



DO
THINGS
THAT
DON'T
SCALE



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Airbnb

What is worse than struggling to find the early adopters? Wasting time with people who never intend to use your product.

In the early days, it is those **unscalable efforts that sparks the biggest growth.**

And this is how Airbnb turned things around with exactly those kinds of unscalable moves.





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But first, the basics... (1/4)

1) Startups Require a Push

Startups don't just take off on their own; founders have to make them take off. It's your drive that gets the engine running.

2) Recruit Users Manually

Don't wait for users to find you—go out and get them. The hustle of recruiting users one by one is how big things start.

3) Focus on User Experience

Make the **user experience exceptional**, even if the product isn't perfect. Personal touches like **hand-written notes** can create loyal fans and lasting growth.

4) Founders Must Do Sales Themselves

You can't delegate this—**selling starts with you**. If you can't sell your vision, no one else will.





But first, the basics... (2/4)

Here's why Paul Graham's "Do Things That Don't Scale" matters so much. It's twofold:

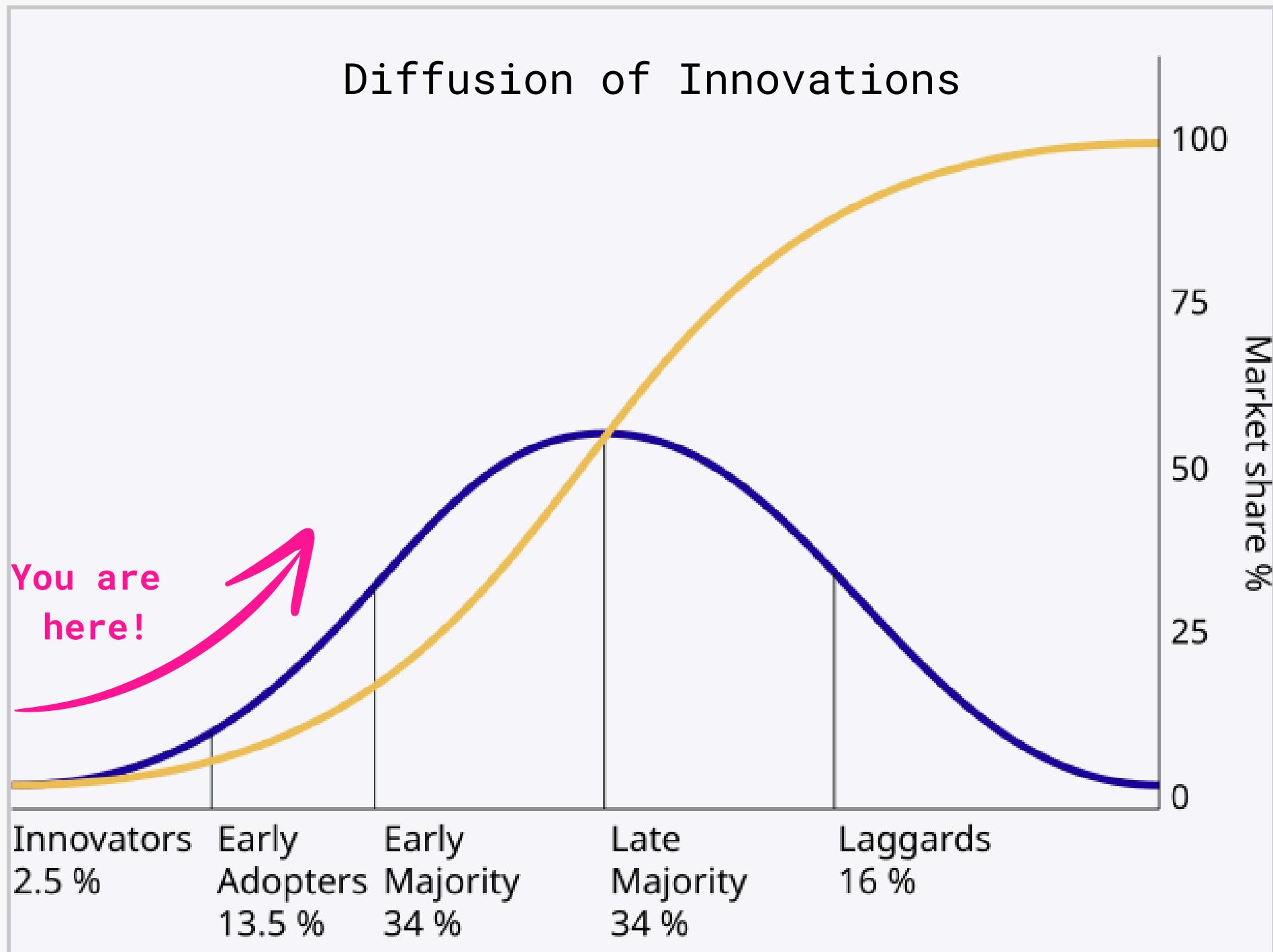
- 1) *"It's harmless if reporters and know-it-alls dismiss your startup... It's even ok if investors dismiss your startup... The big danger is that you'll dismiss your startup yourself."*

- 2) *"...as you roll the time slider back to the first couple months of a startup's life. It's not the product that should be **insanely great**, but the experience of being your user."*



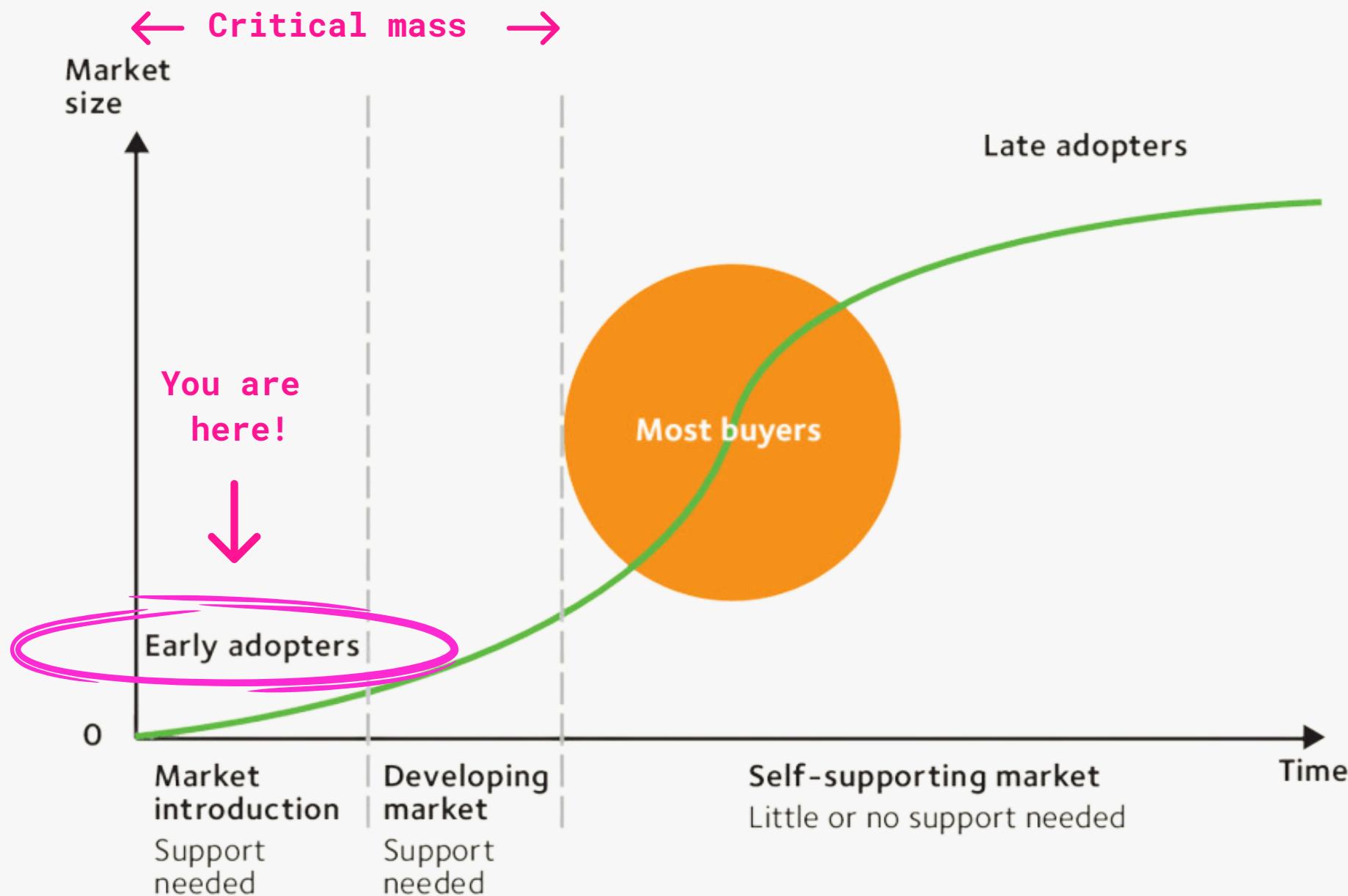
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But first, the basics... (3/4)



DO THINGS THAT DON'T SCALE

But first, the basics... (4/4)



S-curve showing the relationship between time and market penetration of new technology.

"**Support needed**" indicates the need for some degree of incentives to assist market development during the early phases. This support can be phased out once the market has matured.

Source: [ResearchGate](#)



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Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, Nathan Blecharczyk

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Airbnb

Founders : Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, Nathan Blecharczyk

Currently

1. **Valuation: \$113 billion**
2. **Users: >150 million**
3. **Market share of reservation and online booking market: 30.57%**





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Story

They literally started the company by renting out space in their own apartment because they could not afford the rent in San Francisco.

Gebbia explains:

“We didn’t want to post on Craigslist because we felt it was too impersonal. Our entrepreneur instinct said ‘build your own site.’ So we did.”

Promise: 3 air mattresses on the floor and a home-cooked breakfast in the morning.



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Turning Points

To keep the company afloat, they got creative and bought a ton of cereal.

They created **election-themed cereal boxes** naming them Obama O's and Cap'n McCain's.



Sold them at convention parties for **\$40** each.



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Turning Points



They managed to sell 500 boxes of each cereal,
raising around \$30,000
to keep Airbed & Breakfast going.



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Turning Points

The team moved to NYC for six months,
their biggest market,
to meet users **face-to-face**.

They **took listing photos**.

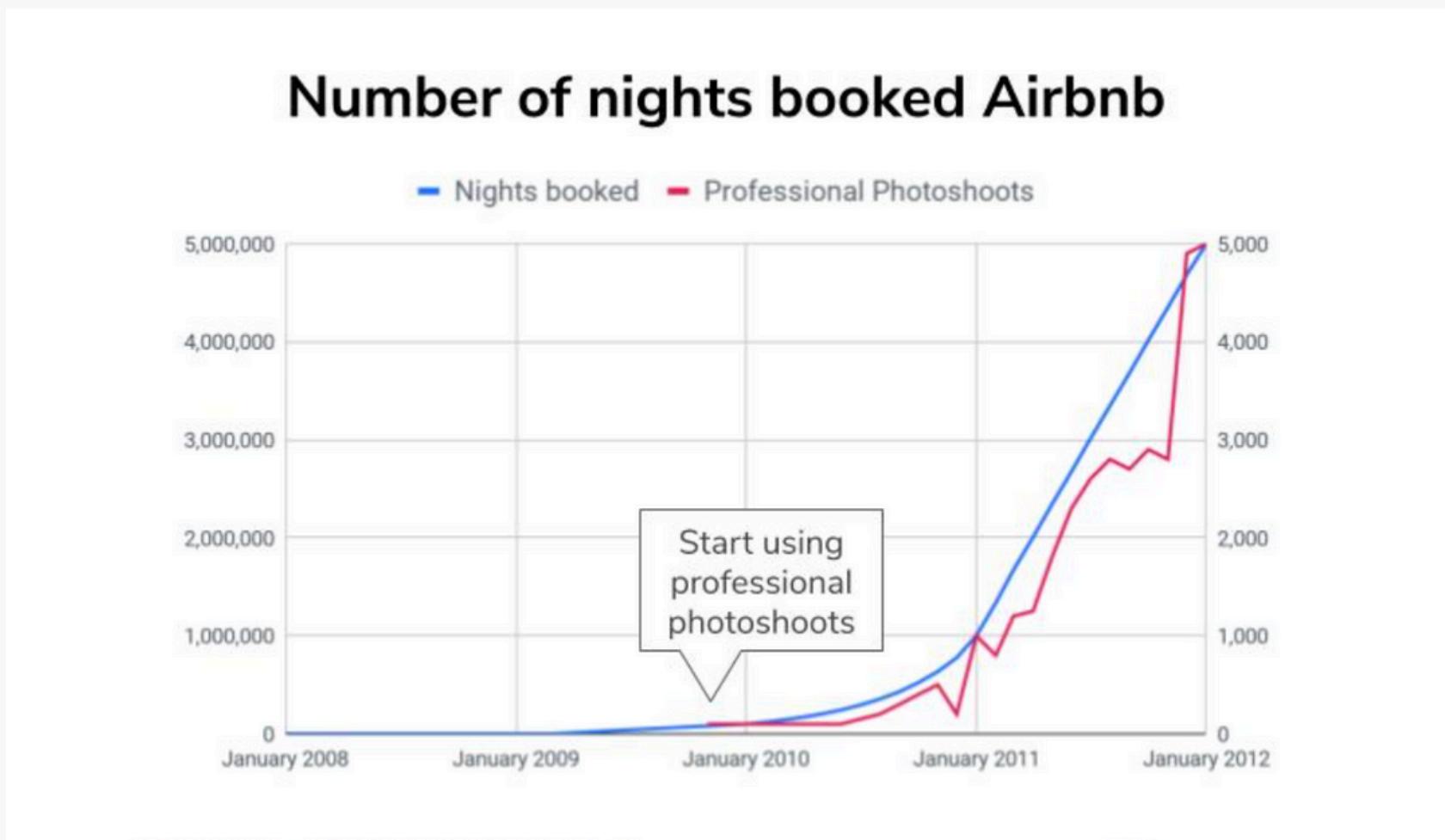
One customer, in particular, stood out.
He kept a detailed diary of
his entire experience—a true hidden gem.



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Turning Points



Joe Zadeh, Airbnb presentation at Lean Startup SXSW, Austin

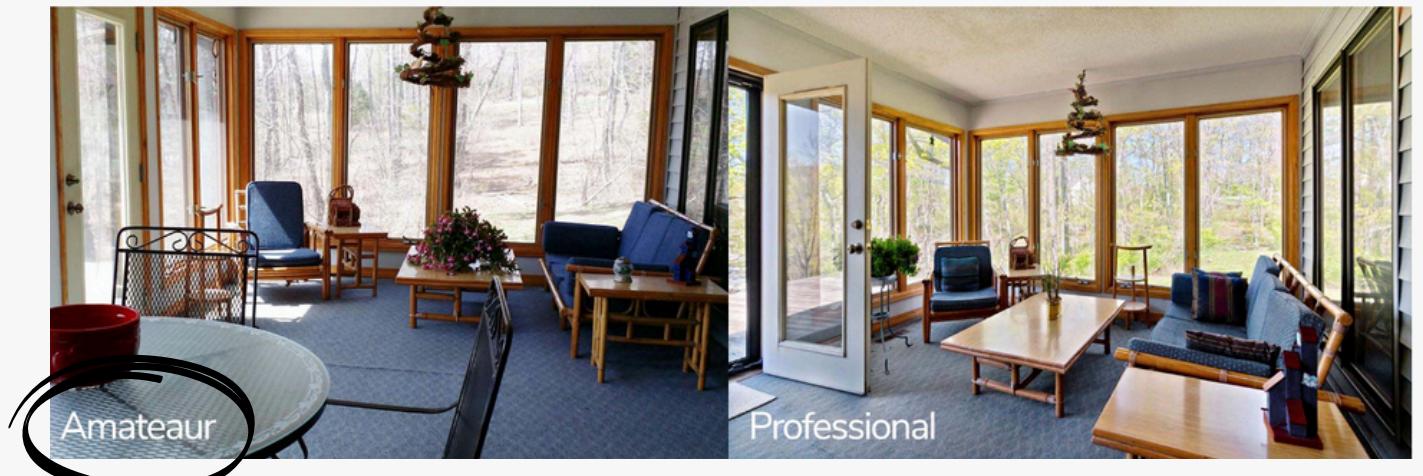
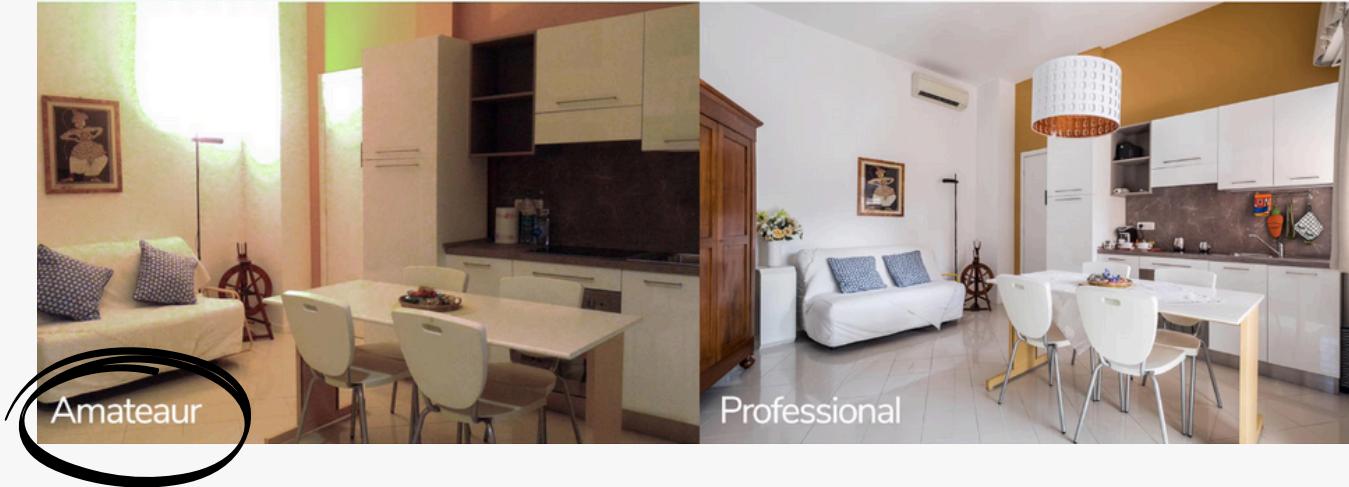
Problem: The founders recognized a pattern—poor photos were driving people away. With the idea being new, skepticism about quality and safety was high, and the poor images only made it worse.

Solution: To put their idea to the test, Airbnb launched a professional photography program, going door-to-door. The result? **Monthly revenue doubled.**



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Turning Points



Source: [Photography that launched an empire](#)

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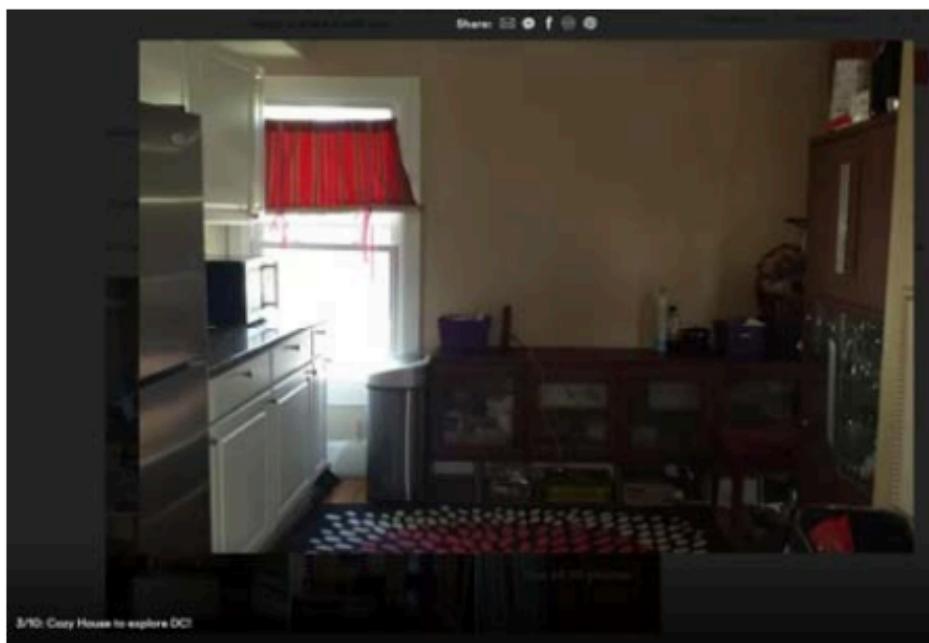


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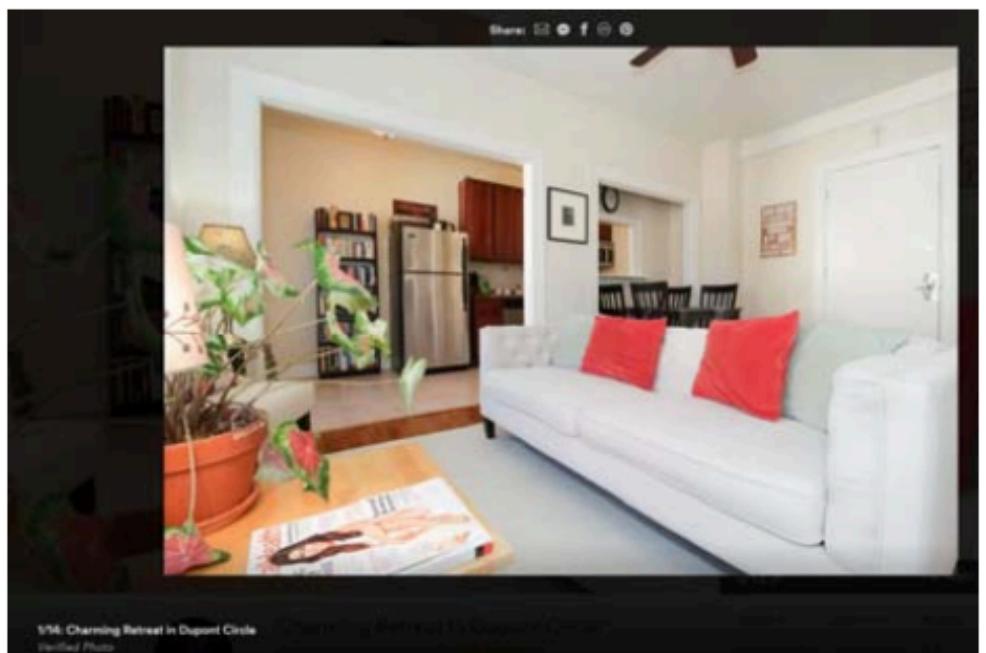


Turning Points

Unverified Photo



Verified Photo



This professional photography boosted annual revenue by **\$2,455** per Airbnb property.

Source: Research paper – How Much Is An Image Worth? An Empirical Analysis of Property's Image Aesthetic Quality on Demand at AirBNB

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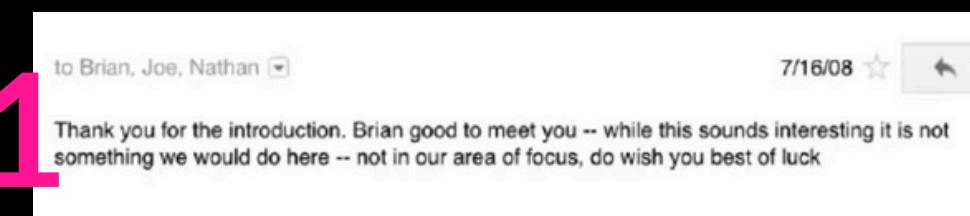


Bonus 1/2

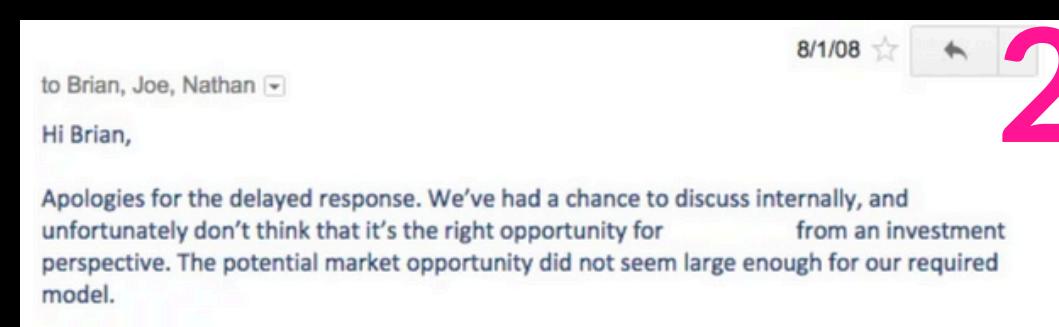
In 2008, Michael Seibel introduced Airbnb's founders to seven top Silicon Valley investors.

The goal? Raise \$150,000 for 10% of the company, valued at \$1.5 million. Five rejected them, and the other two didn't even reply.

1



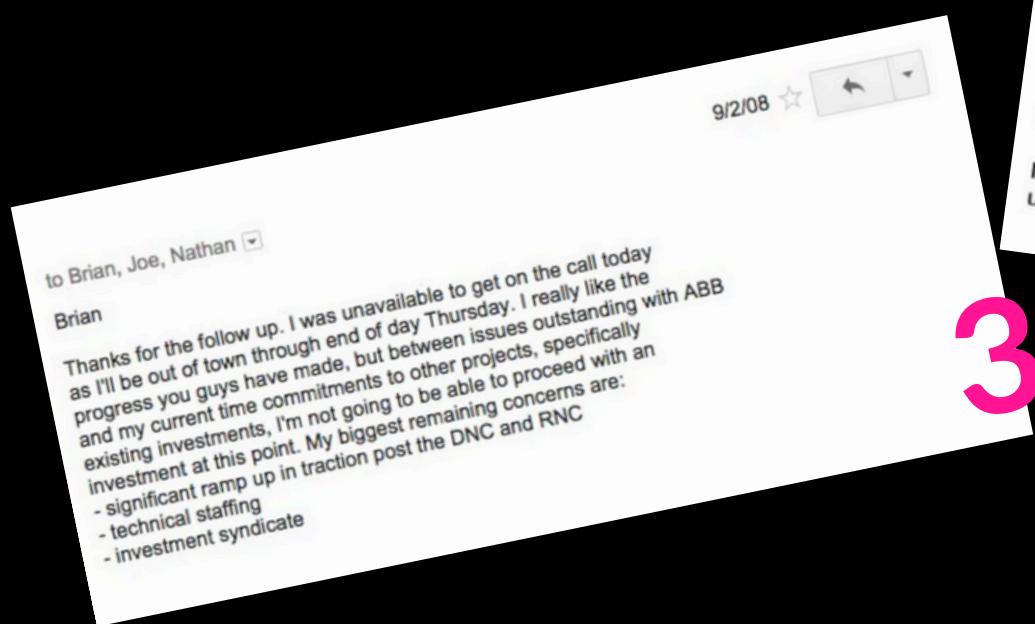
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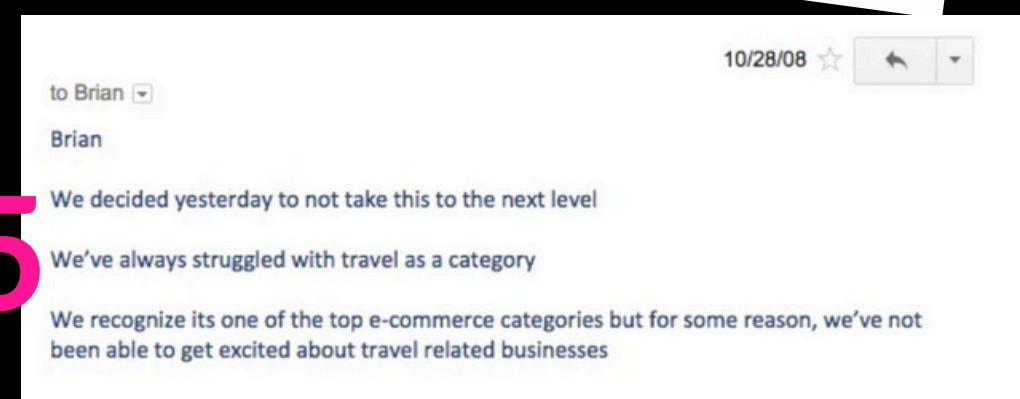
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3



5



Source: [7 Rejections by Brian Chesky](#)

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Bonus 2/2

“Next time you have an idea and it gets rejected, I want you to think of these emails.”

- Brian Chesky

Source: [7 Rejections by Brian Chesky](#)

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LET'S GET STARTED

Sources:

ResearchGate

[https://paulgraham.com
/ds.html](https://paulgraham.com/ds.html)

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