

# **How to get the first 100 customers for your online business**

by Jenda Tovarys, Helvetic Ruby: Zurich on May 17 2024

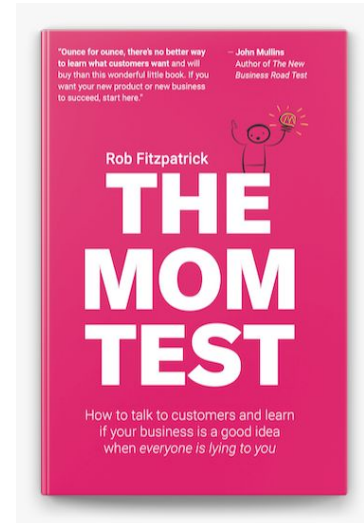
# Jenda Tovarys

- growth at [Better Stack](#)
  - Built on Ruby
- grew from 0 to 150,000+ developers on the platform in 3 years
- raised >\$28m and profitable
- with 3 people in GTM

# Why you need customers?

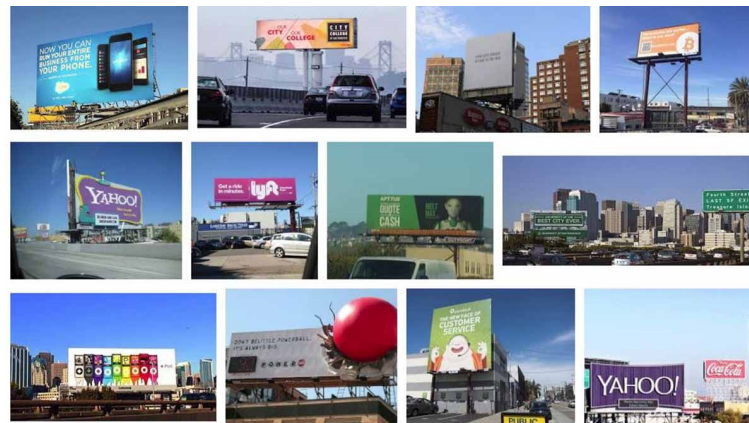
## Ultimate product validator

- Do people want it?
- Will they pay for it?
- How much?



# Getting the first 10 customers

- Forget ads, sponsorships, and partners
- Think small. Goal is 10 only
- **Do things that don't scale & hustle!**
  - Personal network
  - Extended network (ask your friends about their friends)
  - Cold email/linkedin



## DO THINGS THAT DON'T SCALE

**Want to start a startup?** Get funded by [Y Combinator](#).

July 2013

One of the most common types of advice we give at Y Combinator is to do things that don't scale. A lot of would-be founders believe that startups either take off or don't. You build something, make it available, and if you've made a better mousetrap, people beat a path to your door as promised. Or they don't, in which case the market must not exist. [1]

Actually startups take off because the founders make them take off. There may be a handful that just grew by themselves, but usually it takes some sort of push to get them going. A good

# How to cold email 101

Hey,

**No fluff** — I'm the founder of a new WordPress hosting company.

**Non-salesy** — It's designed for folks like you so I'd love to talk about any pain you've got with WordPress and get some feedback.

**Self-aware** — Now, I know your time is valuable. You're a consultant. I don't want you to feel like I'm trying to grab time from you.

**Money talks** — I'm very happy to pay whatever you think is fair for an hour of your time. Even if it's more than your normal hourly rate because I appreciate it's a weird one-off thing.

— Jason

*Jason Cohen on [marketingexamples.com](http://marketingexamples.com)*

# I can't get 10 customers... move on



@levelsio

Only 4 out of 70+ projects I ever did made money and grew

>95% of everything I ever did failed

My hit rate is only about ~5%

So...ship more

```
1 PROJECTS THAT MADE GOOD MONEY AND GREW (4)
2   nomadlist
3   remotek
4   rebase (?)
5   youtube network for electronic music (panda mix show)
6
7 ALL PROJECTS (70)
8   nomadlist
9   nomadjobs
10  remotek
11  remotek workers
12  hoodmaps
13  makebook
```

...

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— Your hosts, [Daniel Vassallo](#) & [Louie Bacaj](#)

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





























# Famous first customer stories

- Pinterest: Screens in Apple stores
- Etsy: Craft fairs
- Tinder: University parties
- Lyft: Ice cream to startup offices
- Behance: Designer interviews

Lenny's Newsletter

## Acquiring your first 1,000 users

1. Go to your users, offline	       
2. Go to your users, online	    
3. Invite your friends	     
4. Create FOMO	      
5. Leverage influencers	    
6. Get press	    
7. Build a community	 

[lennysnewsletter.com](https://lennysnewsletter.com)

# Getting the first 100 customers

## #1: Network + online outbound + offline

- Warm intros from friends
- Cold emails
- Sending physical mail
- Offline in person events
- **You must be different**
- **It's a numbers game**





# Getting the first 100 customers

## #2: Communities

- Find **niche** online communities:  
Discord, Slack, Skool
- **Launches don't matter**, it's a marathon
  - Forget Hacker News & ProductHunt
- Pick and write to people
- Contribute to the conversation

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## Lenny's Newsletter Slack Community

 LENNY RACHITSKY  
MAR 14, 2023

29



Share



The Friends of Lenny's Newsletter Slack Community is an online community open exclusively to paid subscribers of Lenny's Newsletter. There are over 15,000+ members globally, primarily made up of product managers, growth leaders, and founders.

Within the community, you'll find:

# Getting the first 100 customers

## #3: Written content and SEO

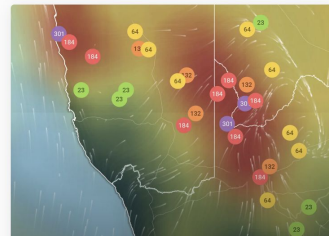
- Types
  - Programmatic → *weather in [city]*
  - High-intent → *best hotels in [city]*
  - Best-on-google → *Paul Graham, Jason Cohen*
- Go niche! **Less competition is better**

## Air quality in Zurich

Air quality index (AQI) and PM2.5 air pollution in Zurich

Last update at 09:00, May 17 (local time)

📍 🔄 38.6K people follow this city



US AQI 25

Good

OVERVIEW

What is the current air quality in Zurich?

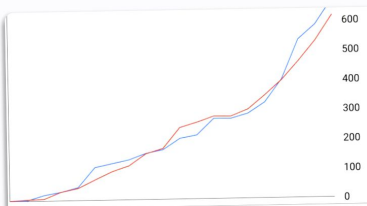
Air pollution level      Air quality index

## Welcome to A Smart Bear: Longform

Articles from building two unicorns over two decades, both bootstrapped and funded.

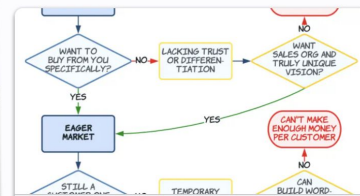
Sort By: Popularity Newest

🔍 Search



### The roadmap to Product/Market Fit (PMF)... maybe

This eight-step process brought WP Engine from an idea to a Unicorn. While there are other roads to Product/Market Fit, consider copying some of these ideas. — December 2023 | 6,600 words.

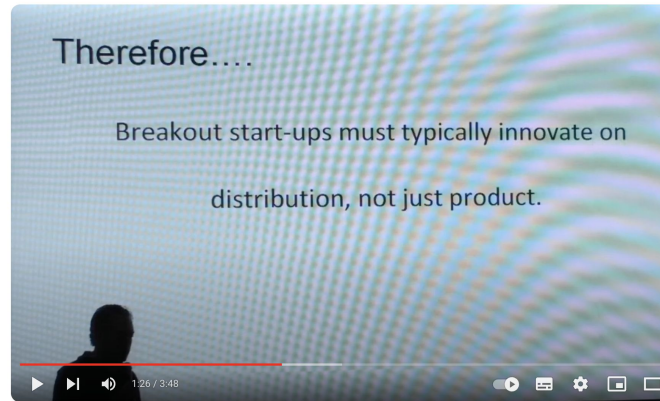


### Excuse me, is there a problem?

Many startups fail despite identifying a real problem and building a product that solves that problem. This explains why, so you can avoid their fate. — April 2023 | 6,800 words.

# You can't do the same things again

- Learn from big successes, but don't copy
- Display ads performance
  - CTR in 1994: 78%
  - CTR in 2024: 0% → thanks to adblock
- Innovate on distribution
- Trends move in circles
- **Do the same... again**



David Sacks explains why many founders get distribution wrong

@andrewchen

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## The Law of Shitty Clickthroughs



The first banner ad ever, on HotWired in 1994, debuted with a clickthrough rate of 78% (thanks @tottotimmons)

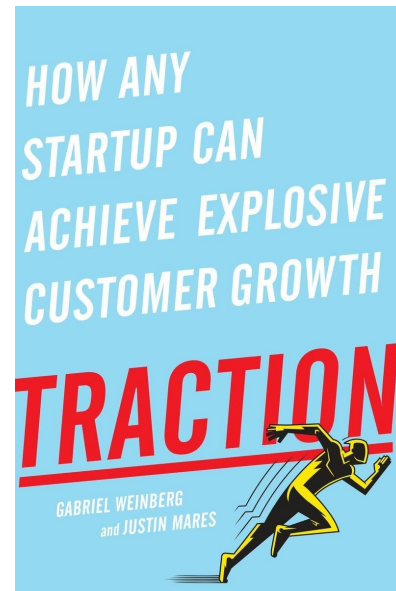
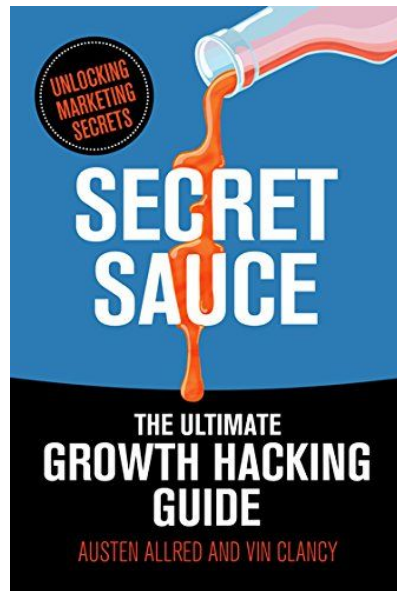
## First it works, and then it doesn't

After months of iterating on different marketing strategies, you finally find something that works. However, the moment you start to scale it, the effectiveness of your marketing erodes to a halt.



# What to read and watch

- Secret sauce
- Traction
- Jason Cohen talks
- Patrick McKenzie talks
- YC talks
- IndieHackers.com interviews
- My first million podcast



# Thank you

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