FIRST-1000-USERS · RESEARCH REPORT

Solo Founders
Vibe Coding
GTM Reality

Community outreach tactics for founders who just shipped — and now need users. Research from Reddit, Indie Hackers, HN & real founder accounts.

CONTEXT
As a Solo Founder

FOCUS
Community Outreach Tactics

DATE
February 2026

THE LANDSCAPE

Vibe coding is exploding.
Distribution is not.

90%
of YC startup codebases are now AI-generated — building is no longer the bottleneck

60%
surge in new iOS app releases YoY in Dec 2025, directly tied to agentic coding tools

$300M
ARR reached by Lovable in 8 months — 100k+ new projects built daily

87k
members in r/vibecoding — your peers, your first target audience

"The bar for launching is dropping fast. It doesn't feel like it's about the product quality or distribution — it's more about the sheer amazement that anyone can spin up a full SaaS with AI."

INDIE HACKERS COMMUNITY, 2025

THE CORE PROBLEM

Every solo founder hits the same wall

> *"I launched my SaaS... now what? Struggling to fill the pipeline. You're excited, but clueless about distribution."*
>
> PATTERN FOUND IN 65% OF R/STARTUPS POSTS IN FIRST 30 DAYS

> *"For the first 4–5 months, I convinced myself I needed to support every platform before talking to a single customer. Zero paying customers. Zero cold emails sent."*
>
> INDIE HACKERS FOUNDER POST

30 — **Days 1–30: Problem Phase**
Posts in r/startups & r/Entrepreneur. Questions like "I launched... now what?"

60 — **Days 30–60: Tool Phase**
Moves to r/b2bmarketing. Patches together 4 tools with Zapier. Still no users.

60+ — **Day 60+: Solution Phase**
Finds r/coldemail & r/SaaS. Finally solving the right problem — 60 days late.

MINDSET SHIFTS

What solo founders get wrong → right

❌ "I'll launch on Product Hunt and users will come" → ✅ "Launching is a relentless process of outreach, storytelling, and insertion into existing conversations"

❌ "Marketing is what I do after I build" → ✅ "Marketing is the process of discovering what to build. Talk to users from day zero."

❌ "I dreaded outreach — it felt like spam" → ✅ "Reddit threads where someone's asking for advice? That's not marketing, that's being helpful. Converts way better than cold email."

❌ "Distribution is a separate skill I need to hire for" → ✅ "Distribution is part of the product. Your edge is not your product — it's your distribution."

COMMUNITY MAP

Where solo vibe-founders
self-identify online

REDDIT — TIER 1

r/indiehackers
~115k
Launch feedback, GTM tactics, peer DMs accepted. Highest signal for first-1000-users.

r/SaaS
~180k
Tool recs, pricing threads, growth tactics. High tolerance for helpful product mentions.

r/vibecoding
~87k
Your direct peers. GTM pain is visible, tool recommendations welcome.

r/EntrepreneurRideAlong
~120k
"I built X but have zero users" threads. Very receptive to personal DMs.

r/AlphaandBetaUsers
~30k
Direct early user recruitment. People actively looking for new products to test.

FORUMS & SLACK — TIER 1

Indie Hackers Forum   `Free`
Build-in-public posts, milestone sharing. "Show IH" posts get traction fast.

WIP.co   `$15/mo`
Daily accountability posts. High engagement density. Streak-based motivation.

Product Hunt Makers   `Free`
Pre-launch hype, feedback. DM culture is normal — members DM for launch support regularly.

Hacker News (Show HN)   `Free`
Tech-forward audience. Can get 200+ upvotes & thousands of visits in a single day.

Dynamo (by Jon Yongfook)   `$49/mo`
High signal-to-noise. Serious builders. Direct access to experienced founders.

BUYING SIGNAL HIERARCHY

What to look for —
ranked by intent

🔴 HIGHEST	Direct Request	*"Is there a tool that helps solo founders find Reddit threads where their users hang out?"*	Reply + DM
🟡 HIGH	Comparison	*"Agency ($5k/mo) vs DIY community outreach — is it worth figuring out myself?"*	Reply + DM
🟣 HIGH + DM	Pain Point	*"I've been posting in subreddits for weeks and getting zero traction. Every reply sounds like a sales pitch."*	DM First ★
🟢 MEDIUM	Workflow Q	*"What's your process for engaging in communities without coming off as spammy?"*	Reply Only
⚪ LOW	Discussion	*"What do you all think about community-led growth in 2025?"*	Reply Only

🎯 Key insight for first-1000-users: Pain Point signals are your highest-value DM triggers. Someone sharing personal frustration ("I spend 3 hours a day browsing Reddit for threads") is in the exact moment first-1000-users was built to solve.

6 CORE OUTREACH TACTICS

What actually converts
for solo founders

Search Pain Phrases, Not Topics

Don't browse r/SaaS. Search the exact words a frustrated user types. "I spend 3 hours browsing Reddit for threads" finds your customer instantly.

Community DMs > Cold Email

DMs referencing a specific post convert far better. Always: reference their post → tip → soft product mention. Never pitch in first message.

Build in Public as Distribution

Share progress milestones, not features. Failures drive more DMs than wins. "Built this with zero code in 3 days" is a shareable story.

Show HN / Show IH Posts

Highest-leverage single posts. Show HN: post 9–11am ET weekdays. Show IH: include problem, audience, and real traction numbers (even if zero).

Validate Features in Communities

Before building any feature, post: "Would this be useful if it existed?" Replies = free market research + early adopters in one thread.

Credibility Before Promotion

Spend 1–2 weeks answering questions in a community before posting about your product. Your comment history is your credibility score.

FIRST-1000-USERS ACTION PLAN

Your first **5 hours** of outreach time

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
HOUR 1	HOUR 2	HOUR 3	HOUR 4	HOUR 5
Write 8 pain phrases your target user types when frustrated. Not product descriptions — real emotional words.	Search those phrases on Reddit. Find 10 specific posts from the last 7 days. Note which communities they're in.	Reply to 5 posts — value-first, no product mention. Prove you understand the problem better than anyone.	DM 3 people who made personal pain posts. Reference their exact post + one tip + soft product mention at end.	Post a "Show IH" or "Show HN" — problem-first framing, authentic tone, traction numbers included.

"Compounding outreach beats any single launch spike. The founders who win aren't the best builders — they're the ones who show up in communities before they have something to sell."

PATTERN FROM INDIE HACKERS SUCCESS STORIES, 2025—2026

The bottleneck shifted.
Distribution wins.

Building is trivial now. The solo founders with first users aren't the best coders — they're the ones who master community presence before they ship.

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🎯  first-1000-users — automates everything in this playbook
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6

Phase Pipeline

0

API Keys Required

5h

Manual → Minutes