Notes:

* There are edge cases for every question, but these tips should apply to 90% of applicants.
* If there is 1 character trait the YC partners are looking for in founders, it’s **authenticity**
* Be as concise as possible with every answer!!!
* Written by Dawson from [Martin (YC S23)](https://www.ycombinator.com/companies/martin)

# Founder Profile

## Role & Responsibilities

**What is your title, or if you haven’t set it yet, main responsibility?\* (CEO, CTO, Sales, Engineering, etc.)**

* Avoid Co-CEOs

**What percent equity do you have?\***

**If you haven't incorporated yet, give the equity percent you expect to have.**

* Should be close to an equal split between the founders, unless you have a very good reason why it’s not
* Giving the CEO an extra share (or something like 50.1%) is reasonable
* If your equity is not split equally, watch this video: [Co-Founder Equity Mistakes to Avoid | Startup School](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DISocTmEwiI&pp=0gcJCfwAo7VqN5tD)

**Are you a technical founder?\***

**You are a programmer, engineer, or scientist who can build the product without outside assistance.**

* Someone better be technical on the founding team
* This is pretty much a deal breaker for YC

**Are you currently in school?**

* If you are in school, YC’s biggest question will be “are these guys serious about dropping out or are they just doing YC as an internship / for credential maxxing?”
* They will get to the bottom of this
* You need to have a good answer for “Why not finish school and then do startups? Why now?”

**If accepted to YC, will you commit to working exclusively on this project for the next year?\* i.e. you won't be in school or have another job**

* If you’re shaky about this, red flag

## Accomplishments

**Please tell us about a time you most successfully hacked some (non-computer) system to your advantage.**

* What I wrote on my application:
  + *“I ran a campus tours startup in college called* [*campusguide.us*](http://campusguide.us)*. My friends and I would give high schoolers and parents tours for $45/hour. To get users, I camped near the admissions office every weekend. Every hour, a few parents would miss their official Yale campus tour time, or forget to book one, and I’d be there waiting.”*

**Please tell us in one or two sentences about the most impressive thing other than this startup that you have built or achieved.**

* Don’t overexaggerate your accomplishments. Just speak plainly.
* ONE TO TWO SENTENCES!

## You're being asked the following questions because you're 25 or under.

**List any entrepreneurship programs, clubs, or hacker houses you have participated in or are currently participating in.**

* This question wasn’t here when we applied. I think they’re just checking if you’re in the SF / startup world already.
* I doubt this adds a lot of value though, because most hacker houses and entrepreneurship clubs are pretty low signal from what I’ve seen.

# Founders

**Who writes code, or does other technical work on your product? Was any of it done by a non-founder? Please explain.**

* Being done by a non-founder is a red flag. If someone wrote code for your product, and you're a pre-revenue / super early stage, they should be a co-founder!

**Are you looking for a cofounder?**

* I’ve had friends apply as solo founders, get in, and match with a co-founder during the batch. It is valid to answer yes.

**Founder Video - Please record a one minute video introducing the founder(s).\***

* Things YC checks for:
  + Do the founders seem to get along?
  + Can they explain what they’re building in 1-2 sentences?
  + Are they bullshitters / fraudsters? In other words, do they seem authentic?
* Watch:
  + [DoorDash's Application Video for YC S13](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rzlr2tNSl0U&pp=ygUXZG9vcmRhc2ggeWMgYXBwbGljYXRpb24%3D)
  + [Weave's Application Video for YC W14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpyvQJGcQGw&pp=ygUUd2VhdmUgeWMgYXBwbGljYXRpb24%3D)

# Company

**Describe what your company does in 50 characters or less.\***

* Your mom should be able to read this and understand what you do!

**If you have a demo, attach it below.**

* Again, a no-bullshit, to-the-point demo is best.
* I really like <https://youtu.be/qwSAKg1YafM>

**Please provide a link to the product, if any.**

* Unless you’re building hard-tech, you should have a product they can try even if you started working on this idea this week.
* Especially if you are building SaaS, you have no excuses here. Just spin something up in an afternoon. It doesn’t need to be perfect. It can be buggy, or not have auth, but the partner should be able to tinker with it.

**What is your company going to make? Please describe your product and what it does or will do.**

* Get extremely concrete!! If I’m a user, how do I use your product? Is it a web app? A chatbot? A mobile app?
* Don’t talk about the grand vision in abstract terms. This is a major turn-off.
* Example response from our S23 application
  + *“Usher is an AI chatbot that helps retailers and supermarkets automate their in-store customer service. When customers are lost, can’t find an item, or have general questions, they can scan a QR code (or go to an iPad) posted around the store and ask our AI, which has access to the store's inventory, policies, and other info.”*

**Where do you live now, and where would the company be based after YC?**

* This should be San Francisco, unless you have a compelling reason for another location (i.e. my customers are all in Latin America)

# Progress

**How far along are you?**

* I’d argue YC’s #1 criteria is “how impressive is their traction given how long they’ve been working?”
* If you started 2 weeks ago, having an MVP launched is impressive
* If you started 1 month ago, having 1 paying user is impressive
* If you started 3 months ago, having some growth is impressive
* If you started over a year ago, having significant revenue is impressive ($500k ARR maybe?)
* Example from our S23 application:
  + *“We started a little over a week ago but have been working nonstop. We've talked to 20 stores with varying sizes, across supermarkets (i.e. Nob Hill, local stores), department stores (i.e. Target), and specialized retailers (i.e. Best Buy, Home Depot). We pinpointed that a big problem for them all was losing customers due to insufficient service at unanticipated peak times, as shoppers couldn't find what they were looking for or couldn't get assistance. We have an MVP, which we have demoed to 3 stores. Rose International Market has agreed to try us out, so we are currently integrating our MVP with their inventory database and testing with their employees. Planning to launch at the start of next week.”*

**How long have each of you been working on this? How much of that has been full-time? Please explain.**

* See “How far along are you?”

**Are people using your product?**

* See “How far along are you?”

**Do you have revenue?**

* See “How far along are you?”

**If you are applying with the same idea as a previous batch, did anything change? If you applied with a different idea, why did you pivot and what did you learn from the last idea?**

* Pivots aren’t bad! Everyone pivots! The important thing is you had a good reason for it, and you clearly gave it a decent shot.

# Idea

**Why did you pick this idea to work on? Do you have domain expertise in this area? How do you know people need what you're making?**

* I’d argue the idea and your founder-market-fit is YC’s #2 criteria, after *progress per unit of time*
* I highly recommend that you watch this video to understand how YC thinks about startup ideas: [How to Get and Evaluate Startup Ideas | Startup School](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Th8JoIan4dg&t=1040s&pp=ygUwamFyZWQgZnJpZWRtYW4gaG93IHRvIGNvbWUgdXAgd2l0aCBzdGFydHVwIGlkZWFz)

**Who are your competitors? What do you understand about your business that they don't?**

* Refer to the linked Youtube video for the section on competitors
* In short, having competitors is a good thing, not a bad thing. It means your idea is somewhat valid.
* Especially if those competitors are entrenched, big companies — that’s a fantastic thing!

**How do or will you make money? How much could you make?**

**(We realize you can't know precisely, but give your best estimate)**

* Do a bottom up market size calculation
  + Market size = Max number of users you could get \* amount you charge per user
  + “We are selling to grocery stores. There are 1M stores in America. We will charge them $10,000 a year on average. That means our TAM is $10Bn/year.”
* Do not do a top down calculation
  + “According to Goldman Sachs the market for social networks is X this year and will go up to Y next year”
* They’re looking for $10 Billion a year or more
* Example from our S23 application
  + *“We will charge stores a monthly rate, determined by either a fixed amount, a percentage of their sales, or an amount calculated with the number of uses of our service. Varying largely on the size of the store, we estimate that we can charge $500-$5000 per month per store. With the hundreds of thousands of stores around the world that need improved in-store customer service solutions, this is easily a multi-billion dollar market.”*

**If you had any other ideas you considered applying with, please list them. One may be something we've been waiting for. Often when we fund people it's to do something they list here and not in the main application.**

* List all of them!

# Equity

**Have you formed ANY legal entity yet? This may be in the US, in your home country or in another country.**

* Should probably be a Delaware C Corp unless you have a really good reason why it isn’t

If you don’t get into YC, or decide you’re not ready to start a company yet, we love working with highly technical people who are already very interested in startups!

Come work with us at [Martin](http://trymartin.com)!

Job post: <https://www.ycombinator.com/companies/martin/jobs/>