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14 steps for acquiring your startup's first customers:

1. Pay to interview people who've successfully grown a startup like yours. You can find them via LinkedIn Sales Navigator.

2. Ask them which 3 channels (ads, SEO, etc.) you should prioritize for acquiring customers.

3. Ask for examples of companies who run these channels well.

Some channels to ask about:

• PR
• Ads
• SEO
• Influencers
• Sponsorships
• Organic social
• Word-of-mouth
• In-depth content
• Referral incentives
• Product-led invites (think Slack, Zoom, Dropbox)

4. Reverse-engineer how those companies run their channels well:

A. Map each step the customer takes between the channel and becoming a happy customer.

B. Study what makes each step great: its pitch, its design, and its user experience.

Here's an example of steps.

• Someone sees your Facebook ad ← Channel
• They visit your page
• Enter their email
• Trial the product
• Pay for the product
• Stay engaged

• Refer more users

(Tools like Ahrefs + FB Ad Library show you competitors' ads and landing pages!)

When you're auditing another company's steps, look for moments that make you remark:

"Wow, I want more of this. I'm interested."

That's the magic you want for your startup.

5. Now recreate a low-res version of the funnel for your company.

This is your jumping off point to explore what works in your startup's context.

Everything is always context-dependent!

6. First, we need a team to build the elements needed for each step:

• Design
• Product
• Copywriting
• Engineering

Get a contractor, agency, or full-time hire—or do it yourself.

Again, this is where LinkedIn Sales Navigator helps you find experienced people.

7. Set up your analytics to measure conversion rates at each step.

I recommend using one of these tools:

• Amplitude
• Mixpanel
• Heap

8. Turn on your channel.

9. Note at which steps people drop-off the most.

Fix drop-off points before over-optimizing other steps.

10. How do you fix drop-off?

You test new:

• Offers + incentives

• Value propositions
• Product changes
• Target personas
• Pricing plans
• UX

11. Repeat the channel and step exercise for each of the channels the experts suggested you test first.

12. If a channel bombs, consider a new contractor or agency to *attack it from a different angle.*

Sometimes, you just need a new approach.

If the best of the best can't make a channel sustainable for you, move onto the next—and come back to this later.

13. Meanwhile, run experiments on working channels to increase their performance further:

• What would compel people even more?
• How can we remove more friction?

14. Over time, your goal is to build your private playbook of growth knowledge.

To do this, don't bury your head in the sand:

Continually consult others and reverse engineer what works in the wild.