

Business Plan

Executive Summary

Mender is a mentor-matching platform that connects prospective college students with current students and alumni for personalized guidance on the college application process and/or first year advice. Using Tinder-like algorithms, users can filter mentors based on college, major, region, experience, and availability. Mender addresses the lack of accessibility to personalized support in a process that is confusing and difficult. It gives students an opportunity to connect with experienced mentors and ease their transition to college.

Overview and Background

Mission Statement: Mender's mission is to expand access to college guidance by providing a personalized matching platform for students to connect with their mentor.

Objectives: In the short term, Mender will have a user-friendly platform with customizable filters, messaging features, and data collection for feedback. Long term, it aims to partner with schools and expand to career mentorship.

Background: Mender is founded by college students who had recently navigated the admissions process themselves. They hope to provide a solution that is inexpensive, reliable, and honest, for other students who lack guidance.

Product/Service: Mender offers users a customized list of mentors that are filtered based on their preferences (college major, region, experience, etc). Mentors have Experience Scores that reflect their background, ratings, and number of Mender mentorships, which sets a suggested price range that they can charge. To protect the safety of users, all mentors will be verified via school email/LinkedIn, in-app messaging (no personal information shared), parental consent for minors, and report/block features. Mentor ratings and financial incentives will encourage strong performance and user trust.

Target Market: Mender primarily targets high school juniors and seniors that are preparing for the college admission process, and are accessible to all socioeconomic backgrounds. Their market size is approximately 3.9 million students yearly, which is the estimated number of high school graduates in 2025 (Lane et al., 2024).

Strategic Positioning: Mender stands out with its personalized data-driven matching algorithm, verified mentors, feedback/rating system, and user-friendly interface.

Market Analysis

Industry Analysis: According to a report by IBISWorld, the college industry is projected to make \$2.875 billion revenue in 2023, and reflects the growing trend of students reaching out for guidance on the application process. Mender catches on to this trend by offering a more personalized, digital, and financially accessible alternative. The increasing EdTech platforms reveals a growing preference towards online and flexible communication, which is exactly what Mender offers.

Competitive Analysis: Mender's main competitors include college consulting companies and general networking platforms, such as Reddit and LinkedIn. However, college consulting companies' services are often unaffordable to students, while Reddit/LinkedIn lack a structured, one-on-one mentorship. Mender's advantage lies in its personalization and accessibility.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: personalized matching, verified and relatable mentor, feedback system to ensure mentor performance

Weaknesses: new platform = limited brand recognition

Opportunities: Increasing college consulting demand, digital transformation to digital platforms

Threats: Relies on high quality mentors to maintain retention

Business Strategy:

Mender faces low bargaining power from suppliers and buyers due to the flexible pricing by mentors and only a small platform fee. However, threats from industry rivalry, substitutes, and new entrants are high due to the competitive college consulting industry. Mender stands out with its commitment and value of personalization and accessibility.

Marketing and Sales Strategy

Marketing Strategy:

Given the high engagement of prospective college students on social media platforms, Mender will create informative and relatable content showcasing success stories from mentors and mentees. This content will highlight how personalized mentorship has helped students make better decisions and reduce the stress of the college application process. Influencers will be enlisted to promote the platform, amplifying trust and credibility. In addition, mender will implement a user referral program to incentivize current users (both students and mentors) to spread the word about the platform. Successful referrals will earn credits toward future sessions or discounts on mentorship fees. This can encourage platform growth.

Pricing Model:

Mender will adopt a tiered pricing strategy to cater to a broad range of users. The pricing structure will be a blend of flexible, mentor-driven rates and a minimal platform fee, ensuring that it remains financially accessible to a wide audience (Moradpour, Zhang, Grootendorst, Anis, & Hollis, 2022).

1. **Mentor Pricing:** Mentors on the platform will set their own rates, but each mentor will have a price range determined by their Experience Score. This score considers factors such as the mentor's educational background, job experience, and user ratings.
2. **Platform Fee:** Mender will charge a small platform fee for each session booked through the platform. This fee will be a percentage of the mentor's rate, used to cover operational

costs and improve platform features.

Operations Plan

Development Plan:

The development of Mender will follow an agile methodology, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation (Sharma, Sarkar, & Gupta, 2012). Initially, we will build an MVP (Minimum Viable Product) with core functionalities, such as mentor search and messaging features. As the platform gains users, we will implement additional features, such as in-platform payment systems and advanced matchmaking algorithms.

Production Plan:

The service will be provided digitally, with no physical product required. The platform will be hosted on cloud infrastructure to ensure scalability and reliability. The user experience will be optimized for both desktop and mobile devices, making it accessible to students on the go.

Supply Chain:

The supply chain is focused on ensuring the availability and quality of mentorship. The "supply" of mentors will come from a curated list of current students and alumni who have gone through a rigorous vetting process. The logistics of managing these relationships will be handled through an automated system within the platform to match mentors and mentees effectively.

Facilities:

As a primarily online platform, Mender will not require significant physical space. Our team will work remotely or from co-working spaces to keep operational costs low.

Financial Plan

Revenue Model:

Mender will generate revenue through a commission-based model. We will charge a small platform fee for each mentoring session, which will be a percentage of the mentor's set rate (Caïs, 2024). Additionally, we will offer premium subscriptions for users who wish to access exclusive features, such as personalized mentorship packages and priority matching.

Financial Projections:

In the first year, we expect modest growth with revenues coming primarily from the platform fees. In the next 3-5 years, we project an increase in both mentor sign-ups and user registrations, leading to a steady growth in revenue. We expect annual revenue to surpass \$1 million by the end of year three, with profits increasing as the operational costs stabilize. Cash flow will be positive by the second year, allowing for reinvestment in platform development and marketing.

Conclusion

Call to Action: What you want from the reader (e.g., investment, partnership, advice).

References

- Caïs, C. (2024). Striking the right balance: Creating an Equitable Sales Commission system. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2023/03/30/striking-the-right-balance-creating-an-equitable-sales-commission-system/>
- IBISWorld. (2023). *Education consultants in the US: Market size 2005–2030*. IBISWorld. <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/market-size/education-consultants/5844/>
- Lane, P., Falkenstern, C., & Bransberger, P. (2024). Knocking at the college door: Projections of high school graduates (11th ed.). Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>
- Moradpour, J., Zhang, W., Grootendorst, P., Anis, A. H., & Hollis, A. (2022). Modeling tiered pricing frameworks: A simulation approach. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1098301522047337>
- Sharma, S., Sarkar, D., & Gupta, D. (2012). Agile processes and methodologies: A conceptual study. *International Journal on Computer Science and Engineering*, 4.

Pitch Presentation Script

Create an oral pitch presentation script that you will share during class presentations. The pitch should be a persuasive presentation enhanced by a demonstration of the project website. Assume that you are presenting your startup idea to a group of potential investors (represented by the instructor and teaching assistants). Prepare a pitch presentation script but do not read off the script during the presentation.

Cindy: Good morning, everyone. Our names are Cindy, Zoey, and Bo. Today, we will be introducing you to our startup Mender, where we hope to help prospective college students find the mentor and guidance that they need. Match Your Mentor with Mender!

Let me begin with our stories. As students that have recently navigated the college application process, we understand the concerns that arise from unaffordable college consulting, unreliable online forums, and piecing together information from all types of sources. Therefore, we hope to provide a solution that is personalizable, digital, trustable, and financially accessible.

Mender's mission is to expand access to college guidance by providing a personalized matching platform for students to connect with a current student or alumni as a mentor. So how exactly will we do that?

As a user, you will be offered a customized list of mentors that are filtered based on their preferences, such as college, major, region, and experience.

As a mentor, you will have an Experience Score that reflects their verified background, ratings, and number of Mender mentorships, which sets a suggested price range that they can charge. Mender will only charge a small platform fee.

Therefore, Mender is kind of like a baby of Tinder and Uber. However, we have improved our personalized data-driven matching algorithm, verification of mentors, feedback/rating system with Experience Scores, and our user-friendly interface.

— ABOVE IS CINDY

Let's talk about the **market opportunity**. Every year, roughly 3.9 million students graduate from U.S. high schools—and nearly all of them face the college admissions gauntlet. According to industry data, the college advising sector generated \$2.875 billion in revenue in 2023, a figure that underscores students' hunger for guidance. Yet, the bulk of that consulting market remains out of reach for families with average incomes. Online communities like Reddit and LinkedIn offer free advice—but the quality is uneven, and it lacks accountability. Mender occupies the sweet spot between expensive one-on-one consulting and impersonal forums: it's affordable, structured, and results-focused.

Of course, no venture is without competition. Traditional consulting firms boast deep expertise, but their rate cards often start at hundreds of dollars per hour. For many families, that's simply not an option. On the other hand, generalized platforms provide a community feel, but without dedicated mentors, students end up sifting through hundreds of comments—and good luck finding the reliable nuggets. Mender combines the best of both worlds: mentors who charge within ranges set by their own Experience Score, plus a small platform fee that keeps everything transparent and scales with our growth.

We've also conducted a thorough **SWOT analysis**. Our strengths lie in personalization—no two students get the same mentor list—and in our quality controls: verification, ratings, and in-app safety features. Our greatest challenge is brand recognition. We're the new kid on the block, so earning trust from both students and parents will be critical. However, the rapid shift toward EdTech and digital learning gives us a tailwind. As more students expect online services for everything from tutoring to mental health support, they'll naturally gravitate toward platforms that feel as slick and secure as the apps they use every day. The key threat we face is ensuring a consistent supply of high-quality mentors; if that falters, student retention could suffer. To guard against that, we're building partnerships with university alumni associations and offering incentives—like enhanced visibility and performance bonuses—to keep the mentor pool robust.

Now, let me walk you through our **strategic roadmap**. In the next three months, we'll launch our **Minimum Viable Product**: filters for college, major, and region; in-app messaging; secure scheduling; and the Experience Score algorithm. As user volume grows, we'll roll out in-app payments, advanced matching features powered by machine learning, and a mobile-first interface. All development follows agile sprints, so we can pivot quickly based on real-time feedback. We'll host on cloud infrastructure—scalable, reliable, and cost-effective—to keep our burn rate low.

-----DIVIDE BELOW IS ZOEY

On the **marketing front**, we know that prospective students spend hours on social media platforms—TikTok, Instagram, YouTube—so we'll produce short documentary-style videos

featuring real Mender mentor-mentee pairs. We'll partner with influencers in the education space to amplify these narratives. And we'll launch a referral program: every time a student or mentor refers a friend, both parties earn session credits.

Financially, we operate on a commission-based model. Mentors set their own rates within Experience Score ranges, and Mender collects a modest percentage, covering operational costs and reinvesting in product enhancements.

For the **projections**, in year one, we're targeting 5,000 active users. By year three, we project over \$1 million in annual revenue, with positive cash flow achieved by the end of year two. These milestones will allow us to reinvest in growth—adding new features, expanding into career mentorship for college undergraduates, and forging partnerships with high schools nationwide.

So why invest in Mender today? Because we're solving a universal pain point with a scalable, tech-enabled solution that meets students where they live—online. We've validated the problem through our own experiences and market research. We know the demand is there, and we've designed a model that aligns incentives across students, mentors, and our platform. With your support, we can accelerate development, expand our marketing reach, and cement Mender as the go-to place for personalized, accessible mentorship.

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you're as excited as I am about Mender's potential to democratize college guidance. I'd be delighted to answer any questions you have.