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How to prove your customers will buy your idea in a sizeable market

Validate your idea



If you want a product you know your customers will love to buy, then you need to research and validate your opportunity early and economically.



You may have read about “research, design, build and test with an MVP” before, but many startups unknowingly skip important steps or don’t research properly. This means that they launch a product that solves the wrong problem for the wrong market, or isn’t right for the target customer.

Validating the opportunity, market and proposition early and effectively has the power to prove (or disprove!) your target customers will buy your product and give you greater certainty that your investment isn’t going to waste.

Don’t develop your product until you have early proof from a qualified group of end users and buyers.

In this article, we’re going to tell you why you need to validate your opportunity and how to do it effectively to build a product your customer will love to buy.



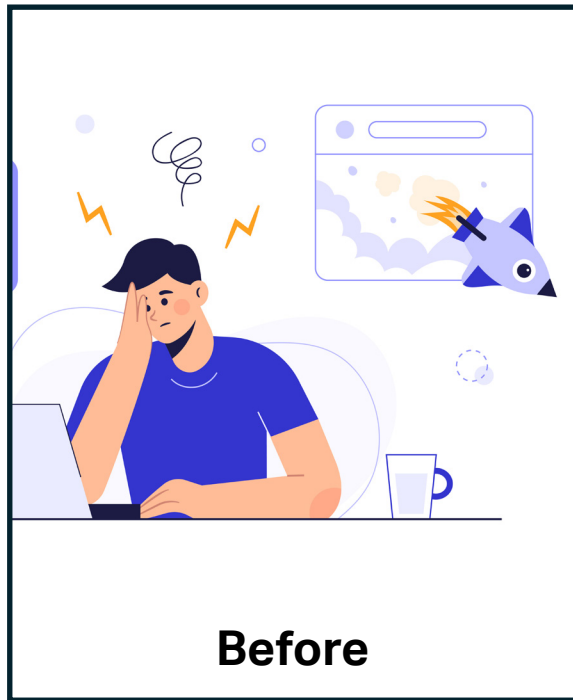
What does it mean to validate a market opportunity?

Imagine a healthcare startup that has a promising idea for a new femtech product but they don't yet know if there is a market for it, or if their customers will like it. To reduce the uncertainty, they set out to research specific areas which give them confidence the product will create a sustainable business. They do this as a matter of priority before embarking on costly development and business activities which are not important at this stage. It enables them to find out early if it's worth the effort and investment.

Another example would be a small to medium enterprise (SME) that's already selling white labelled wireless chargers. Their sales have fallen over the last few years and they know they need to innovate and create their own products to differentiate themselves from their competition. They conduct focussed and strategic market research to find new opportunities and unmet customer needs with quantifiable data that shows the market potential. Using various design methods enables them to bring their ideas to life through visual and physical prototyping and test their proposition on customers economically.

Validating an opportunity, market and proposition allows tech startups to prove their product idea will create a viable business. This enables them to proceed with greater certainty and confidence that their investment is used in the best way possible. The advantage is that you find out if the product will be bought by your customers in a sizable market early on and prevent unnecessary efforts in the future. It may also show how you might need to change your idea or direction and experiment with the next opportunity.





Why should you prove your product is desirable in a sizeable market?

Proving your idea as early as possible in the development process is super effective for a number of reasons:

1. Reduce Financial Risk

Proving your product's desirability early prevents you from sinking significant resources into something customers may not want. By validating demand, you minimise the risk of expensive product development failures, especially in industries where prototyping, manufacturing, and logistics are costly.

2. Speed to Market

For tech startups, speed is often critical. Early proof of desirability allows you to pivot or refine your product quickly, helping you avoid wasted cycles of development. This agility can give you a competitive advantage, allowing you to reach the market faster than competitors.

3. Investor Confidence

Investors are more likely to fund ventures with validated demand. Proving desirability shows that your product isn't just a concept—it has market potential. This increases your credibility and makes it easier to secure funding, especially in a crowded tech space.

4. User Centred Development

Proving desirability forces you to engage with real customers early on. This user-centred approach ensures you're developing a product that genuinely solves a problem or fulfils a need/ business opportunity, rather than relying on assumptions.

5. Avoid an Over Complicated Product

Focus is vital for new businesses developing innovative ideas. It's easy to get caught up in adding unnecessary features. Proving desirability helps you stay focused on the core features that matter most to your target audience, reducing wasted time and resources.

6. Optimise for Market Fit

Validating desirability ensures that you're not just building a technically excellent product, but one that resonates with your specific market. This improves your chances of achieving product-market fit, essential for startup growth.

7. Save on Marketing Costs

If you validate early, you'll already have a clearer idea of your target market, messaging, and channels, meaning your marketing efforts can be more focused and cost-effective when you're ready to launch.

8. Early Adopter Buy-In

Tech startups often rely on early adopters to generate momentum. Validating desirability allows you to secure early adopters who are not only willing to buy your product but can also become advocates who spread the word.

9. Refine Pricing Strategy

Effective market research gives you an understanding of how much customers are willing to pay. This helps you refine your pricing model before it's too late, ensuring profitability and a competitive edge.

10. Better Supply Chain Decisions

Facing challenges related to production and supply chain logistics is inevitable. By proving desirability early, you can make better, data-driven decisions on inventory, production volumes, and supplier partnerships, avoiding overproduction or delays.

Overcoming Idea Confirmation Bias

Before you embark on proving your opportunity is going to bring you business success, you need to be aware of confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias refers to your tendency to interpret or look for information that confirms existing assumptions or hypotheses.

At the beginning of your tech startup journey, this is a dangerous thought process which needs to be prevented in order to prove or disprove customers will buy your idea. Not doing so will inevitably create an unwanted product, and ultimately stop your business from growing.

When founders want an idea or opportunity to succeed, they believe it will and are motivated by wishful thinking and ignore reality. This leads to searching for positive information in favour of their idea, and then stopping once they have some confirmation (usually from poor sources).

Without looking at two sides of the argument (and therefore disproving as well as proving), the project will lack true and factual data to effectively define the problem, opportunity and robustly test the product proposition.

Always practise radical honesty, question "why" in everything you do and gain insights from real strangers who are in your target market. Additionally, ensure your mindset rewards and encourages testing ideas that might fail, removing the ego and satisfaction of being "right". It's about seeing the true reality that's in front of you, not what you want it to be.





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"Don't jump into building your product straight away, instead we validate the opportunity early and economically.

Only then do we invest heavily in a new proposition."

- Jonathan Marchbank on Idea Validation.

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**Ready to start
validating your idea?**

Book a free 45-minute discovery call to
discuss your idea or project.

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How to prove your customers will buy your idea in a sizable market



Your opportunity can emerge from 3 areas:

1. A problem.
2. A market gap, trend or emerging category.
3. A technology.

Despite observing a new and promising opportunity, there are important steps required to prove the market is sizable and your customer will buy your idea. Here's how:

Validate the initial problem or opportunity with specificity

Research into the problem you're trying to solve as deeply as possible using qualitative and quantitative online methods which complement each other. Succinctly write out a problem statement with as much specificity as you can. Remove any fluff or useless information.

For example, imagine you're looking into helping the ageing population, a useful piece of data might be: "95% of people aged 65+ in the UK say they want to remain at home for as long as possible as they age. By the age of 75+, 62% of people will have unmet needs required to stay living at home as they age".

This contributes to defining market size, and shows there is potential for technology which enables ageing in place. You can go even more specific - like addressing falls and finding out how many falls occur annually.

Find useful information from:

Online sources & databases - such as articles, blogs and research papers or reports. These provide compelling and factual data.

Market Gap Analysis - Identify competitors who are playing in this space and map out what they offer and what they don't offer. This might identify a point of differentiation.

Online Marketplaces - Visit websites like Amazon, dedicated ecommerce sites and distil useful and insightful product reviews and comments.

Social Media - Review adverts which appear on sites like Instagram, Facebook and Reddit. Find what people comment on, what they love and what they dislike about certain product features from specific brands which are market leaders.

Review Sites - Compile interesting and relevant comments of review sites like Trustpilot and find out what your competitors' customers are saying.

Insights from all these sources will start to form trends and patterns in problems and opportunities which you can use to contribute to your product proposition.

Research the benefits and drawbacks of the science or technology

Becoming an expert in the area you're playing in has powerful effects on your understanding of the market and product before you've even started. Read around the subject and find research papers and claims within the industry that can provide an extra layer of knowledge.

For example (keeping with the "ageing in place" subject), finding out what the root cause of falls at home with the elderly population can spark new ideas and opportunities as well as providing you with compelling information to include in marketing activities. E.g. A key contributor to falls is dehydration. You might want to look into this problem even further.

Additionally, finding out the effects of the problem helps uncover more data and provide you with key benefits to shout about when sourcing funding and advertising to your customers.

Know ALL your potential target customers (Market Segmentation)

The main goal here is to broadly find out which customer segments might suffer from the problem you have identified or pay for the opportunity (About 10 - 15). Then, focus down on one segment which suffers from the problem the most.

This will help form the End User Profile(s) you will be researching in more detail later and will give you the most rich insights as they suffer from the problem the most.

Primary Market Research (with your ideal customer)

Now you have a good idea of the ideal target customer, you need to start talking to them and find out more insights which will strengthen your understanding. You want to find out where they are, what they like and dislike, basic financial information etc etc. There are a few key methods you should complete to do this effectively:

Online Survey - Create a concise survey which you can send to people online through social media and email newsletters. Although online surveys don't always give you accurate and honest feedback, they're a great start to understanding key information. You won't have a huge list of your target customers yet, so find an organisation you can partner with who does. Leverage their community to reach a large audience.

Observation - Reach out to people who are as close to you as possible and ask if you can observe them as they complete their tasks. Take notes and only ask questions if you're curious about why they might be doing something which you think is interesting.

Interviews - Organise dedicated time slots with your target customers and ask them open ended questions about their problems, pain points and potential opportunities.

Identify Product Placement Environments

Find out where your potential solutions might be used including domestic and commercial environments. This will help build a go to market strategy later. For example, you might be developing a new fall detector for people ageing at home, but there might be a lower risk and better market selling to multi-occupant and commercial settings.

Select a Beachhead Market

Once you've got a lot of data on potential target customers, it's important to focus on one location, with one customer in one channel. Lacking focus will cause you to do too much and decrease your odds of success.

You want to select a beachhead market that's:

- Well funded
- Has a compelling reason to buy
- Without a difficult competitor to overcome
- Has adjacent segments to pursue later (and grow your business)

Build an End User Profile

Create a one page table of what your selected end user profile looks like. Include:

- Demographics
- Key Pain Points
- Their Ideal Experience
- Important insights (in their words)
- Key purchasing criteria
- Environments
- Motivations

This table ensures you stay on the right track and gives you a point to keep referring back to. It also enables you to tailor your marketing activities and draw in leads. Keep going back to the end user profile to refine over time.

Calculate the TAM size Globally and for your Beachhead market.

Now that you have a specific end user and problem to focus on, it's best to calculate the potential TAM (Total addressable market) globally and in your beachhead market. This will tell you if there is a sizable market to enter to create a sustainable business that can grow. It will also tell you if your beachhead market will give you enough traction when you launch.

Get to know your competitors

Competitor benchmarking is a lot of work and there are various tools and methods to complete this. However, for the benefit of this guide, focus on the below:

- Identify your key competitors.
- Explore their products, what they do and how they function.
- Find out what benefits they talk about.
- Read their customer reviews and social media comments.

This data will tell you if there are any key pain points or opportunities that haven't yet been addressed and prove there is an opportunity to be tackled.

Prototype a Product Proposition

By this point you will have a lot of knowledge to make your first best guess on what your proposition might be. Initially, create a description of what benefits your solution might provide your target customer. Don't worry about how to achieve them at this stage, it's a paper based prototype.

You can use this later to test on your end users. Additionally, you should complete some concept work to build your first visual prototype using an expert designer. This can be a low fidelity 3D CAD model which has been rendered to look real (almost). These are great as it gives you a design to initially critique, test on users and bring your initial ideas and assumptions to life.

Build a Waitlist

Using the product proposition visuals and descriptions, you can start to quickly test your idea on your target customers and end users. A great way to do this is to build a waitlist.

Before you look into this, it's important to consult with an Intellectual Property Lawyer, as you don't want to give any potential inventions away to the public domain. However, there are strategies to build a waitlist even if you can't talk about the idea or solution in detail.

A waitlist can be an economical and fast way of validating the idea before you've even started to build it. You can share the problem you're solving, the benefits and ask a series of questions to understand people's opinions. Better still, this can be completely online to reach a global audience.

But crucially, you're gaining a list of potential leads for the product which can go a long way when you're seeking funding.

Keep in communication with end users who have engaged with your research

Research, Design and Development is an iterative process, meaning you will need to continually refine, modify and sometimes pivot with your initial assumptions and vision. Don't stick with one idea, and don't become "married" to your first idea. Keep an open mind, challenge and question everything.

As you now have an exciting new proposition, re-test on your target customers (end users and buyers).

As your ideas mature, keep a constant feedback loop going with your end users - ones who you have developed a relationship with, and new ones. For example, continually leverage primary and secondary user research methods.

Here are some useful research methods below:

- **Usability Testing** - 1 on 1 product focussed tasks.
- **Field Studies** - Study users in their own natural environment.
- **Contextual Inquiry** - Collaboration with users in their environment.
- **Participatory Design** - Users construct their own ideal experience.
- **Focus Groups** - Group of users in a discussion with a facilitator.
- **Interviews** - 1 on 1 discussion in depth with a user.
- **Usability Benchmarking** - Usability studies
- **Unmoderated Testing** - Qualitative and Quantitative studies to capture user behaviours and attitudes.
- **Concept Testing** - Rouch prototypes to capture the key essence of the needs of the users.
- **Customer Feedback** - Online form or survey based on a product.
- **A/B testing** - Users interact with different design options and provide feedback.

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What if you can't engage with your end users?

Sometimes it can be really hard to engage with the right end users. Some reasons might be due to location, lack of response or they just don't have the motivation to collaborate with you.

In short, tackle every avenue!

If you have tried to directly contact your end users and they're not engaging or there just aren't enough people to gain sufficient evidence, then there are ways to overcome this:

- Provide incentives (like vouchers, early access, launch discounts).
- Collaborate with an external body who has close relationships with your end users (e.g. NHS).
- Partner with an expert research organisation or freelancer.
- Write educational content on social media channels to increase engagement and drive traffic to your waitlist or surveys.
- Attend networking events and exhibitions to connect with a variety of people.

No matter what you're developing, eventually you will gain enough evidence from a group of qualified end users - be patient and stay relentless.



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