

# Startup idea checklist

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I've been tinkering with different startup ideas and needed a good checklist to think through them. There are great templates for this already: [The YC application](#), Amazon's [internal press release](#), and Sequoia's [Writing a Business Plan](#). I found myself mixing and tweaking these templates because they don't exactly match my model of the world, so I wrote up my own list.

I use this list both to develop ideas and filter them. If you adopt it, be careful about using it as a filter. Remember that in the early stages, good ideas are very easy to kill.

## Product

### 1. Who are the users?

<= 70 chars

### 2. What is the essence of their dissatisfaction? If they read this answer, would they say "thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way"?

<= 240 chars

*@benedictevans: "The iTunes Store solved a user problem. So did the App Store. And so did Spotify and Apple Music, and indeed Apple News. But what user problem is solved by Apple's commissioning TV shows?"*

### 3. What are you building for them?

<= 70 chars

*Peter Drucker: Is the product being designed **for** the customer, or **at** the customer?*

### 4. Write a tweet from a hypothetical customer explaining the product and how it eliminates their dissatisfaction.

*@BrianNorgard: No one cares about your product. Who built it, its features, the origin story — it's all superfluous. People only find value in what your product can do for them right now. Save people time. Save people money. Give people an escape. The selfish hand will always govern.*

*Peter Drucker: Are you **really** doing the best you can to help the customer?*

### 5. Write a blog post title for your product launch. Is it surprising? Is it new? Will your target customers want to click on it? Will they want to share the link? Will they still share it the next day?

<= 70 chars

### 6. Write the first paragraph of your product announcement blog post. Include the product name, an explanation of what the product is, the target market, the main benefit, and the call to action

<= 240 chars

194 Comments



7. What “metrics of goodness” do your target customers care about? Does your product dominate every available alternative on these metrics?

<= 240 chars

**See also:** [The Rise of Worse is Better](#), [Worse is worse](#)

## Growth

8. Fill in the bottom-up market size equation: `NUM_USERS * ACV = MARKET_SIZE`. Are your numbers credible? Find a good reference class if you’re building something completely new.

**See also:** [Shut up and multiply](#)

9. Which subset of your target customers are so constrained by the status quo, they’ll welcome a buggy product?

<= 140 chars

10. List your first ten customers.

<= 240 chars

**See also:** [Do Things that Don’t Scale](#)

11. Which playbook will you use to get customers after the first ten?

<= 240 chars

**See also:** [Five ways to build a \\$100 million business](#)

12. What would need to be true in 18 months for you to get essentially unlimited cheap capital? How will you achieve that?

<= 240 chars

## Strategy

13. Why now? What’s true about the world that nobody else figured out yet?

<= 240 chars

14. What is the most ambitious achievable milestone for your company within a 25 year time horizon?

<= 70 chars

15. Is your product a credible advance toward this milestone?

Yes/no

16. What’s the *next* credible advance toward this milestone? The one after that? The one after that?

<= 240 chars

**See also:** [Tesla master plan](#), [iPhone runs OSX](#)

17. How will you build a moat?

<= 240 chars

**See also:** [How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy](#)

## Meaning

18. What would reaching your 25 year milestone mean for the world? Is this future *really* exciting? How many years of your life would you give up to teleport there? If you found yourself in this counterfactual world, would you want to go back?

*<= 140 chars*

19. If another company was working on this idea and not you, what would you think about it? Would you join them?

*Yes/no*

20. Imagine yourself standing in front of your team, investors, family, and friends. You've failed, and they're waiting for you to speak. What will you say? Are you willing to work on this problem given that failure is the default?

*<= 480 chars*

**See also:** [Your intervention won't work](#)

## Bonus

21. What's your company's stock ticker symbol?

[@sama](#): "it's easy/fun to say every new startup you hear about is bad. you will usually be right. you will never be successful."

22. Is it likely to be the most important company started this year?



**George Orwell**: "Whoever is winning at the moment will always seem to be invincible."

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Thanks to [Darryl Ramm](#) for feedback on this post.

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Product at Stripe. Built RethinkDB.  
Computational neuroscience PhD dropout.  
Dilettante economist, anthropologist, and  
rationalist.