck a deal with Hadeswap, which at the time had 10x more distribution than Tensor, whereby Tensor would build a brand-new front-end for Hadeswap in exchange for a backlink to Tensor's website. This dramatically increased distribution for Tensor."</p>	<p><a href="https://medium.com/alliancedao/do-things-that-dont-scale-crypto-edition-a8d472828382">https://medium.com/alliancedao/do-things-that-dont-scale-crypto-edition-a8d472828382</a></p>
Thumbtack	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Go directly wherever your customers are.</p>	2	<p>"We used email marketing to get our first 1,000 users. We found email addresses of local service professionals and messaged them letting them know we existed. If they registered with Thumbtack, we would start sending them job leads. The number-one thing any local service professional wants is new customers. We found new customers for them, notified them via email, and they signed up."</p> <p>—Sander Daniels, co-founder</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Uber	<p>Go directly wherever your customers are.</p>	2	<p>"There was a very significant use of street teams early on at Uber. They went to places like the Caltrain station and handed out referral codes. There are stories about how Travis [Kalanick] went to Twitter HQ personally and handed out referral codes."</p> <p>—Andrew Chen, early growth leader</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Verbling	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p>	2	<p>"Jake Jolis (formerly Verbling) would act as an English speaker trying to learn other languages at all hours of the night in order to improve the matchmaking on his language learning app. Most people were there to learn English rather than the other way around."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992&amp;p=2</a></p>
Warp	<p>Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.</p>	2	<p>"currently migrating from rippling to @joinwarp and the warp team is completely cracked. i requested a setting and they shipped it in an hour"</p> <p>"Speed from customer feedback to feature or bugfix shipped correlates very strongly with, it not defines, success in startups"</p>	<p><a href="https://x.com/0interestrates/status/1798057347660824822">https://x.com/0interestrates/status/1798057347660824822</a></p> <p><a href="https://x.com/rauchg/status/1798087149511909856">https://x.com/rauchg/status/1798087149511909856</a></p>
Wufoo	<p>Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.</p>	2	<p>"For as long as they could (which turned out to be surprisingly long), Wufoo sent each new user a hand-written thank you note. Your first users should feel that signing up with you was one of the best choices they ever made. And you in turn should be racking your brains to think of new ways to delight them."</p>	<p><a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_startup">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_startup</a></p>
Twitch	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p> <p>Be relentlessly resourceful and creative.</p>	2	<p>"The first hack we had if suddenly some famous person was streaming, on their channel there'd be a bunch of dynamic things that could load like username, view counts, and a whole bunch of other dynamic thing that would basically hit our application servers and destroy them if 100K people were trying to request the page at the same time. We actually had a button that could make any page on <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c">justin.tv</a> a static page. All those features would stop working. Your name wouldn't appear. Your view count wouldn't update. Literally a static page that loaded our video player and you couldn't touch us. We could just cache that static page and as many people as possible could look at it. Now to them, certain things wouldn't look right but at least the video would work and we didn't have to work on the harder parts until way later."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCPjk8Tpb5c</a></p>
Avatar AI (@levelsio)	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p>	2	<p>"First version was an index.html + @Stripe link + @Typeform to upload photos, then I manually did the photos and uploaded them to the GPU</p> <p>Pic 2 is current version as a web app after 1Y: 100% automated, 1850 customers @ \$79K MRR, renamed to <a href="http://photoai.com">http://photoai.com</a>"</p>	<p><a href="https://x.com/levelsio/status/1717183107529576672">https://x.com/levelsio/status/1717183107529576672</a></p>
Airbnb	<p>Go directly wherever your customers are.</p>	1	<p>"Direct sales was critical to get the first listings on the platform, especially in immature markets without critical mass. It enabled us to pick and choose different supply types and build the right mix of homes. The local teams were accountable for their market and could themselves decide which supply to acquire, e.g. in which neighborhood, what size of the listing, and price points."</p> <p>—Georg Bauser, early employee</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Andrej Karpathy	<p>Validate the problem manually and build for scale later.</p>	1	<p>"It was hard. As I beta-tested the interface, the task of labeling images with 5 out of 1000 categories quickly turned out to be extremely challenging, even for some friends in the lab who have been working on ILSVRC and its classes for a while. First we thought we would put it up on AMT. Then we thought we could recruit paid undergrads. Then I organized a labeling party of intense labeling effort only among the (expert labelers) in our lab. Then I developed a modified interface that used GoogLeNet predictions to prune the number of categories from 1000 to only about 100. It was still too hard - people kept missing categories and getting up to ranges of 13-15% error rates. In the end I realized that to get anywhere competitively close to GoogLeNet, it was most efficient if I sat down and went through the painfully long training process and the subsequent careful annotation process myself.</p> <p>It took a while. I ended up training on 500 validation images and then switched to the test set of 1500 images. The labeling happened at a rate of about 1 per minute, but this decreased over time. I only enjoyed the first ~200, and the rest I only did #forscience. (In the end we convinced one more expert labeler to spend a few hours on the annotations, but they only got up to 280 images, with less training, and only got to about 12%). The labeling time distribution was strongly bimodal: Some images are easily recognized, while some images (such as those of fine-grained breeds of dogs, birds, or monkeys) can require multiple minutes of concentrated effort. I became very good at identifying breeds of dogs."</p>	<p><a href="https://karpathy.github.io/2014/09/02/what-i-learned-from-competing-against-a-convnet-on-imagenet/">https://karpathy.github.io/2014/09/02/what-i-learned-from-competing-against-a-convnet-on-imagenet/</a></p> <p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38020134">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38020134</a></p>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
Behance	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"For our first 1,000 users, there were a few hacks I found especially helpful in this phase. One was using sites like StumbleUpon, Reddit, NotCot, and others (and eventually Pinterest) that featured great work around the web with a link-back.</p> <p>I remember sending tons of 'I noticed your work on MySpace/DeviantArt/etc. and thought you'd enjoy showcasing your work on Behance' type of emails. The more personal these emails were, the better they converted. And I figured, for every great member we had, many of his or her admirers would follow. We have evidence to prove that the majority of new members joined because of someone they admire. My simple daily practice was to bring in 10 amazing new members every day. Whether it took a phone call or me building their portfolio for them, we were willing to do whatever it took because we were so convinced by the network effect."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Behance	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"We got our first 100 users by contacting the 100 designers and artists we admired most and asked if we could interview them for a blog on productivity in the creative world. Nearly all of them said yes. After asking a series of questions over email, we offered to construct a portfolio on their behalf on Behance, alongside the blog post. Nobody declined. This initiative yielded a v1 of Behance that was jam-packed with an average of about five 'projects' each from 100 top creatives, built the way we wanted (which set the standard for new members). This manual labor was the most important thing we ever did. It solved our chicken-or-egg problem."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Bitcoin	Start a deliberately contained fire.	1	<p><b>My note: IMO somewhat of a reach from Pomp but I thought this was an interesting take:</b></p> <p>"Bitcoin's initial adoption was very similar. Satoshi Nakamoto didn't have a for-profit company. He/She/They didn't raise money to build the product or market it. Bitcoin's software was written, then a white paper was put together, and eventually a very small group of cryptographers were told about the cryptocurrency via a cryptography email list. The Bitcoin "founder" was literally emailing early users one on one, including answering questions and discussing features. Eventually, the discussion of this small group grew from emails (very private) to Internet forums (a little more public), but throughout the entire process, users were encouraged to download the software and start using/testing it.</p> <p>Bitcoin had a single target market initially — cypherpunks. (A cypherpunk is "any activist advocating widespread use of strong cryptography and privacy-enhancing technologies as a route to social and political change."). These individuals had a shared set of ideals, ethos, and view of the world. They were the exact people looking for a decentralized, secure, digital currency that removed the need for centralized authorities. And when Satoshi Nakamoto built the right product and handed it to the cypherpunks, they knew exactly what to do with it — mine it, hold it, and use it. Bitcoin found product-market fit almost immediately, which accelerated adoption (it also didn't hurt that money is an extremely viral product)."</p>	<p><a href="https://cryptowords.github.io/bitcoin-did-the-things-that-didnt-scale-initially">https://cryptowords.github.io/bitcoin-did-the-things-that-didnt-scale-initially</a></p>
Caviar	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"For us, for supply growth, it was direct sales/field sales—no question!"</p> <p>—Gokul Rajaram, early employee</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Facebook	Ask for help and referrals.	1	<p>"[Mark] Zuckerberg's friends made up most of the 10 first Facebook sign-ups, after which the social network expanded to friends of friends across campus. Eventually it swept all Ivy League colleges, the nation, and then the world."</p> <p>—Business Insider</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a>  <a href="https://www.firstversions.com/2015/04/facebook.html">https://www.firstversions.com/2015/04/facebook.html</a></p>
Facebook	Start a deliberately contained fire.	1	<p>"That's what Facebook did. At first it was just for Harvard students. In that form it only had a potential market of a few thousand people, but because they felt it was really for them, a critical mass of them signed up. After Facebook stopped being for Harvard students, it remained for students at specific colleges for quite a while. When I interviewed Mark Zuckerberg at Startup School, he said that while it was a lot of work creating course lists for each school, doing that made students feel the site was their natural home."</p>	<p><a href="https://paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://paulgraham.com/ds.html</a></p>
Github	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"Tom Preston-Werner (formerly GitHub) emailed tons of OSS maintainers, including John Resig of jQuery, to try and convince them to migrate over to GitHub. He admits that it wasn't a great strategy though - project maintainers have to convince themselves to switch VCS systems."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=3801092&amp;p=2">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=3801092&amp;p=2</a></p>
Intercom	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"So all day every day I'd email people to tell them about Intercom, show them what Intercom might look like for them, and hear their feedback. I did this 100% by hand and if I was to do it all again today I'd still do it by hand. Honestly.</p> <p>We opened up Intercom to the public on January 27th, 2011 and with the floodgates open I decided to switch to blogging and presenting webinars to help onboard groups of users at a time. Again, there were ways to automate this and avoid the hard work, at a cost of the nuance. So every week I did one live webinar on Wednesday nights to groups ranging from 9 to 90 depending on how successful the week had been. My goal was to get 100% of the attendees using the product and some weeks we got damn close.</p> <p>We grew email by email, Skype by Skype, webinar by webinar, and looking back I can't distill it down to any one thing. Just do all of it and one of two things will happen: either it starts working eventually, or you just can't do it anymore. If it doesn't work out, you'll feel a lot better knowing that you gave it everything you had, rather than realising you should have actually talked to your would-be customers before trying to automate them."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.intercom.com/blog/how-intercom-got-our-first-customers/">https://www.intercom.com/blog/how-intercom-got-our-first-customers/</a></p>

Company	Tactic	"Epicness" Level	Story / Quote	Sources
LinkedIn	Ask for help and referrals.	1	<p>"Reid [Hoffman] and the rest of the founding team all sent invites to our professional contacts on launch day. We asked all those folks to try the v1 product and invite their professional contacts. In total that was maybe a couple thousand individuals.</p> <p>During the first seven days, most of the 12,000-odd people who signed up were either 1st degree (e.g. directly knew someone on the founding team) or 2nd degree ('friend of a friend' of someone on the founding team) connections. So virtually all of the people who signed up in the first week were part of the startup ecosystem (so, predisposed to try out new products) and had a direct or indirect connection to the LinkedIn team (therefore more willing to check out a colleague/friend's new project)."</p> <p>—Lee Hower, founding team, via Quora</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p> <p><a href="https://thenextweb.com/news/linkedin-10-years-social-network">https://thenextweb.com/news/linkedin-10-years-social-network</a></p>
Pinterest	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"How do you find users to recruit manually? If you build something to solve your own problems, then you only have to find your peers, which is usually straightforward. Otherwise you'll have to make a more deliberate effort to locate the most promising vein of users. The usual way to do that is to get some initial set of users by doing a comparatively untargeted launch, and then to observe which kind seem most enthusiastic, and seek out more like them.</p> <p>For example, Ben Silbermann noticed that a lot of the earliest Pinterest users were interested in design, so he went to a conference of design bloggers to recruit users, and that worked well."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.paulgraham.com/ds.html">https://www.paulgraham.com/ds.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/letters-from-wall-street/id1467001278?i=1000449959298">https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/letters-from-wall-street/id1467001278?i=1000449959298</a></p>
Quora	Ask for help and referrals.	1	<p>"Quora launched in January 2010 with a user base largely composed of [Adam] D'Angelo's and [Charlie] Cheever's college and high-school friends, meaning there was a lot of early Quora information on the best places to eat in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Cheever was raised. But they also built a feature into the site whereby users could invite people, and soon their friends from Facebook were summoning people from other startups, and other entrepreneurs."</p> <p>—Wired</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Reddit	Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	1	<p>"When reddit first started, all merch was hand packed by Alexis with a note in it. At one point he sent us a stack of 1000 postcards and made all of us sign them, and then used those to pack the merch."</p>	<p><a href="https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992">https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=38010992</a></p>
Teespring	Provide a personalized and "insanely" delightful experience.	1	<p>"The easiest way to do this early, and again something that is completely unsustainable - it's not going to scale forever - is to just talk to those users. People will say this all the time, it's sort of the core tenant of Y Combinator, is talk to users. I cannot stress how important it is that you spend a large chunk of your time talking to users. You should do it constantly, every single day, and as long as possible. Today at Teespring, I'm still the catchall email address, so anytime anybody misspells "support" or writes an email address that doesn't exist, I get that email. And so I still do about 10 to 20 customer service tickets every single day; I spend hours each night reading every single tweet, probably a little bit OCD, but that's okay; I read through all the Teespring communities.</p>	<p><a href="https://startupclass.samaltman.com/courses/lec08/">https://startupclass.samaltman.com/courses/lec08/</a></p>
Uber	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"Uber Black was initially ops- and phone-driven. They would call limo companies to pitch them. A lot of limo companies were sole proprietorships, and the pitch was 'While you are waiting for trips, we'll guarantee you a minimum level of income if you keep this app on.'"</p> <p>—Andrew Chen, early growth leader</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Whatsapp	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>"To get the first users [Jan Koum] reached the Russian emigrant community in San Jose through his friend Alex Fishman. That community became WhatsApp early adopters."</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.reddit.com/r/startups/comments/8b0u5m/how_whatsapp_got_their_first_users/">https://www.reddit.com/r/startups/comments/8b0u5m/how_whatsapp_got_their_first_users/</a></p>
Yelp	Ask for help and referrals.	1	<p>"Inviting people from our network (mostly former coworkers from PayPal) drove our initial users. We asked all our network to invite their friends, and being startup people who wanted to help us, they obliged, so two degrees out, we probably got to 1K or so users. The takeaway is not to underestimate the power of one's personal referral network and to think deeply about the incentive and mechanics."</p> <p>—Russel Simmons, co-founder</p>	<p><a href="https://medium.com/swlh/building-yelp-bc4e62c4db3b">https://medium.com/swlh/building-yelp-bc4e62c4db3b</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>
Youtube	Go directly wherever your customers are.	1	<p>YouTube (supply side): Email</p> <p>"For the entirety of the summer of 2005, it was a lot of experimentation—going after bloggers, video bloggers, photographers, pets communities, etc. It was a lot of trial and error in guessing what type of content creators were looking and [were] in need of a service like YouTube."</p> <p>—Steve Chen, co-founder</p>	<p><a href="https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users">https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/consumer-business-find-first-users</a></p>