

ARTiom DASHINSKY

GENERATING PRODUCT IDEAS



ACTIONABLE TECHNIQUES FOR
FINDING NEW BUSINESS IDEAS

Generating Product Ideas:

Actionable Techniques for Finding New Business Ideas

© 2020 Labor Arti UG (*haftungsbeschränkt*). All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Artiom Dashinsky
artiom@dashinsky.com
productideasbook.com
Published: August 2020

Editor: Sarah Busby

Table of contents

Why I wrote this book	4
Why you should read this book	7
Introducing the idea generation framework	10
Define your Audience List	14
The Framework	18
PART 1: OBSERVE	19
#1: Solving your own business problems	20
#2: Productizing your own life experiences	26
#3: Insider ideas	34
#4: Vision-based ideas	38
PART 2: REPLICATE AND IMPROVE	44
#5: Cross-industry product innovation	45
#6: Improve abandoned but useful products	50
#7: Localization of existing solutions	54
#8: Automate marketplace services and products	58
#9: Product unbundling	61
#10: Data sets	66
PART 3: FIND SIGNALS	71
#11: Web search analysis	72
#12: Identifying your audience's problems	75
#13: Selling pickaxes to gold miners	79
#14: Scientific research	82
PART 4: MODEL	88
#15: Business model patterns	89
#16: Analyzing common goals	96
#17: Product models	101
WHERE TO FIND MORE IDEAS	111
HOW TO PRIORITIZE IDEAS	115
FRAMEWORK CHEAT SHEET	125
FRAMEWORK CANVASES	131
ENDNOTES	132

Why I wrote this book

For as long as I can remember, I've had ideas. I believe it started with seeing my parents' hustles. Both were trained industrial designers, living in Belarus, where I was born. They had just launched their careers when the USSR fell apart, at the beginning of the 90s. Industry collapsed and there was nothing for them to design anymore. My parents suddenly had to find creative ways to make a living for themselves and to provide for their newborn — me.

During these years I saw my parents doing many things — importing dolls from China and clothes from Turkey, making smoked pork and horseradish for local food markets, designing bottle labels for local alcohol producers (the only industry that was still going strong, for tragic reasons), producing wooden souvenirs, the list goes on.

These hustles were not a choice but a necessity for my parents, to make ends meet; but I believe that seeing them working on such a wide variety of things formed my “you can build anything” mindset. I soon started venturing into entrepreneurship myself and, at the age of 15, I was already running multiple side hustles: selling pirated movies (I'm not sure you could buy unpirated content in Belarus until recently!), writing for local newspapers about technology and computer games, and self-publishing a paid-for student publication for classmates and teachers at my school.

When I was 16, I moved to Israel. Without realizing it back then, I was moving to one of the most innovative countries in the world. With a population of just nine million people, Israel has the third most companies on the NASDAQ, after the US and China.¹ They are also number one in the world for venture

capital invested per capita², and research and development spending per capita.³ Moving to this environment and being surrounded by innovation has probably impacted my professional life more than anything else. I skipped college and kept building websites and, later, designing products. I worked as a freelancer, a full-time employee in tech companies, an agency owner, and a tech-product company co-founder.

Two years ago, after almost a decade of rich and varied experience, I realized that I most enjoyed working on my own projects. I took a leap and decided to go back to the same things I loved to do when I was 14 — building things I believed should exist. Now I'm creating digital, physical, and content products. From some I can make a living, others were a complete failure.

My ability to generate ideas fluctuates over time but, two years ago, I felt like I arrived at a tipping point when the list of ideas I wanted to pursue became much longer than the time or resources I had.

I never consciously worked on getting better at generating ideas, so I became curious about this shift from having *some* ideas to having *many* ideas. I started observing the thought processes that led me to new ideas during the years and noticed patterns. Based on these, I created a framework to support idea generation and started using it myself. At some point, I realized that these techniques could benefit others too.

“Ideas are cheap, execution is everything,” says Chris Sacca, an investor in Twitter and Uber. The startup industry is living by this mantra, and there is some truth to it. However, execution without ideas or of bad ideas won’t get you very far. You *have* to have ideas to build a business.

Today you can learn any execution-related skill online: coding, design, marketing, distribution, and sales. When

building a business, *ideas* are multipliers of the effort that is put into the execution. But how many resources do you know of that teach us how to come up with business ideas? There are some ideation methodologies like design thinking, but they only provide a method and not the inputs to feed into this method, which means they're not very actionable. In my research, I was surprised to find no consolidated and solid resource providing specific and practical advice on generating product ideas.

With this book, I want to fill this gap and allow everyone to learn how to generate ideas. I hope it will help more people to start a business and solve the most urgent problems the world is facing today, making it more sustainable, healthy, and equal.

Artiom Dashinsky
July 2020

Why you should read this book

"The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas."

— Linus Pauling, Nobel Prize Laureate

This book is an actionable guide to finding ideas for products that solve problems. You can decide which product type best fits the solution and your skills, whether it's software tools, services, physical products, content products, etc. I believe that anyone who wants to have more ideas for products or businesses will benefit from this book, regardless of their skills or experience.

The ideas you'll come up with could be used to build:

- full-time or part-time business (i.e. bootstrapped, startups, lifestyle businesses).
- side projects (weekend projects, side hustles).
- new features in your existing products.
- open-source projects.
- concepts for your portfolio or studies, etc.

The profit potential and the project size depend on your commitment and ambitions. During idea generation, you'll be biased toward your own skill set and available time and resources, so your ideas will automatically be close to what you're capable of implementing.

Here's how you could benefit from this book:

Entrepreneurs and indie hackers

- Launch a new SaaS, physical, digital, service, or content product.

- Build a backlog of product ideas for your next businesses.
- Find ideas for growth and marketing projects for your existing products.

Full-time employees (software engineers, designers, product managers, etc.)

- Build a profitable side hustle that could, one day, become your own full-time business.
- Find ideas for personal projects so you can gain experience in validating, shipping, marketing, and selling your own product to prepare for your future business.
- Increase your chances of getting hired as a product manager by gaining the above experience.
- Find marketing and growth ideas for your company's products.
- Start a weekend project to realize your passions.

Freelancers

- Find opportunities for a side business project to diversify your income.
- Learn to package your freelance experience into a product.
- Grow your personal brand via small marketing and content products.

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

Students

- Gain real-world experience by building your own small projects.
- Find ideas for your school projects or your first portfolio.

Introducing the idea generation framework

Problems first, products second

It is a common belief in the startup community that the best ideas are organic. This means that ideas grow from your own experience and from solving your own problems. Some of the following techniques will help you to extract such problems, and some will lead you to find interesting opportunities. For me, finding these opportunities is one way to expose myself to new and interesting problems to solve.

Tomer Sharon, in his book, *Validating Product Ideas*, interviewed 200 product managers and founders, and discovered that, while 198 of them had a list of ideas, only two had a list of problems. The latter is a much better approach for several reasons, one of which is that problems potentially have multiple solutions (and, therefore, could generate multiple products). It means that focusing on problems can potentially lead to more product ideas. Having many ideas can increase the chances of finding successful ideas just by having a wider variety to choose from.

So, to have more and better ideas and to increase your chances of business success, **always be aware of the problem you're trying to solve.**

Why use this framework?

Below you'll find 17 techniques that help you to generate product ideas. This framework has two goals:

1. **To generate ideas immediately** — Methods like these are a great way to lead the thought process in specific directions by adding constraints. Take some time to go through the techniques and put effort into following them and writing down the ideas you come up with. You will build a list of ideas quickly and, later on, you can assess them properly and pick the most promising ones.
2. **To create ideation mental models in your mind** — Putting these techniques to the back of mind, once you've had a chance to practice each one, will help you to start noticing problems and opportunities in the future.

Some of the techniques might seem obvious at first, but it doesn't mean they aren't effective. I invite you to try them before you decide to skip them. Even when some of them are similar, the variety of approaches allows us to attack the same goal from different angles and arms us with as many ideation strategies as possible.

In the framework, we will take different sources — business models, product models, your own experience, your insider experience, trends, localization, existing products, scientific research, open data sets, etc. — and find intersections between them and audiences (which we'll define in the next chapter). Finding such intersections will allow us to create novel connections, leading to new ideas.

The techniques in this book are sorted by complexity. It means that, if you're working on your first product, you will most probably find the first techniques beneficial. If you already have experience in building businesses, some of the

techniques at the beginning might seem obvious to you. The techniques toward the end of the book require more thought, research, and time. For some of the techniques, you'll find additional materials like printable canvases to help you put them into practice.

The importance of examples

Each of the techniques I describe utilize examples of product ideas that they may generate. I included these with two goals:

- **To help you to absorb the technique** – I find examples extremely useful in helping me to understand concepts, and I believe this is also true for many of my readers. My goal was to base this book as much as possible on my personal experience, so the examples are biased toward my areas of expertise. However, all techniques are universal and could work for other industries and skill sets.
- **To provide inspiration** — I believe that reading stories about other businesses or ideas will get you into the right state of mind to think creatively about problems and solutions, and will, hopefully, spark your own ideas. You'll find examples from my own products, the products of my friends and colleagues, and products I'm using or that I'm familiar with. Many of the techniques will include product ideas I came up with using this very framework. These products probably don't exist yet so, if one of them resonates with you, feel free to use it as inspiration to build your own product.

The examples I use in the book vary from bootstrapped side

projects to multimillion-dollar, VC-backed companies, so you can see the techniques can be used to build businesses of any size, depending on your ambitions. I've only built bootstrapped small businesses myself, so the examples might be slightly biased toward these.

Practice, practice, practice

Like with any other skill, when improving your ability to generate new ideas, practice is crucial. It's hard to have many ideas when you're not dedicating time or resources to creating them. To make it easier for you to practice, at the end of the book you'll find the following resources:

- **Framework cheat sheet** is a short overview of all techniques and their key steps, to help you practice and remember them.
- Link to printable **framework canvases** that you can fill out with your ideas while practicing different techniques.

Define your Audience List

Before we start coming up with ideas, we want to create an Audience List, which we will use with many of the techniques. Ask yourself which audiences' problems you would like to be solving with your product? Or, in short — **who would you like to serve?**

By focusing on an audience you'll enjoy serving, you will increase the chances that you'll be more familiar with the market and their needs, have better empathy for your target users, and feel more passionate about solving their problems. This passion will also increase your chances of success, as you're less likely to give up on the project.

Making an Audience List will also benefit you in the future, since you'll keep this list at the back of your mind and will be more likely to notice the problems they are experiencing.

A good technique for finding the right audiences is to start with those you are part of or have close acquaintance with. For me, it would be:

- Co-working tenants
- UX designers
- Cyclists
- People who are sustainability conscious
- Indie hackers
- Etsy sellers
- People with back/neck pain
- Independent book writers
- Remote workers
- Airbnb hosts

While building your list, add both individuals and businesses. When listing individuals, consider if there are relevant organizations that you'd enjoy serving as well. For example, if you like coffee, you might enjoy serving not just people who love coffee but also coffee shops, coffee producers, bean roasters, coffee distributors, etc. The same for bike riders and bike shops, or students and universities.

Audience types

If you're not sure how to start, here are some audience categories and examples.

Individuals

You can characterize your audience around a specific:

- *age*
- *gender*
- *location*
- *occupation*
- *interest*
- *need*
- *habit*
- *hobby*
- *family status, etc.*

For example:

- Deaf people
- Yoga practitioners
- Preschool kids
- People going through divorce
- Vegans

- Senior citizens
- Aquarium owners

Small businesses

- Art galleries
- Accountants
- Bloggers
- Bed and breakfast facilities
- Bars
- Beauty salons
- Boutique hotels
- Car dealers
- Car repair shops
- Copywriters
- Coffee shops
- Caterers
- Day care facilities
- Event planners
- Event space rentals
- Farmers
- Gyms
- Graphic designers
- Interior decorators
- Lawyers
- Movie critics
- Musicians
- Massage therapists
- Music lessons
- Nutritionists
- Nightclubs
- Online stores
- Personal chefs
- Personal trainers
- Photographers
- Private investigators
- Podcasters
- Physicians
- Property managers
- Restaurants
- Real estate brokers
- Sports coaches
- Startups
- Therapists
- Translators
- Tutors
- Video editors
- Vintage clothing boutiques
- Yoga studios
- Writers
- Warehouses

Enterprise

- Airlines
- Banks
- Casinos
- Freight and transportation companies
- Health care providers
- Hotel chains
- Insurance companies
- Manufacturers
- Real estate companies
- Retailers
- Sport clubs
- Tech companies

Nonprofit organizations and institutes

- Charities
- Foundations
- Government institutes
- Municipalities
- Museums
- Religious organizations
- Pension funds
- Political parties
- Public transportation
- Public universities
- Schools

The Framework

P A R T 1 : O B S E R V E

We're going to start with four techniques that focus on observation. They help us to learn actively by finding problems around us that we might have already developed some interest in, passion for, or experience with.

All of these techniques are also helpful to adopt as ongoing mindsets that will help you to notice problems and opportunities around you in the future.

- #1: Solving your own business problems
- #2: Productizing your own life experiences
- #3: Insider ideas
- #4: Vision-based ideas

 CANVAS INCLUDED

#1: Solving your own business problems

Solving your own problems is arguably the best way to find ideas for startups. As Paul Graham, the founder of YCombinator says: “*At YC we call ideas that grow naturally out of the founders' own experiences ‘organic’ startup ideas. The most successful startups almost all begin this way.*”

With this technique, we’re going to create a matrix that helps to extract such ideas from your work experiences (for personal experiences check out the next technique).

Step 1: List things that you’ve worked on

These could be projects or roles; something you do in your day job, as a freelance gig, or in your spare time. For example:

- Building a website for animal adoption with my friend.
- Managing a coffee shop.
- Developing an iPhone app at my full-time job.
- Crafting wooden standing desks and selling them on Etsy as a side gig.
- Running a three-person UX-design agency.
- Publishing an indie magazine.
- Managing a team of three junior interior designers at work.

Step 2: List inefficiencies

Look at this list and ask yourself:

- What did you spend a lot of time on?
- What did you spend a lot of money on?
- What processes frustrated you?

The first two questions are especially powerful. People always find value in paying for something that helps them to make more money or save time. When your service costs \$30 and allows the customer to earn more than \$30 (or save time that they feel is worth more than \$30), there are few reasons for them not to buy your product.

Step 3: Explore intersections to find problems

Now fill out a matrix, answering these questions on each of the projects or roles, and looking for opportunities to build products that would solve these inefficiencies.

Craigslist, Basecamp, GitHub, InVision, and Dropbox started from frustration or an attempt to optimize processes in this way. Here are some more examples of project ideas that evolved from such an approach, including my own experiences.

Saving English teachers time

Danielle Simpson, my acquaintance Arvid Kahl's partner, taught English online. There are 1.5 billion English learners worldwide, and digital language learning services have an annual growth figure of 6% which makes the market hungry for English teachers⁴. Unfortunately, online teachers only get paid for their teaching time and not for the overheads like preparing, organizing, and providing feedback. So, Danielle

and Arvid built FeedbackPanda, a tool helping online language teachers to manage student's feedback with templates and a feedback management tool. The product's monthly plan cost is equivalent to 30 minutes of their teaching value, but actually saves teachers a couple of hours a day. Last year, Danielle and Arvid had reached \$55,000 a month in revenue and sold the company. (You can learn more about their journey at thebootstrappedfounder.com.)

Helping indie magazine publishers

Kai Brach, the publisher of my favorite magazine, Offscreen, had to learn all aspects of indie publishing from scratch: content production, printing, shipping, distribution, and marketing. He had to learn by doing and accept mistakes that cost him time and money (launching an unsuccessful Kickstarter campaign; printing 6000 magazine covers with a typo). He realized he wasn't the only one going through these painful experiences, and that most indie publishers struggle with the same challenges. He decided to make his experience accessible to other indie publishers which led him to become part of the founding team of Heftwerk (heftwerk.com), a German services company helping indie magazines to do printing, shipping, and distribution.

Automatic debugging for software engineers

In 2014, I had a small agency providing design and software development services to tech companies. After working on several iOS mobile apps, we noticed the same pattern emerging in the problems we encountered— we didn't have a way to track the bugs in our customer's apps. Moreover, the time we spent debugging would swallow about 20–30% of development

time. We decided to create a product solving this inefficiency: a debugging tool for iOS developers that automatically learns what the production issues are in apps, cutting debug time from hours to seconds.

Saving UI designers time

In 2013, I led on design as a full-time employee in a startup. I started noticing how time-consuming and frustrating the manual process of exporting UI assets was to our junior designers. To optimize this process, I built Retinize It. It was a simple Photoshop action (similar to Macros in Word) that didn't require any coding skills for me to build it. With one click, this tool allowed me to isolate a UI element and save it in two resolutions required in iPhone and iPad apps we were developing. We could start using this tool immediately, saving hours of work for our designers. Since it was so successful internally, I decided to make it accessible to other designers for free. This tool immediately became incredibly popular — it was downloaded about 100,000 times and featured in all major design blogs. Even though I didn't monetize it, it gave me invaluable experience of shipping a product, and led to some highly valuable connections and consulting gigs.

Here are two extra tips for you when looking for opportunities:

- **Serve the opposite side** — Check to see if your experience could be valuable to the opposite side of the business that you're working in. For example, if you've worked in a call center, your experience could be helpful to people who want to negotiate prices with call center

representatives. If you were responsible for hiring architects in your firm, your experience could help architects to prepare for job interviews. A real-world example: Daniel Vroman Rusteen used to work for Airbnb, and now he's helping Airbnb hosts to make more money with their spaces⁵.

- **Behind-the-door processes** — Ask yourself: what are the processes you have access to or understand deeply that few others do? As consumers, we're only exposed to the front end of the products and services. For example, eating in a restaurant exposes you to the space, design, hospitality, prepared food, order collection process, Wi-Fi functionality, etc. However, when you're part of creating a product or a service, you have access that most people don't. In this case, it would be how the supply chain, inventory management, salary payments, and other internal processes in the restaurant work. Looking at such processes gives you a competitive advantage against other entrepreneurs who might not have access to this knowledge and experience, and are thus less likely to build a product for it. A couple of my friends are working for a startup, looking at the problem of supplier payment management at shops and restaurants. Small shops and restaurants have multiple vendors who work with different payment methods and due dates, adding operations load that is untenable for a small business, so they decided to build a system helping to reduce the overheads of managing these processes. Such problems are hard to discover without having access to the intricacies of the behind-the-scenes processes in a specific context.

Keep those questions from Step 2 about inefficiencies in your mind at all times, and seek out problems that need solving. By adopting this mindset long-term, you will more easily notice opportunities in the future.

#2: Productizing your own life experiences

This technique draws on a huge untapped resource that you already have at your fingertips – your own life. Your familiarity with an experience, the difficulties you encountered, and mistakes you made, is the ideal starting point for identifying problems.

Step 1: List the life experiences you've acquired

For example:

- Moving to Japan
- Going through a divorce
- Dealing with back pain
- Applying for a business owner visa
- Buying a modular house

Step 2: List the frictions you encountered

- What level of research did they require?
- Which experiences required hiring a consultant?
- What mistakes did you make?
- What aspects did you wish someone would have told you about in advance?

Step 3: Simplify the experience for others

People are going through the same expensive and time-

consuming experiences every day. What if they could be optimized to free up people's time for more important things?

Summarize your hard-won expertise into a product to help others avoid the same frictions. The end product could be a book, a course or workshop, a consulting business, or an online community around this topic.

You could go for niche topics (e.g. how to set up a business in Germany as a foreigner) or go broad (e.g. how to become vegan). Ideally, you want to find the perfect spot between the two — finding an audience that will be big enough to make it a viable product but niche enough to avoid competing with too many other options on the market.

The advantage of this approach is that you're already familiar with the playing field and the audience. You might even be part of a community interested in such a solution already, so you know where to find potential customers and what their needs are.

Here are a couple of examples of how people leverage this approach to build a business:

- Elle Huerta, who was going through a breakup, was looking for guidance online but couldn't find anything helpful. She has since built Mend (letsmend.com), an app providing advice and support for heartbreak. Since it was founded in 2017, the app has provided more than two million users with training courses.⁶
- Tobias Van Schneider is a designer who moved from Austria to New York and had to deal with issues like finding a job, getting a visa, calculating the cost of living, choosing an apartment, etc. To summarize his experiences and provide guidance on achieving a

smoother transition, he wrote an e-book, *How to Move to New York City* (letsgoto.nyc)

The idea for this book you're reading is also a result of this technique — I'm sharing the knowledge I acquired of generating ideas for profitable businesses. Here are three more ideas I came up with using this technique:

Suing spammers

In Israel, it became normal to receive one or two unsolicited spam SMS messages per day. It is an annoyance everyone experiences. To deter companies from such behavior, a law was created. It allowed citizens to sue companies who were spamming them, and receive up to \$280 per message, without proof of damages.

Unfortunately, very few people were suing spammers because of the amount of research required to understand how to do it.

I decided to sue one of the companies who spammed me. It was a sketchy business promising to make you rich if you'd invest through their automated investment product. I spent a couple of days researching how to sue a company and write my statement of claim for the court. To my surprise, a month later, after submitting the claim, I was contacted by the lawyer of the company. They wanted to make a settlement and offered to pay 50% of the requested amount. I insisted on 100% and received a check for \$280 delivered to my office without even having to show up in court.

The process involved research time that others would not be willing to invest, so I wanted to save people time and use my experience to make this process more accessible to them. It

would increase the chances of people taking action and help eliminate spam. I decided to build a service that would allow citizens to submit their spam messages. The service would then take care of the paperwork and submit the claim on their behalf, taking 20% of the claim compensation and only in the case of a win.

Unfortunately, this service ended up being unfeasible because of regulatory limitations. Although, to make sure others could benefit from my research and experience, I decided to open source the statement of claim and prepare a tutorial for suing a spamming business. I posted it on my Facebook page, and it went viral. I was invited to interviews on TV and in newspapers and I also built an online community helping people with advice on suing spammers.



Figure 2.1 Giving an interview on the second most popular TV channel in Israel about my experience of suing spammers

Language complexity ratings for books and movies

I moved to Germany a couple of years ago and I'm currently learning German. One of the helpful techniques for improving language skills is consuming books, movies, and podcasts. However, I find it hard to know if a book, movie, or TV series will match my experience level without purchasing it first. At the moment, it is done through trial and error, which leads to a lot of mistakes and time and money spent. To solve this problem, a language complexity rating could be developed.

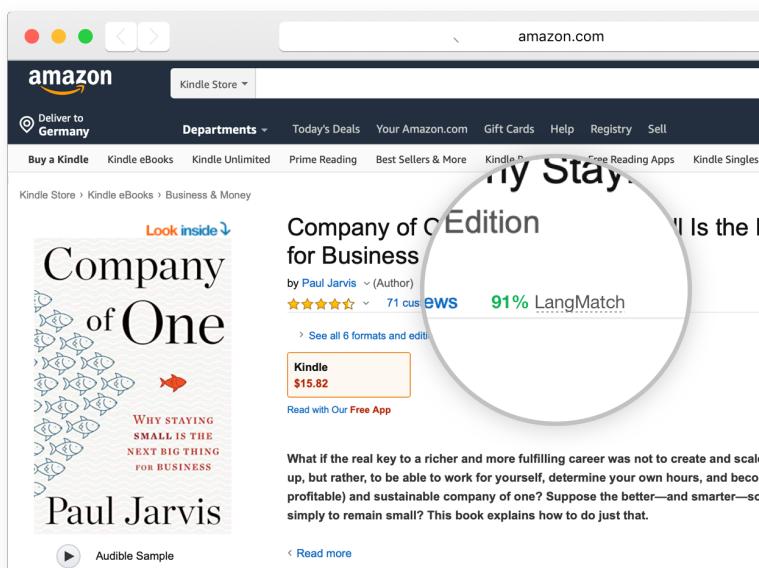


Figure 2.2 A mock-up of how language complexity ratings for books could be displayed on Amazon

Such a product could use existing tools, like Readable.com, that analyze language complexity, such as the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tests. It could be a stand-alone platform and/or a browser add-on that shows the score

on Amazon, Netflix, YouTube, etc. The end goal would be to create a unique score standard. Licensing for such a rating could be sold in the future, similar to how IMDB licenses their data like cast and crew, user ratings, plot summaries, release dates, box office receipts, etc.

Reducing back pain using smartphones

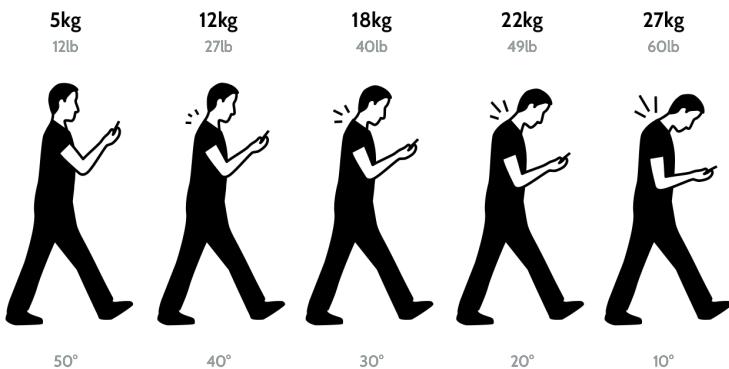


Figure 2.3 Here is a rough estimation based on research of how much pressure is placed on the spine while looking down at a smartphone⁷. An adult head weighs about 5kg (10-12lb) in the neutral position. As the head tilts forward, the force applied on the neck surges. The degrees represent the smartphone tilt.

As someone who has experienced back and neck pain, I invested a significant amount of time into researching different causes. It turns out that looking down at your phone places enormous strain on the spine and can result in head pain, neck pain, arm pain, and numbness⁸.

Previously, public awareness of the impact of smartphones on our health led to the launch of features like Apple's Screen Time. Even though this might sound counterintuitive, this

feature which helps users reduce time spent on their smartphones benefits Apple's business in the long-term. Nir Eyal explains it as a way for Apple and Google to make their products less harmful and prevent customers from looking for alternatives, similar to how car producers have an incentive to make their cars safer.⁹ I believe this rise in awareness of the role smartphones play in back and neck pain will lead to a demand for new ergonomic solutions.

One of the solutions that could be built to improve smartphone user's posture is an app tracking smartphone tilt and providing insights on the user's posture. The flatter the smartphone is held, the more weight is put on your neck. The tilt of the phone can be measured by a built-in inclinometer which all iPhones have.

Tracking such data and providing insights over time, similar to Apple's Screen Time or Health app (*Figure 2.4*), could encourage customers to be more conscious of their posture, thereby improving their health. Ultimately, people will be more satisfied with using their smartphones long-term.

#2: PRODUCTIZING YOUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES

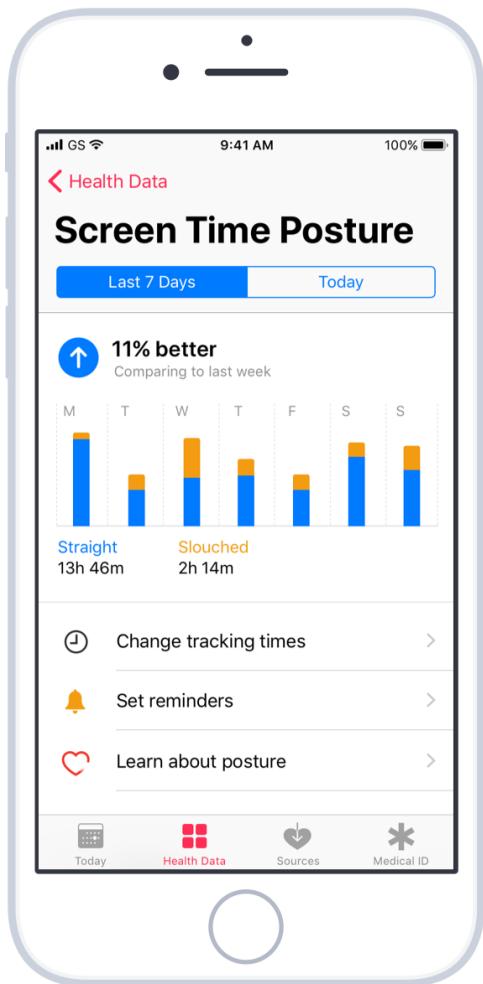


Figure 2.4 A mock-up of how posture tracking could be incorporated into the Health app on iPhone

#3: Insider ideas

Similar to the previous technique, this relies on and exploits your existing knowledge, but it focuses on your observations inside organizations.

Step 1: List the internal processes of organizations with which you're familiar

List organizations (companies, non-profit, university, military, etc.) you're familiar with, including their internal processes. Most probably these will be:

- organizations you were part of (which you worked for, studied at, served at, etc.)
- organizations your close friends are working for or running (and where they wouldn't mind sharing the internal processes).
- organizations you've consulted for.

Step 2: List the opportunities these organizations didn't pursue

For a big company, some opportunities are too small and so not worth pursuing. However, these opportunities might be big enough for you. For each of the organizations from Step 1, list the following:

- Internal products that would have value outside of the organization.
- Audiences and niches that the organization ignored because they were too small for them (often

corporations or VC-backed companies choose to focus only on big markets).

- Processes that the organization routinely outsourced.
- Products or features that the organization eliminated for reasons that weren't necessarily related to the lack of traction (i.e. a change of company priorities or restructuring).

Step 3: Explore the product ideas that emerge

Consider the list of opportunities derived from Step 2 and whether they are interesting and viable.

There are many examples of this technique being used by startups. Asana (with a \$1.5b valuation and plans to go public later in 2020¹⁰), a task management tool, was created by Dustin Moskovitz after he developed a similar internal work management tool while working for Facebook.¹¹

The idea behind the network security company, Check Point (with a \$15b market cap in 2020¹²), emerged while the founder, Gil Shwed, was serving in the Israeli military, where he worked on securing classified networks. When the internet emerged in the early 90s, he applied similar technology concepts to those he used to work on in the military to build his product for IT security.

In 2016, I led the design of several products at WeWork. Here are two insider ideas I had from my experience there:

Aggregating user research

One of my colleagues, Tomer Sharon, built an internal system called Polaris with his team. It allowed him to collect

and organize user interviews the research team would perform. Usually, research teams record video or phone calls with customers but, unfortunately, this type of data is hard to tag and search. Polaris helped to catalog such data and provided everyone in the company with access to the research. With this tool, a product manager working on improving a conference room booking product could find all mentions of conference rooms in all the user interviews the company has ever done.

The data was tagged not just by topic but also by whether the experience customers described was positive or negative, and how frequently it would happen to them. It allowed managers to see an overview of what issues members were complaining about the most and, as a result, what they should be working on next.

I was very impressed by this product and found it useful myself. I was convinced it would have value outside of the organization. This product wasn't core to WeWork's business, and they didn't have plans to offer it externally, so, when I left in 2017, I was considering building such a product myself and offering it to companies. At the time, I chose to work on another product first but, that same year, Dovetail¹³ emerged, a product doing precisely that. Today they have customers like Shopify, Gartner, Sketch, Square, and Samsung.

Working space for digital nomads

At the time of writing this book, WeWork has more than 800 buildings in 120 cities. The number of co-working spaces in the world is growing exponentially, with a 20% growth rate in the last five years.

Digital nomads could be a loyal and profitable niche audience for co-working spaces. However, their need to switch

cities or countries every couple of months requires pricing and billing adjustments from co-working companies.

Global co-working companies would not put effort into such a niche since they have an almost infinite scale with their existing product that does not require much adjustment along the way. Conversely, the small co-working spaces are usually very local and so can't offer international access for digital nomads. A solution that could solve this problem is a company that doesn't have any physical assets itself but which creates partnerships with existing spaces specifically to serve the digital nomad market. It could create an international network of co-working spaces, making it easy to onboard these customers and make it frictionless for them to switch workspaces while moving between countries.

#4: Vision-based ideas

I like how Erika Hall defines design: it's the gap between what currently exists and what you're aiming for.¹⁴ I'd say that this definition would also work well in describing entrepreneurship. A great way to start thinking of product ideas is to define what it is that you're aiming for.

Step 1: Define your vision

Think of how you believe the world should look in the future, compare this image to how it is now, and fill in the gaps with your product or service. Your vision will probably belong to one of two categories:

- Bring something **positive** closer e.g. make healthcare more accessible; make pets live longer; teach kids to be more creative.
- Move away from something **negative** e.g. reduce smoking in developing countries; reduce microplastic pollution in the ocean; help people to have less physical pain in their workspace.

You might already know what problems you'd like to tackle. Otherwise, if you're looking to make a positive impact but not sure how, here are three resources to help you do that:

- **80000hours.org.** Eighty thousand hours is the number of hours in your career, and this non-profit explores how you can best use these 80,000 hours to help solve the world's most pressing problems.
- **The UN Sustainable Development Goals¹⁵** are a plan for building a better world for people and our planet by

2030. These goals include ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

- **Project Drawdown¹⁶** explores solutions¹⁷ for climate change and prioritizes them by impact, measured by gigatons of equivalent CO₂ reduced.

By tackling the problems listed in these resources, you can be confident that your effort will count.



Figure 4.1 List of Sustainable Development Goals created by the United Nations

Step 2: Find the reasons the vision is not a reality

After defining the vision, we know where we are going. Now we need to build a list of reasons why we're not there yet. We can discover the reasons by asking ourselves questions depending on the type of vision:

- Moving away from something negative — *What causes this problem?*
- Bringing something positive closer — *What prevents it from happening?*

These reasons will be the problems we're going to focus on solving.

For example, your vision might be preventing microplastics from getting into the ocean. They end up in our food chain and cause serious illnesses in humans and animals. This is a “negative” vision, which means we’re trying to move away from it.

The good thing about trying to find ideas that help to solve global problems is that a massive amount of effort has been put into researching and understanding the problems already. On the topic of microplastics in the oceans, we can find reports¹⁸ showing an exact breakdown of the causes of pollution and the percentage of their contribution to the problem:

- Laundry of synthetic textiles — 35%
- Car tires — 28%
- City dust — 24%
- Road markings — 7%
- Marine coatings — 4%
- Personal care products — 2%

Step 3: List ways of solving these obstacles

Once we have listed the problems, we can come up with ideas for possible solutions. Below are some examples.

Microplastics in the oceans

LANGBRETT is a small, sustainable clothing company in Germany that is founded by a group of surfers. They are passionate about protecting nature and they looked in detail at the issue of microplastics polluting the oceans. They took that primary cause, outlined above — laundry of synthetic textiles —and invented a laundry bag that could be used in home washing machines which filtered out microplastics. They raised about \$30,000 in their Kickstarter campaign and later received a \$100,000 grant from Patagonia for the research and development of their product.¹⁹ Today the laundry bag is sold by Patagonia, H&M, ARKET, and many other sustainability-minded online shops.

Physical pain in the workspace

One of my visions is prevention and reduction of the physical pain people might be having in their workspace. One of the reasons people are having pain is bad workspace ergonomics. Long hours spent sitting might lead to various disorders, many of which include pain. There are many causes and obstacles to solving this problem, and I've tackled two of them:

- Lack of accessibility to ergonomic solutions — I responded to this problem by producing the most accessible, high-quality standing desk in Israel.
- Lack of workspace ergonomics awareness — By producing custom-branded laptop stands used by companies like Samsung and Sketch as free giveaways at conferences, I've provided thousands of people with free ergonomics improvement for their workspace and

greater awareness of the issue.



Figure 4.2 Standing desk I produced in Israel by licensing the design of my ex-colleague at WeWork

Reducing waste

With a vision of reducing waste, you might list common problems like home appliance waste and electronic waste.

One of the causes is these product's low durability. In fact, today products don't last as long as they used to.²⁰ In Germany, the percentage of new appliances sold to replace defective ones (as opposed to first-time purchases) increased from 3.5% to 8.3% between 2004 and 2012.²¹

Information concerning the durability of products matters

to consumers: in one study from Alanus University in Germany, consumers weighted price and theoretical product lifetime as nearly equal factors when deciding whether or not to purchase an item (33% and 31%, respectively).²²

Collecting such information and making it accessible to the public could be helpful in reducing waste and desirable for consumers. There are several possible sources for gathering durability data: manufacturers, external product review companies (Wirecutter, iFixit, Consumer Reports), repair businesses, and the consumers themselves.

Durability reporting would help consumers to make sustainable (and also economically-viable) choices, decreasing waste and encouraging purchasing of products that are less likely to quickly end up at the landfill.

P A R T 2 : R E P L I C A T E A N D I M P R O V E

There are two things I've learned while generating new product ideas: everything is a remix of existing things and everything can be improved. Most products leverage existing concepts and just add a new twist to them. The bonus is, it's easier to build, communicate, and sell something people aren't completely new to.

In the next six techniques we're going to look at ways to find opportunities for creating something new based on existing concepts.

- #5: Cross-industry product innovation
- #6: Improve abandoned but useful products
- #7: Localization of existing solutions
- #8: Automate marketplace services and products
- #9: Product unbundling
- #10: Data sets

#5: Cross-industry product innovation

This is similar to the localizing technique. Although here, instead of bringing a product to a new market or language and adjusting it for this context, we're going to shift between industries.

Step 1: Make a list of valuable products

We want to bring products from other industries to ours or ones we are very familiar with, so we need to start with listing products outside of our industry that are working well. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to be successful in your niche, but it's a good starting point that might improve the chances of success. Here's how you can start:

- Ask people from other industries what products they love using personally or for their business and what products they bought in the last year.
- Think of products that you're using which you rate highly, especially if you are multidisciplinary, in terms of working across industries.
- Think of products you've seen or read about recently that caught your eye.
- If you can't think of many products, use the resources about existing products list in the "Where to find ideas" chapter and explore those that you find interesting, valuable, or successful.

Step 2: Adjust these products to your industry/audience

Now we want to intersect this list of products with the industries or audiences you're deeply familiar with. You can also use your Audience List in this step. Consider whether the problems these products solve are also happening in your industry and relevant to your audience.

This is an excellent ongoing mindset to adopt — watching out for products and thinking about how they could be implemented in your industry.

Ideally, the audiences you're looking at are ones you can empathize with, understand their needs and have access to. For me, it is designers. Here are some examples of how I leveraged this approach to come up with ideas and build successful products for designers.

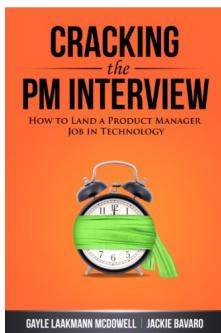
Job interview preparation resources for different roles

I've been working with software developers and product managers for most of my career. Many of my friends are one or the other. When they would talk about job interviews, they'd often mention that they'd use books to prepare for it. For developers, it was *Cracking the Coding Interview*, and for PMs it was *Cracking the PM Interview*.

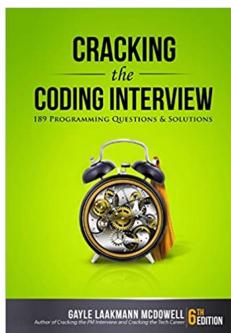
When I started to interview designers for my team, I thought that it would be helpful to read a book like this for designers to improve my technique. I was surprised to find there was no such thing. So, I decided to write it myself. I ended up narrowing it down to focus only on the most critical part of the design interview — the testing exercises.

The book launched in 2018 and immediately became an

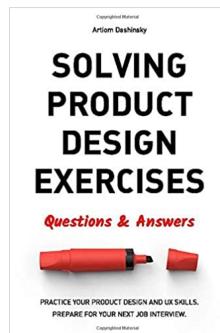
Amazon best seller in the UX category. Bringing an existing concept that worked well in other industries to mine made about \$100,000 in sales without marketing (most of which are profits since it was self-published) in the first year.



For product managers



For software developers



For designers

Figure 5.1 Books for preparing for job interviews in different roles

Keyboard stickers boosting productivity in different professions

Another product that I based on an existing concept from other industries was SketchKeys. In 2016, an app called Sketch started to gain momentum among interface designers and became the new industry standard, replacing Photoshop. Sketch had keyboard shortcuts that are nothing like the ones in Photoshop.

I remembered colorful keyboard stickers that I saw video editors using and thought that these could work for designers as well. Since Sketch is a professional app, the user spends most of their day on it, using a lot of repetitive tools and functions. Using shortcuts is a great way to improve productivity and, if I could help designers to learn new shortcuts and save just 3% of their time, it would accumulate

into a significant amount of saved resources. It could also improve the workspace ergonomics since keyboard shortcuts provide an alternative to a mouse, overuse of which can lead to discomfort, pain, and health disorders.



Figure 5.2 SketchKeys — keyboard stickers with shortcuts for design app Figma

I ended up building such stickers for Sketch and then for other design tools like Figma and Adobe XD. I didn't put too much effort into this project and didn't do any marketing, so it's been running passively for the last four years, almost without requiring any attention, averaging \$8,000 yearly sales with about an 80% margin.

Stands for laptops and musical instruments

One of the products I'm producing that is not just for designers is laptop stands made locally from eco-friendly

plywood. It is mostly sold to companies who want it branded with their logo, so they can use the stands as giveaways at conferences or as a corporate gift.



Stand for laptops

Same stand for music instruments

Figure 5.3 Wooden stand used by different audiences

One day, my friend, who is a music producer, came by and saw this stand under my laptop. He took a sampling drum machine from his bag, put it on the stand, and it fitted like a glove. Later, we tested it out on his synthesizers and other drum machines, and many of them fitted well on my laptop stands. He uses three of my stands now in his music setup.

Many of the stands for musicians are two to three times more expensive than my laptop stands (I assume due to a smaller, more specialized market). It also solves an audience-specific problem, as my stand's portability allows musicians to easily carry it to their gigs. So, I'm currently working on this opportunity to bring an already existing product to a different industry and offer musicians a high-quality solution for a better price.

#6: Improve abandoned but useful products

Some products get some traction but are not maintained well by the creators for different reasons and are thus abandoned. It could be a switch of focus, a lack of skills and resources, or an agenda that won't allow them to make necessary changes to the product (for example, they might have a business model of selling users' data to advertisers, while many users are increasingly trying to avoid such products).

Finding these “fallen” products and building a better version of them is a robust strategy as it generates ideas that are already demand-validated.

Step 1: Find in demand products with low ratings

To find in demand but low-rated products, start by searching stores that consolidate products; here you can find out how popular the product is and how well it meets users' needs from the reviews. You could use App Store (iOS, macOS, Apple TV), Google Play, Amazon Apps Store (skills for Echo, apps for Kindle), Chrome Store Extensions, or Trustpilot.

To make the search easier, use:

- App Annie²³ — The free trial version allows you to preview the top app charts for iOS, Apple TV, macOS, Google Play, and Amazon apps and sort by ratings.
- Chrome Store — You could navigate the store yourself or find someone on Fiverr who would find apps meeting specific criteria for you.

Ideally, we're looking for apps that have:

- a low rating; less than 3.5 stars (the product doesn't deliver on the promise).
- a lot of downloads or users (which validates the demand).
- not been updated for a long time (a higher chance that it was abandoned).

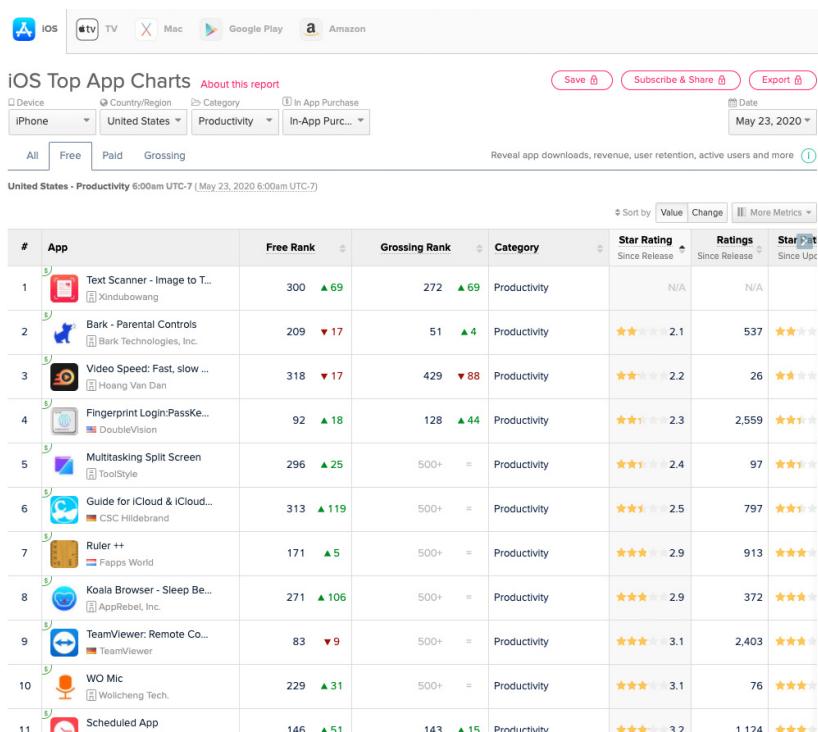


Figure 6.1 App Annie: The lowest-rated but most popular productivity apps for iOS

Step 2: Build better versions of these products

Build a product that better delivers on the promise of these apps and manages to solve the problem more effectively.

Rik Schennink was browsing Envato (envato.com), a store of digital add-ons and web components for developers, using this strategy and looking for successful projects he could do better.²⁴ This is how he got the idea for Doca (pqina.nl/doka/), an image editor that developers can integrate into their web products. Rik is an indie developer and his project generates \$10,000 a month in revenue.

Here are three different examples I've found using this technique with concrete problems that could be resolved to create a better product:

- **Free Visio Viewer**²⁵ is a Chrome extension that provides a preview of Microsoft Visio files across different platforms without having to install it. The extension has 200,000+ users and an average rating of 3 stars, with customers complaining that it doesn't work and that they don't appreciate the fact their files are uploaded to a public website.
- **Signily**²⁶ is a \$0.99 iPhone app with a sign language keyboard. It's #128 in the Utilities category in the App Store and has a 2.9 rating with people complaining about many aspects of its functionality. It clearly looks like the demand is there, but the product isn't meeting it properly. (This specific product is made by a non-profit organization developing products for sign language integration, so I'd avoid replicating their app and encroaching on their income. Instead use this as an example only.)

- **Scheduled App²⁷** allows you to schedule your text messages in SMS, iMessage, and WhatsApp, to be sent at specific times. With a 3.1 average rating (and almost 1000 reviews) this is clearly an underachieving product in a substantial potential market.

#7: Localization of existing solutions

This technique is similar to the cross-industries approach in that it starts with considering an existing product and its potential feasibility in another context. Although here, instead of moving products between industries, we will explore whether we can move them from one market and language to another.

Step 1: List countries, regions, and languages you're familiar with

Being bilingual, or having experience of living in several countries, gives you the advantage of understanding the culture, language, and needs of another place. You probably also have connections in these locations. It means that you can more effectively create products for these markets or in these languages.

For me, for example, such a list would look like this:

- Israel
- Belarus / Russia
- Germany
- Russian
- Hebrew
- German
- English

Step 2: List products worth replicating

Now we want to think of problems and solutions which are worth replicating. To do that we'll use a similar model to that used in the cross-industry technique:

- Ask people around you what products they love using in their city, country, and language. If they struggle to think of something, ask them what products they bought in the last six months.
- Think of products you find valuable yourself.
- Think of products you've seen or read about recently that have caught your eye.

In a global economy, there is a good chance that many concepts already exist across many different geographical markets. However, companies might decide that some countries are too small to bother investing in, while it might still be a big enough market for your business.

Moreover, companies will most probably choose to expand only when they have a solid footing in their home market. Even when they are well-established there, the next market they choose will probably be one of the big ones. For example, a product that starts in California will probably first expand to other states in the US, after which it might launch in Canada, Australia and then maybe the UK, Germany, and France, etc. If you have a small country on your list, there is a chance that the big players might reach it very late or not at all.

The giants of the tech industry reached Israel only recently — Amazon in 2019, Spotify in 2018, and Netflix in 2016. However, you probably don't want to compete with these companies as they are large, powerful, and their products are hard to build. Still, the point is, if even *they* pass on certain

markets, it's likely that smaller companies might not have enough resources, ambition, or interest to reach your geographical area or language very soon. It leaves you with an opportunity to be the first (and maybe the only) player in your market and also to have the first-mover advantage.

An additional reason that this technique works is the varying maturity of different markets. For example, Russia is less interested in sustainability-centered products than the US or Europe. For many companies, a small niche like this is not enough to justify coming to this market. However, such a niche could be big enough for you to make a profit. Besides, such small niches might mean a stronger and more committed community, which makes it easier to penetrate the market and sell your goods.

Step 3: Bring the product to a new country or language

Now you want to see if the products you've listed can be feasibly brought to a new country, region, or language – preferably one that you're familiar with and have experience of. Here are some examples:

- I use TransferWise for international money transfers, and it's one of my favorite products. It works very well when I need to deal with transfers inside the EU or to the US. However, I do business with Belarus and TransferWise does not operate there. That's when I use Azimo, a company that provides exactly the same product but with one small change — they took the list of countries that TransferWise supports and inverted it. Cleverly, Azimo works in all countries that TransferWise

does not. This is a perfect example of this technique in action.

- Billshark is a company operating in the US that helps its customers to reduce their bills by negotiating better deals on their behalf. They charge customers 40% of the amount they save on their internet, TV, or mobile package, etc. It's a product that gives you free money. Why would someone not use it? It's a very language and region-specific business and it wouldn't be that hard to replicate it in your own country or area. The best part is, if you have some sales experience and you're an extrovert, you can start building a business like this tomorrow morning.
- Many institutions like universities, pension funds, local authorities, and charitable foundations have stopped investing funds in fossil fuels²⁸ for moral and economic reasons. This trend can be applied to individuals too. Fossil Free Funds²⁹ is a project that provides information on the level of involvement of your mutual funds in fossil fuels. I assume it's mostly used by people who care about the environment. Such a product is very country-specific and would be popular in other markets too, allowing those interested in sustainability to ensure their funds are safe and not supporting the world's further dependence on fossil fuels.

#8: Automate marketplace services and products

By trawling marketplaces such as Fiverr and Etsy, you can gauge what products and services are in high demand. After finding these offers, we could explore which ones we could automate a solution for and, in doing so, provide a more cost and time-efficient product to the end customer.

The advantage of this technique is that we're going to take advantage of the huge amount of traffic these platforms already have and work on products and services that are already demand-validated.

Step 1: Find automatable services

Fiverr

Fiverr is an online marketplace for freelance services. It's a go-to place for uncomplex and affordable services with a well-defined scope, such as designing a logo, editing video clips, recording an ad voice-over, scraping website pages, or writing a press release. Usually, freelance services are packaged in gigs so, instead of hiring a designer, customers buy a pre-packaged service like, "logo design with two revisions," or, "10 banners for all Google Ads sizes." As the name suggests, the pricing starts as low as \$5 per gig.

What we want to do is to find gigs that can be easily automated. It will probably be more technologically challenging to automate services like a human voice-over. However, to some degree you can automate SEO services and reports, graphic design, social media management, audio transcripts, lead generation, web scraping, etc.

Fiverr can be viewed as a catalog of problems people are trying to solve. By analyzing the services, you can find new problems and validate the demand.

Etsy

Another place we want to look is Etsy. It is a marketplace that's mostly for physical goods, although it has a lot of downloadable products that are mostly graphics files; graphics that can be printed on a home printer, on t-shirts, on cards, using a laser cut machine, or a 3D printer, etc. Many of them are templates and could be converted to a simple automated tool allowing customers to design such graphics themselves and customize them.

Step 2: Build products automating the services

Fiverr

Many of the Fiverr gigs can be transformed into a self-service product that will solve the needs of the customer and make it faster, better, and cheaper. You could either completely automate it or partially outsource tasks to Amazon Mechanical Turk.

Logo design is one of the most popular services on Fiverr. Tailor Brands is a company that automates logo and branding creation. They have 14 million users, with 500 million designs created via their product.

A service I used on Fiverr is buying contact lists of audience segments such as parenting bloggers or journalists whom I intended to reach out to regarding my product. Automating such a service would mean web-scraping publicly available data and making it searchable. Such a product could lower the

barrier for small businesses to access journalists, or make it easier for PR agencies to do their jobs. JustReachOut does exactly that, and their cheapest plan is \$159/month including emails to 50 journalists.

One technique for finding relevant journalists on your topic is to search for related news and reach out to the journalists who wrote about it recently. This process can be partially automated via Google News API as it can find all authors who wrote on topics including specific keywords; then you can find their contact data via Hunter.io or Mechanical Turk.

Etsy

When it comes to Etsy, one of the popular digital products are certificate templates for school diplomas etc. Such templates require editing, one-by-one, using a different piece of software. You could build a better certificate product with more flexibility, to capture the market which Etsy is currently satisfying. Your templates could allow schools to do design adjustments and upload a list of students to generate ready-to-print PDF files much more quickly. Next step could be creating a partnership with a printing company who would produce the certificates and provide you with a cut.

#9: Product unbundling

The definition of an unbundling business model is taking a product and breaking it into smaller products, business lines, or divisions. For example, if you look at the Craigslist homepage, you can find categories that were unbundled by new companies to create extremely successful products: Zillow for the Housing category; Airbnb for Vacation Rentals; Indeed and ZipRecruiter for Jobs; Tinder for Personals; and Nextdoor for Community.

I've taken this concept and slightly adjusted it to serve our goal of finding problems to solve and opportunities for new products. We'll look at problems that businesses have already validated and solved with products, and then consider how we might focus on a particular feature or audience niche, to explore how we might better solve this ourselves. In addition, we'll look at the platforms these products aren't currently serving well, and see if we can fill these gaps.

Step 1: List products that your audience uses

Assuming you want to generate ideas relevant to your chosen audience, we want to start by making a list of products related to that audience, which we will then unbundle. For example, if your audience is UX designers, some of the products we might want to unbundle are:

- InVision
- Zeplin
- Figma
- Sketch

Step 2: Analyze the features, platforms, and audiences

In order to find opportunities for unbundling, let's consider three aspects of products that we might want to explore:

Extractable features

Étienne Garbugli describes the most effective technique I know for analyzing unbundling opportunities in his post on Indie Hackers.³⁰ He suggests analyzing the pricing pages of products, comparing different plans, and looking at what features each company charges a premium for. For example, Mailchimp's pricing page has a table of 57 features. Some of these features could be extracted and built as a small stand-alone product.

There is a good chance that the company you're analyzing has already put effort into testing what customers are willing to pay for so, with this technique, you'll find ideas that are already partially validated. By isolating a feature to produce a stand-alone product, and focusing on doing one thing well, you could provide better value to the end customer.

Unsupported platforms

Companies have multiple, competing priorities, and they often have to put effort into supporting some platforms and deprioritizing others because of lack of time or resources; for example, developing a desktop version of a service but not the native application for smartphones or tablets. One of the reasons for that could be a relatively small number of users on the platform. However, even if it's not a big enough platform

for the company to focus on, it could be big enough for you to build the app and provide for the client or customers.

Niche audiences

Big products may aim to serve a broad audience when, often, more specific and dedicated solutions for each of the audience segments could be more valuable. For example, UpWork is a marketplace for a wide range of freelancers which I use monthly. Even though I can find the professionals that I need on UpWork, I prefer finding editors on Reedsy and lawyers on UpCouncil because the support they provide is more tailored and specialized.

Some products to explore for unbundling opportunities and finding niches: eBay, Amazon, Reddit, Craigslist, and Slack (think about what communities are using the latter).

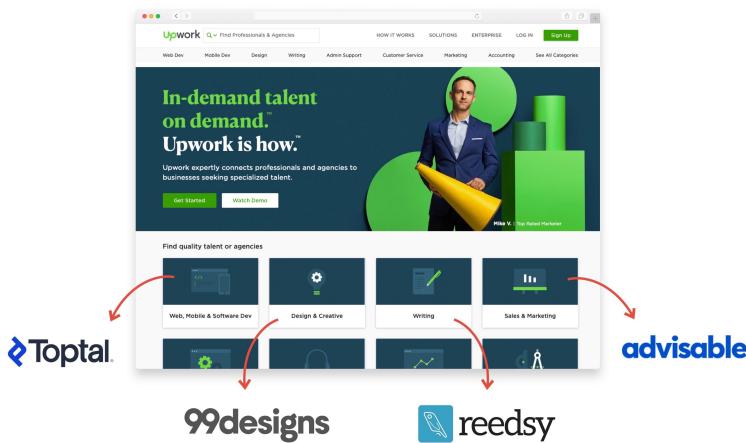


Figure 9.1 Companies that unbundle UpWork's main categories and make each of them a stand-alone business: Toptal for software development; 99designs for design; Reedsy for writing; Advisable for sales and marketing

Step 3: Convert the opportunities to products

Here are some examples of new products that we could generate from these three techniques:

- **Mailchimp** — This is an example of the feature extraction mentioned by Étienne Garbugli above. Mailchimp provides an email marketing service to their customers. Étienne points to Send Time Optimization, a premium feature I personally use in Mailchimp. This feature analyzes when the subscribers are most active and thus determines what the best time to send your newsletter is. The times when open rates (of email) are the highest across industries are known. So, we could build a service allowing Mailchimp customers to import their subscriber list with IP addresses to determine users' time zones; it is simple to then calculate the optimal time to send out a newsletter. This functionality could quite easily be developed as a stand-alone product that would then serve anyone wanting to send automated emails to a subscriber list at the best time, even if they are using other providers.
- **Figma** — Figma, a vector graphics editor and prototyping tool, doesn't have good support for iPads, so Matias Martinez built an app called Figurative³¹ which allows people to run Figma on iPads. His very first version already has a 4.3/5 rating on the Apple App Store. Another element that could potentially be extracted from Figma is their Version History feature, that allows you to view and restore earlier versions of a file, but which is only available for free for 30 days. There might be an opportunity to build an external

version control tool that provides an even better experience or value.

- **SoundCloud** – SoundCloud, a music distribution and sharing site, discontinued their macOS due to limited resources and focused on their iOS and web apps. Dennis Oberhoff saw an opportunity here and developed DaftCloud³², a new independent app. For \$10, it provides a super slick interface for SoundCloud on macOS.
- **Reddit** — Reddit is probably the biggest web content rating and discussion website. In his article, “The Guide to Unbundling Reddit,” Greg Isenberg gives some examples³³ of companies that leverage big communities on Reddit (also known as subreddits) and build a business out of it:
 - Supergreat app – A website with user-generated beauty products and makeup reviews for the beauty community (replacing *r/beauty* subreddit).
 - Goodreads – A catalog of book reviews and discussions for the reader community (replacing *r/books* subreddit).

It seems like it's a good technique to find subreddits where users are creating content of any kind. There is a public list of subreddits you can explore and see what communities are popular at redditlist.com.

#10: Data sets

Many governments, municipalities, public bodies, and even corporations open some of their data to the public to let them build services around it. Governments don't always have the resources to build these services themselves and, by allowing everyone the opportunity to get involved, they save money and time while still allowing for innovation and problem solving using the public data.

Here are some examples of the areas in which the UK government gives away data:

- Business and economy — small businesses, industry, imports, exports and trade
- Crime and justice — courts, police, prisons, offenders, borders and immigration
- Defense — armed forces, health and safety, search and rescue
- Education — students, training, qualifications and the National Curriculum
- Environment — weather, flooding, rivers, air quality, geology and agriculture
- Government — staff numbers and pay, local counselors and department business plans
- Government spending
- Health — smoking, drugs, alcohol, medicine performance and hospitals
- Mapping — addresses, boundaries, land ownership, aerial photographs, seabed and land terrain

- Society — employment, benefits, household finances, poverty and population
- Towns and cities — housing, urban planning, leisure, waste and energy, consumption
- Transport — airports, roads, freight, electric vehicles, parking, buses and footpaths

Step 1: Explore data sets

Here are some places you could find open data:

- Data.gov.uk — data from the UK government (from the examples above)
- Data.gov — data from the U.S. government
- Data.europa.eu — data from the European Union. This data set is useful for comparisons, since it includes data sets about different European countries in a single, consistent format.
- Movement.uber.com — open data from Uber about travel times across cities, speeds across cities, and Uber bike activity
- Daten.berlin.de — open data about Berlin

The screenshot shows the data.gov.uk homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Publish your data', 'Documentation', and 'Support'. A 'BETA' badge with the text 'This is a new service - your [feedback](#) will help us to improve it.' is visible. Below the navigation is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon. The main content area is titled 'Find open data' and has a subtitle: 'Find data published by central government, local authorities and public bodies to help you build products and services'. There are several categories listed in a grid:

Business and economy	Environment	Mapping
Small businesses, industry, imports, exports and trade	Weather, flooding, rivers, air quality, geology and agriculture	Addresses, boundaries, land ownership, aerial photographs, seabed and land terrain
Crime and justice	Government	Society
Courts, police, prison, offenders, borders and immigration	Staff numbers and pay, local councillors and department business plans	Employment, benefits, household finances, poverty and population
Defence	Government spending	Towns and cities
Armed forces, health and safety, search and rescue	Includes all payments by government departments over £25,000	Includes housing, urban planning, leisure, waste and energy, consumption
Education	Health	Transport
Students, training, qualifications and the National Curriculum	Includes smoking, drugs, alcohol, medicine performance and hospitals	Airports, roads, freight, electric vehicles, parking, buses and footpaths

At the bottom of the page, there's a footer with links for 'About', 'Accessibility', 'Cookies', 'Privacy', 'Terms and conditions', and 'Support'. It also mentions 'Built by the Government Digital Service' and the 'Open Government Licence v3.0'. The Royal Coat of Arms is displayed, along with the text '© Crown copyright'.

Figure 10.1 The data.gov.uk homepage providing open data to the public

Step 2: Find audiences who will benefit from it

The first thing you could do with the data is to make it more accessible. There is a good chance that governments don't have the resources to do this themselves. Even more value can be provided when several data sets are combined to reveal more interesting insights. Think of audiences that might benefit from such data or insights, what trends it could serve, and what problems it would solve. Make sure to check if it could be relevant for your Audience List.

Step 3: Provide the data to the audience

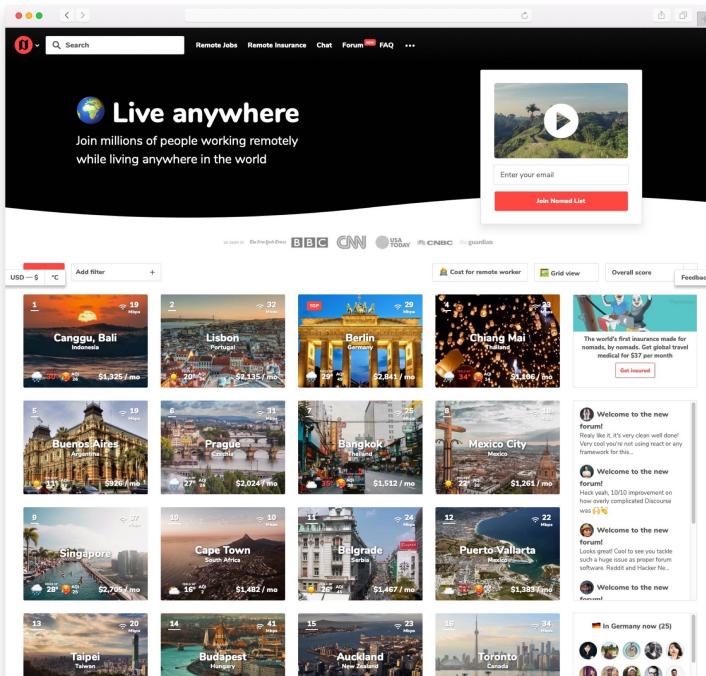


Figure 10.2 Nomad List provides rankings on how attractive different cities for remote work by consolidating opened data

One of the products that was built this way is Nomad List (nomadlist.com). The website uses public data sets from the UN, the WHO, the IMF, and the World Bank for things like demographic and healthcare information, as well as public APIs for things like weather, air quality, and traffic density. Nomad List uses this data to rank how attractive cities are for remote work. It currently has about one million page views per month and more than \$300,000 in yearly revenue.³⁴

Here are some other examples of ideas that could emerge

from combining data sets and making them accessible to specific audiences:

- *Cycling-friendly city navigation* — Most of the navigation apps are heavily oriented for either car commutes or public transportation. If you collected data about bike lanes, air pollution, bike accidents, and bike theft across the city, you could create a bike-friendly navigation service.
- *Location rankings for people looking to rent a space long-term or Airbnb short-term* — It might require a lot of research to understand how attractive a specific area in a city is for one's criteria, especially for a visitor. You could create a ranking with multiple layers for how quiet, interesting, trendy, or kid-friendly areas are, helping people to assess how much it fits their preferences. By combining the data about construction sites, nearby schools, parks, coffee shops, and Foursquare ratings of nearby restaurants, etc., you could make it quick and easy to get an accurate impression of the location of a rental.
- *Optimal delivery area calculation for restaurants* — You could create a service that helps restaurants to define which areas it makes sense to add their delivery service to. You would perhaps have to analyze distance, population density, socio-economic level, and how likely it is that people will order from this area.

P A R T 3 : F I N D S I G N A L S

In the next four techniques we're going to look at different sources showing us problems we could base a product around. More specifically, we're going to find opportunities through your own assumptions, web search, scientific research, and market trends.

- #11: Web search analysis
- #12: Identifying your audience's problems
- #13: Selling pickaxes to gold miners
- #14: Scientific research

#11: Web search analysis

This technique is similar to the Scientific research technique (#14). While in scientific research the signal we're tapping into is the direction of cutting-edge investigations into the world around us, here the signal is the public consciousness. More specifically, the searches people are already doing in search engines. It's a great way to validate the demand and interest around specific problems.

Step 1: Use tools to analyze the most common search engine questions

Go to answerthepublic.com. This website analyzes the autocomplete data from search engines like Google and provides lists of such searches. It means that the results you'll see are lists of frequent searches using your keywords.

Originally this product was made to provide ideas to marketers for creating content that would bring traffic via search engines. But it can also be used for finding product ideas.

Here are two other tools with similar functionality: keywordtool.io and keysearch.co/tools/brainstorm-niche-ideas. These provide results from other interesting sources such as YouTube, Amazon, eBay, Instagram, Play Store, Twitter, etc.

Step 2: Search for the topics relevant to your Audience List

We're going to use the same approach as in the scientific research technique. Search for topics relevant to your

audience, for example, “remote work” for remote employees.

Audience	Search keywords
People with back pain	<i>Back pain, back muscle strain</i>
Remote employees	<i>Remote work, productivity, home office</i>
Independent book writers	<i>Self-publishing</i>
Vegans	<i>Veganism, plant-based diet</i>

Step 3: Find problems that people are looking to solve

In the results, you’ll see problems people are looking to solve or solutions they are searching for. For example, a search for “remote work” will return:

- “*Remote work agreement*” — The legislation around remote work isn’t straightforward for employees or companies. It’s an opportunity to build a consultancy or templates that will help to solve this problem for both audiences.
- “*Remote work taxes*” — Again, this is a complex area of knowledge that remote workers and those employing them have to get to grips with. Expert guidance could save both sides a lot of money and trouble. People would be happy to pay for a product or consultation helping them to get these issues in order to avoid regulatory problems.

- “*Remote work agency*” — There is an opportunity here to build a head-hunting agency specializing in finding remote employees. You could find a niche within this market and specialize in hunting only designers or experienced executives.
- “*Remote work podcast*” — Apparently, since remote work is still new, people are hungry to learn more about it. Creating a podcast could be a stand-alone project if it were monetized, or a way to build an audience and community to whom you could market your future products.

 CANVAS INCLUDED

#12: Identifying your audience's problems

This is a very straightforward technique that might sound trivial. However, entrepreneurs might not always take the time to sit down, do the research, and implement it.

Step 1: Put your Audience List in a table

We want to create a table with three columns. In the first column we want to list your audiences:

Audience	Problems	Product Ideas
Co-working tenants		
Self-published authors		
Cyclists		

Step 2: Explore the problems they encounter

In the second column, we want to list the problems they might encounter. We're going to use two sources to define their problems:

- **Your assumptions** (which you'll obviously have to validate) — use your experience or knowledge to list problems this audience is dealing with.
- **Google** — start with googling “why [activity] is bad”.

With cycling you could search for: “why cycling is bad...” and see what problems are flagged up on Google when it autocompletes the rest of the sentence. With this technique, you receive an immediate glimpse into the problems people are having and researching; it quickly shows you what problems your audience is aware of.

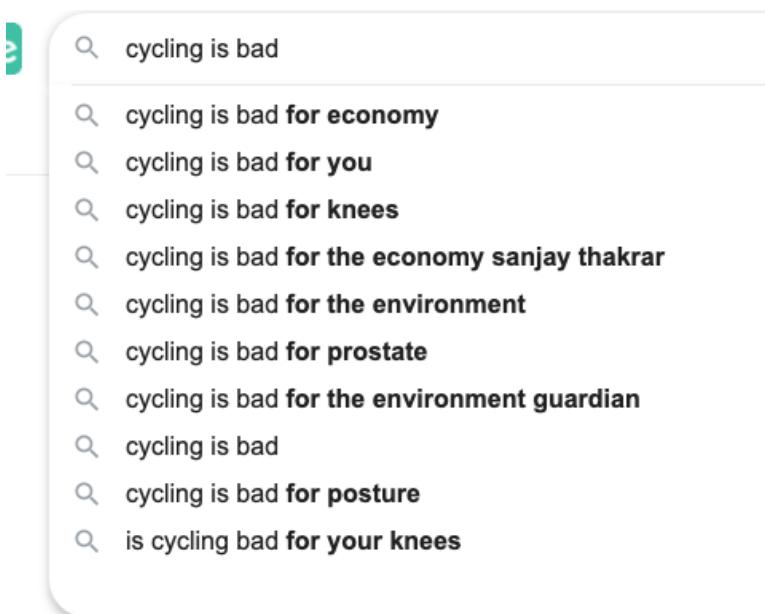


Figure 12.1 Google autocompletes your sentence, allowing you to discover what problems each audience segment is researching

For example, cycling feels like a healthy activity, overall. However, googling “cycling is bad” educated me on an issue I wasn’t aware of before — that cycling might be harmful³⁵ to your health due to inhalation of carbon monoxide and ozone. Additional problems that cyclists encounter, that I would assume from my experience, are road safety and bike theft.

Step 3: List ideas to solve these problems

Now we want to fill out the last column and think of products that might be able to solve these problems. Consider if it should be a digital or a physical product. If it's digital, try leveraging different platforms that are most relevant for such a solution i.e. smartwatch, smartphone, tablet, desktop, laptop, TV, virtual reality headset, etc.

Here's an example of a table that I completed in order to generate ideas:

Audience	Problems	Product Ideas
Self-published authors	<i>Improving book rating on Amazon</i>	Create embeddable rating system into e-books. Allow authors to add a suggestion to rate the book from one to five stars at the end of the PDF or ePub file. If the reader rates it as five stars, forward them to Amazon, asking them to leave a review. If the review is less than five stars, provide a link to a form asking what they didn't like (similar to what many mobile apps are doing today).

GENERATING PRODUCT IDEAS

	<i>Expand your book's reach</i>	Many libraries accept book purchase requests from library members. Build a service that authors could embed on their website through which readers could request the book from their local library. This is especially useful for student audiences who might not otherwise be able to afford to buy the book.
Open space co-working tenants	<i>Can't leave belongings overnight (like monitor, keyboard, bag).</i>	B2B: Build out-of-the-box lockers co-working spaces can easily install for members and charge for on a day rate, creating a new differentiator or revenue driver.

#13: Selling pickaxes to gold miners

“You can mine for gold or you can sell pickaxes.’ This is of course an allusion to the California Gold Rush where some of the most successful business people such as Levi Strauss and Samuel Brannan didn’t mine for gold themselves but instead sold supplies to miners – wheelbarrows, tents, jeans, pickaxes, etc. Mining for gold was the more glamorous path but actually turned out, in aggregate, to be a worse return on capital and labor than selling supplies.” – Chris Dixon, general partner at Andreessen Horowitz³⁶

When you see a trend emerging, your first instinct might be to jump right into it. Often, however, a better strategy is to serve the people or businesses who are part of the trend; get to selling the pickaxes rather than mining the gold.

Step 1: List trends

Timing in utilizing trends could be a critical factor. For example, gold miners will be happy to pay for the pickaxes that will help them to get ahead of the curve. In addition, if the trend is new, there’s a chance there’s not much competition for pickaxes, so the market you’re going to operate in won’t be saturated.

If you’re not sure what the emerging trends are right now, here are three resources to help you:

GENERATING PRODUCT IDEAS

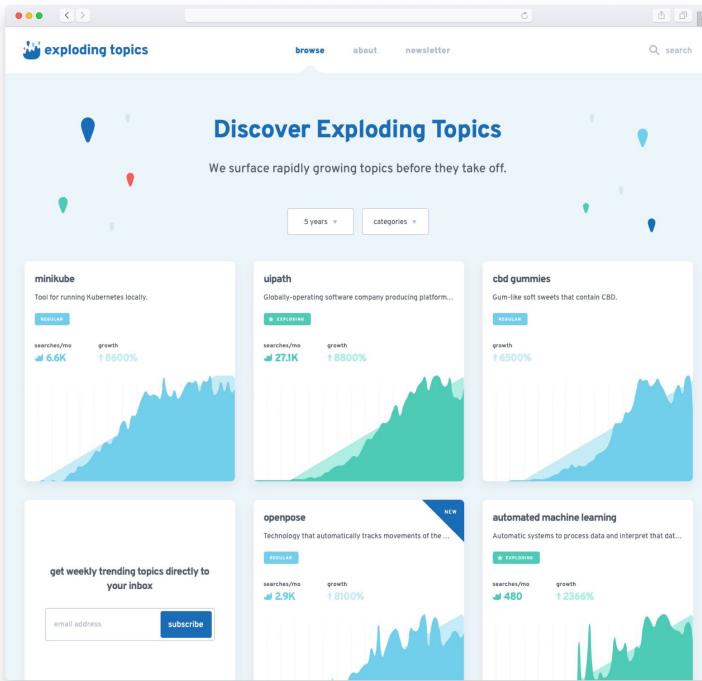


Figure 13.1 List of trends at explodingtopics.com

- TrendHunter.com
- Explodingtopics.com
- Trends.co (this requires a paid subscription, but it is a high-quality, weekly analysis of opportunities that may be highly beneficial).

To make them more relevant and interesting for you, you could filter them to leave only trends that:

- you'd enjoy serving.
- you're part of.
- are pertinent to your Audience List.

Step 2: Find opportunities to serve the participants in the trend

A good example of this approach that Nathan Latka gives in his book, *How to Be a Capitalist Without Any Capital*, is not to try and catch the trend of food deliveries or to compete with BlueApron or HelloFresh, but to look for opportunities to serve these companies. Onfleet (onfleet.com) are doing exactly that by providing a last-mile delivery management system for customers like HelloFresh, Meadow, and Imperfect Food. They had revenue of \$4.8m in 2019³⁷.

Similarly, California-based Packed (packedpkg.com) looked at the exploding market for newly legal cannabis and decided to serve it by providing high-quality packaging for cannabis brands. They created packaging for flowers, concentrates, cartridges, edibles, and pre-rolls and have worked with the top-selling cannabis brands in the United States.

Podcasts are becoming big business and there are companies who recognized this trend and capitalized on it, not by making podcasts themselves but by providing tools for those who do. Jon Buda and Justin Jackson built Transistor.fm, a set of analytics and distribution tools for podcasts, with clients like Basecamp, Kickstarter, and Alexis Ohanian (co-founder of Reddit). Another company in this field is Supercast, who help podcasters to easily create paid podcasts and monetize their work. In just six months they processed millions of dollars for their clients while being in beta and with only about 10 customers³⁸.

#14: Scientific research

Research provides us with insight and new knowledge about known problems or helps us to discover new ones. In addition, ideas that are found through this technique will already have a scientific basis which provides you with a reliable foundation and validation that the problem is real.

In this technique we're going to leverage the existing knowledge and insights created by scientists to find problems relevant to the Audience List.

Step 1: Go to scientific research aggregators

Here are some free research aggregators you could use:

- sciencedirect.com
- researchgate.net
- sciencedaily.com
- jstor.org
- scholar.google.com

Step 2: Search for the topics relevant to your audiences

Use the Audience List you've defined. Search for the topics related to the audiences you've outlined. Here are some examples:

Audience	Search keywords
People with back pain	<i>Back pain, back muscle strain</i>

Remote employees	<i>Remote work, productivity, home office</i>
Independent book writers	<i>Self-publishing</i>
Vegans	<i>Veganism, plant-based diet</i>

Depending on how strict you are on working on problems specific to your audience, you could also explore problems in aggregators categories that are not necessarily focused on your Audience List, such as public health³⁹.

Another method is to go to one of the research aggregators and see if there are issues that resonate with you on the homepage and, in this way, find out about industries or problems you weren't aware of.

Step 3: Solve problems exposed in the research

Here are some problems I've found via research, and the product ideas I generated to solve them:

How air quality affects productivity

Searching on the topic of productivity led me to research exploring⁴⁰ the negative effect CO₂ levels have on human cognitive skills. High CO₂ levels in the office or home can decrease some areas of cognitive performance by 50%. People join co-working spaces to be more productive and employers try to squeeze every drop of productivity from their employees by providing them with snacks, sugar, coffee, energy drinks, etc. But most end up overlooking the air quality of a working

space that might reduce productivity by half.



Figure 14.1 Producteeve: a potential new product to measure air quality

Here, you could build a service that measures indoor CO₂ levels, provides a tailored report on the results, and then sells equipment to improve it. The service could offer a \$29 air quality measurement kit with prepaid return shipping. Based on these measurements, the service would produce a report on the air quality and recommendations to improve it.

Another potential product could be a resource aggregating the indoor air quality measurements in different co-working spaces, providing tenants with air quality metrics when they choose an office. Such a service could be monetized by generating leads for co-working spaces (for example, WeWork used to pay 10% of a referral's monthly rent for a year).

How noise affects productivity



Figure 14.2 A noise measurement app sitting in the macOS menu bar

Research shows how noise affects productivity⁴¹ (as well as creativity levels⁴², and even health⁴³). To help people mitigate its effects in different environments like the office or a co-working space, in a coffee shop, or at home, you could build an app to measure, track, and analyze noise levels.

Such an app could show when the noise level or noise type is suboptimal, so the user can move to another space. It could provide a weekly or monthly summary insight, for example: “The co-working space has the best noise levels in the morning, and home working is best in the afternoons.” You could also aggregate the data to provide a list of co-working spaces and coffee shops with optimal noise levels and times.

The impact of vegetables on children's health

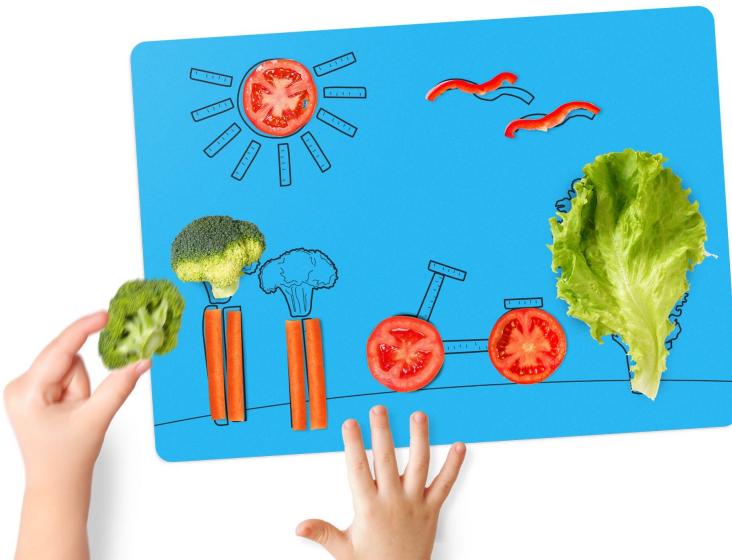


Figure 14.3 VeggieMat: an interactive product that encourages children to eat vegetables

While researching an unrelated product I was working on, I came across a study exploring how to make children eat more vegetables. I wasn't aware of the problem at the time, so I did some research to understand why it was so important. It turns out that increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, just in the US, could save 100,000 lives and \$17 billion in health care costs, yearly⁴⁴. The food habits that children develop between ages two and three were strongly linked with their diet preferences in adulthood, so it's a time period that has a significant impact on people's health over their lifetime.

This original research⁴⁵ consolidated tens of studies exploring different approaches to making children eat more

vegetables. I decided to see if I could combine several of their conclusions into one product to increase the chances of improving their intake. I ended up using four studies which claimed that children are more likely to eat vegetables when: they are involved in the food preparation; they have six colors on their plate; they have tactile contact with food; and the food looks visually interesting and appealing.

This is how my product, an interactive placemat called VeggieMat, was born. Children would use it as a plate, combining food slices to create interesting visuals, and eat them afterwards or during the activity. Parents who used VeggieMat with their children said they would now eat vegetables they never ate before and that it helped them to start a dialogue with them on the importance of the vegetables.

P A R T 4 : M O D E L

The last three techniques require more time than the others, but they're also very likely to help you generate a list of ideas. We're going to find opportunities by evaluating how different business types could be applied to your audiences.

#15: Business model patterns

#16: Analyzing common goals

#17: Product models

 CANVAS INCLUDED

#15: Business model patterns

This technique of exploring the opportunities in business model patterns is particularly suited to company employees looking for new and innovative ideas for their organization: for example, new product lines, revenue streams, strategies, or monetization methods.

We're going to use a list of business model patterns and find intersections with our Audience List to find product opportunities.

Step 1: List business models patterns

A business model pattern is a component that can be used or combined to create business models (a business model is the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value).

You can find lists of business models and patterns at these resources:

- Business Model Navigator (businessmodelnavigator.com)
- Simplicable (simplicable.com/new/business-models)

For our purposes, the exact definition of a business model or business model pattern doesn't have to be strict, since our goal is only to spark connections and generate new ideas. Below I've prepared a list of some of the business models patterns I've researched to kick this process off:

- **Add-on** — providing additional services or products in

addition to the core product for an additional fee.
(EasyJet, Booking.com)

- **Advertising** — helping businesses to promote their services to potential customers. (*Google Ads, Taboola, BuySellAds*)
- **Access over ownership** — providing customers with the use of a product without buying it. (*BlaBlaCar, Rentuu*)
- **Brand trust production** — helping businesses to produce, collect and keep positive online reviews, testimonials, and case studies, etc. (*Yotpo, Trustpilot, Stamped.io*)
- **Certification and compliance** — providing businesses or individuals with proof of being compliant with a certain standard. (*FSC®, LEED, Microsoft Certified*)
- **Community building** — building a network of people that provide value by their very existence and allowing network members to receive value from each other. Potentially provides extra paid services. (*Nextdoor, Product Hunt, Flickr*)
- **Customer loyalty** — helping to retain customers by rewarding or providing extra value in return for loyalty. (*JetBlue, Marriott International*)
- **Direct-to-consumer** — selling consumer goods directly to customers, bypassing third-party retailers, wholesalers, or distributors (*Casper, Everlane, AWAY*)
- **Disintermediation** — providing services by cutting out the middleman (*Alibaba, Spotify for artists*)
- **eCommerce** — bringing goods sold offline, online.
- **Experience** — providing a remarkable experience that

didn't exist or wasn't available to the target audience before. (*Virgin Airlines, Tomorrowland, Disney World*)

- **Embedded social enterprises** — embedding a commitment to social good in for-profit activities. (*Toms, Boxed Water*)
- **Flat fee** — providing services that would typically depend on usage for a fixed price. (*Netflix, Spotify*)
- **Fractional ownership** — allowing customers to self-organize to purchase expensive assets (real estate, cars, aircraft) together. It is similar to renting instead of buying but, in this case, customers own part of the asset. (*NetJets*)
- **High-quality content** — producing premium, high-quality content and selling access to it. (*Masterclass, Glo*)
- **Integrator** — combining several components (products) into a new entity, providing new value by leveraging the collective ability.
- **Lower barriers to entry** — making a product that used to be very exclusive accessible to the masses. (*Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing*)
- **Lead generation** — collecting and selling the contacts of customers who are potentially interested in a service or product to parties providing this product.
(*comparethemarket.com, confused.com*)
- **Long-tail** — focusing on selling a low volume of many niche products rather than a few best sellers. (*Amazon, Google Search, Spotify*)
- **Lock-in** — building an eco-system which makes it expensive or time-consuming for customers to switch

to competitors' offers. (*Gillette, Apple*)

- **Luxury experience** — providing short-term access to something very expensive that is normally out of financial reach, for a fee (like supercars). (*PrivateFly, Sailo*)
- **Marketplace** — creating a connection between two parties providing supply and demand for a certain need. (*eBay, Airbnb, Etsy*)
- **On-demand** — making products and services easily accessible and immediately available, where and when they're needed. (*Uber, Task Rabbit*)
- **Peer-to-peer** — creating an infrastructure for individuals to provide goods and services that are normally provided by companies. (*Airbnb, eBay, Lyft*)
- **Pay-as-you-go** — providing products on a pay-per-use/consumption basis. (*Zipcar, Breather*)
- **Research** — providing companies and individuals with insights. (*Accenture, Bloomberg, Gartner*)
- **Referral** — providing customers with tools to recommend the product in order to acquire more customers. Customers are incentivized by receiving a cut from the sale. (*WeWork, Uber*)
- **Rent instead of buy** — providing access to products that normally have to be purchased. (*car2go, Netflix*)
- **Spare change use** — allowing customers to use the leftover change from everyday purchases or online shopping. (*Acorns, Moneybox, Mylo*)
- **Subscription** — providing access to a product or a service on a recurring basis. (*Netflix, Dollar Shave Club*,

HelloFresh)

- **White label** — producing goods that could be distributed by others under their brand. (*Teespring, Printful*)

Step 2: Build a matrix using your Audience List

As an example, here are the audiences that I might want to target:

- Co-working tenants
- The sustainability conscious
- Cyclists
- Indie hackers
- People with back pain
- Remote employees
- Yoga teachers

Step 3: Find product ideas in the intersections

Now we want to explore the intersections between the business model patterns and the audiences. However, this is just a strategy to generate creative thinking; if looking at the business model patterns leads you to an unrelated idea, feel free to pursue it.

Here are some ideas I came up with by looking at the intersections:

- *People with back pain + subscription* — We could create a subscription-based model for a pain relief service that takes advantage of already existing offers and consolidates them. The service could provide consultations with a physiotherapist or trainer, and access to dedicated activities that aim to help the

condition such as yoga, swimming, and massage.

- *People with back pain + rent instead of buy* — 1) We could create a rentable kit of appliances for relief of back pain. Amazon is full of pain relief products, some of which are quite expensive. Different methods work for different people, so being able to try various approaches could be a powerful unique selling point. Besides, buying costly appliances could be especially wasteful for people with temporary pain who might use the device just a few times. 2) Back pain is one of the most common reasons for work absence, so another option is to offer such kits to companies who could provide them to employees and, as a result, save money and improve employee well-being.
- *Co-working tenants + fractional ownership* — We could create a model allowing solopreneurs and freelancers to buy small parts of a co-working space. By paying for ownership in monthly instalments, it would provide a manageable financial burden similar to a rent payment. In this way, they can have access to space and also acquire part of an asset as an investment.
- *The sustainability conscious + experience* — We could aggregate existing or organize new tours to landfills, recycling centers (paper, plastic bottles, e-waste, compost), and FSC-certified forest facilities, etc. With such a service you could provide a unique product that would be a great source of knowledge and inspiration for our audience but would also make a great gift for consumers who would prefer experiences over material goods.

- *Cyclists + flat fee* — We could create a flat fee, all-inclusive insurance for bicycles, covering repairs and theft.
- *Yoga teachers + disintermediation (removing the middleman)* — We could remove yoga studios as the “middleman” and allow teachers with an existing and loyal community to rent space on-demand for their classes or retreats.

 CANVAS INCLUDED

#16: Analyzing common goals

Using this technique, we're going to search for opportunities according to the common problems, needs and goals of businesses and individuals.

Step 1: Split the Audience List into individuals and businesses

Businesses and individuals have different needs so, for this technique, make sure to split your Audience List into these two categories.

While listing businesses, consider adding ones that serve the individuals in your list. For example, if you have cyclists in your individuals list, think about whether you'd be interested in building products for bike shops who will eventually serve this audience.

Here are the audiences I will work with as an example.

Individuals (B2C):

- The sustainability conscious
- Cyclists
- Co-working tenants
- People with back pain
- Remote employees

Businesses (B2B):

- Airbnb hosts
- Self-published writers

- Gyms
- Night clubs
- Banks
- Remote companies

Step 2: Build an audience/goals matrix

Here are some common goals or motivations that drive individuals, which they are often willing to pay for:

- Compliance with regulations and laws
- Saving money
- Saving time
- Earning more money
- Acquiring experience
- Becoming healthier
- Getting rid of bad habits
- Improving productivity
- Connecting with like-minded people
- Educating themselves
- Increasing security
- Finding a job

Here are some common business goals that companies pursue and which they are often willing to pay for:

- Finding new customers
- Increasing sales
- Increasing average sale size
- Reducing churn
- Increasing leads
- Improving social media engagement
- Increasing customer engagement
- Increasing customer retention

- Increasing customer satisfaction
- Improving customer loyalty
- Reducing expenses and saving money
- Saving time
- Complying with regulations
- Improving operations and efficiency
- Recruiting talent
- Retaining talent
- Improving employee productivity

This is not a full list and you can, of course, drill down further into each of them. Moreover, there will be multiple ways to achieve each of these goals. For example, increasing sales for Etsy sellers could be achieved by:

- Increasing the visitor-to-sale conversion rate.
- Reducing cost per lead by each channel.
- Finding new distribution channels, etc.

Step 3: Find opportunities

Now we need to look at the intersections of our matrix and seek out the problems we would like to tackle. Here are some examples of ideas I came up with when combining the audiences I mentioned above with the goals:

B2C:

- *Remote employees + becoming healthier* — Here you could create a service providing personalized health plans for people working from home, and particularly for those working in front of a computer for many hours a day. It would include guidance on physical exercise,

ergonomics improvement, eye exercises, etc., and could be sold to companies as a B2B product, positioned as a perk to employees. Such a wellness evaluation could occur as part of the onboarding process for new employees.

- *The sustainability conscious + education* — Here you could build a MasterClass-level content around sustainability, entitled: From One to Zero. It could cover different aspects of lifestyle such as shopping, cooking, and travel, educating us on how to take concrete steps toward a more eco-friendly approach.

B2B:

- *Remote companies + retaining talent* — Here you could create a service helping companies to build career growth plans for employees. Such a product could be positioned by companies as a perk and make them more desirable as an employer. Alternatively, you could sell these directly to individuals interested in having a bespoke plan and strategy designed to help them build a fulfilling career.
- *Airbnb hosts + increasing customer satisfaction / increasing average sale size* — Here you could create a service allowing Airbnb hosts to ask guests about their preferences or special requests in advance. It would help hosts to improve the experience and potentially provide opportunities for upselling additional services.
- *Independent writers + increasing social media engagement* — Here you could help authors to take their book content and redistribute it in smaller pieces to social

media (i.e. Twitter, Instagram). By building a pipeline of content for them to spread their message via different channels you could boost their profile and potentially increase sales.

 CANVAS INCLUDED

#17: Product models

There are product types that work in different verticals. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems fulfil a need that exists in different industries. As a result, CRM systems exist for numerous niches: for car dealerships, catering businesses, boutique hotels, construction companies, real estate agents, etc.

At a certain point, I started to notice products with similar functions in different industries. I began to write these patterns down and called them “product models”; they helped me to generate product ideas for different niches.

In addition, products built using product models are easier to communicate to customers. They are more likely to absorb and understand the model when they’re already familiar with the concept from seeing it in other industries. They may explain a product to themselves in shorthand as: “It’s like Uber, but for hairdressers,” or, “It’s like Google Analytics for a podcast.”

Step 1: List product models

A product model is a product concept that works in different disciplines or industries. When seeking new product ideas, they’re appealing because we can bring the value of an existing product from one audience to another.

The process is similar to what we did in the cross-industry product innovation technique. Although here we also need to recognize the unique categories that the products fall into,

which I call product models.

I invite you to start noticing these models across products and writing them down. To discover the models yourself, take some interesting products, zoom out, and consider if there are common principles to the product type that work in other industries as well.

Here are some of the product models I've written down for myself; feel free to use them. Examine if these products exist for your niches and, if not, consider pursuing them:

DIY kits

DIY kits are fun. They are great gifts, provide an activity with friends, family, and children, and a way to learn to craft something yourself. It also gives you more control over what's going inside products that you're consuming.

It works in different verticals for children and adults but the possibilities are endless. There are DIY kits for making beer, toothpaste, cosmetics, gin, kombucha, a ukulele, candles, etc.

Analytics tools

A great way to improve or manage something more effectively, is to track and analyze your progress in order to receive tailored insights. It is true both for individuals (Fitbit for physical activity, Sleep Score for sleep, the Flo app for period tracking, etc.) and for companies (Mixpanel for web performance, OutMatch for HR, Transistor.fm for podcasts).

Version control and collaboration tools

Software developers, designers, and video editors often work on projects that are being constantly changed and

updated for months or years. Sometimes these processes include multiple co-workers, departments, or even external people like clients or partners working on the same project (and files). Many professional niches already have solutions that allow them to achieve smooth version control, collaboration, and handover of such projects. For code it's GitHub; for design it's Abstract and InVision; for video it's Frame.io.

Planners

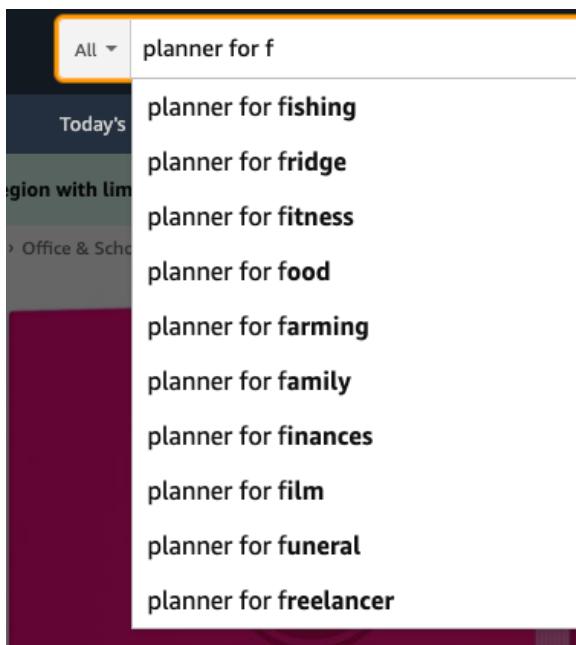


Figure 17.1 Search autocomplete on Amazon for “planner”

Planners are a big industry (\$342.7m in 2016⁴⁶). The Kickstarter campaign for the SELF Journal planner received \$322,000. If you type planner into the Amazon search bar,

autocomplete provides a long list of planner types. For the letter “F” there are planners for farmers, fitness, finances, food, funerals, and fishing, etc. Many of these searches might not be hugely popular, but this also means they may not have much competition.

An interesting idea could be taking board templates for Trello, Notion, and Airtable and converting them to planners.

Comparison websites and tools

Some decisions require a lot of research and comparison. For example, choosing a provider for car insurance, mortgage, home or office internet, bank accounts, health insurance, etc. Products consolidating information from different providers and simplifying choices provide huge value and have immediate monetization opportunities through referrals and lead-generation for the providers. Comparethemarket.com, confused.com, and moneysupermarket.com are popular examples of comparison websites.

Check24, a company making such comparisons in multiple areas of services and conducting consumer reports in Germany, had revenues of €500m in 2015/16⁴⁷.

Sustainable alternatives

In 2015, 66% of millennials said they’d be willing to pay more for products and services that came from companies that were committed to positive social and environmental impacts, up from 55% in 2014, and 50% in 2013.⁴⁸

You can see this demand for more sustainable products, even on Amazon; many search keywords are often combined with the word “sustainable.” Thus, producing almost any product that is made with more sustainable materials, with a

transparent supply chain, and a positive social and environmental impact, provides an immediate competitive advantage.

Curation products

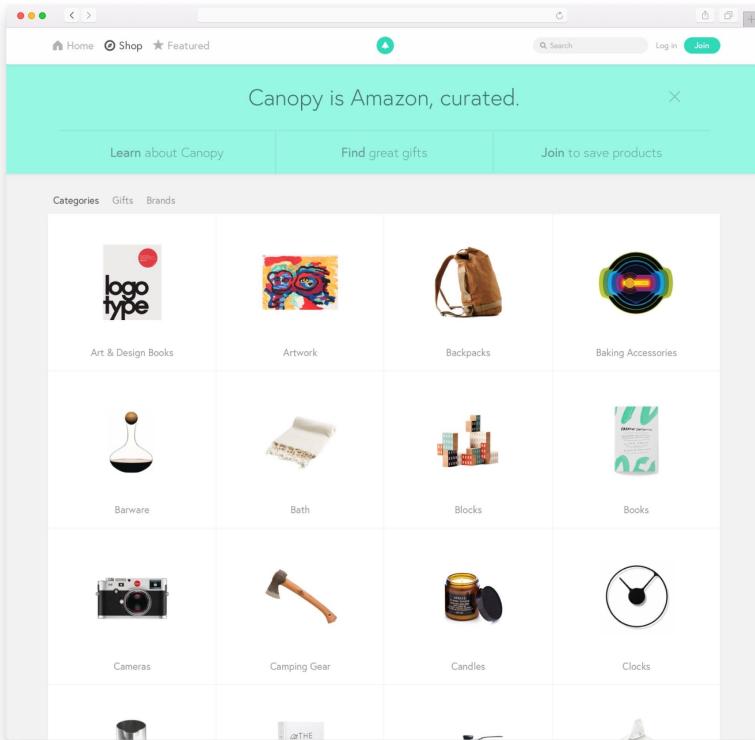


Figure 17.2 canopy.co, a website curating well-designed products from Amazon

We're living in an era of abundance; for a small fee, anyone can get access to most music, TV shows, or products in the world. It leads to decision paralysis; when we have all the options available to us, it becomes harder to make a decision and often leads to not taking any decision at all.

That's why I find curated resources so powerful. They filter out the noise and give me what I want. For example, clothing boutiques like Voo Store in Berlin⁴⁹ are doing it for clothes; Canopy.co is a website with curated products from Amazon that creates a catalog of really well-designed products; and Atlas Obscura is doing it for travel and adventure spots.

The algorithms are not necessarily doing this perfectly for everything yet, especially for niche products, and this is where there are opportunities.

From digital to physical

When you bring digital elements to the physical world, they often look fresh and unexpected. They're mostly products that are fun rather than functional. Here are some examples of bringing elements of the digital world to the physical:

- Emoji Masks is a fun company that produces physical emoji masks, begun in 2014. It generated revenue of more than \$50,000 in its first 60 days.
- Jessica Hische created⁵⁰ a “do not disturb” mode for real life. She designed a beautiful sign saying, “In Code Mode,” that can be hung on a wall and which lights up when the user doesn’t want to be disturbed.

Review websites

Websites or YouTube channels specializing in in-depth reviews of products are in demand. If you’re specializing in a specific niche, it could be a great product to build to serve that. Review websites are easy to start and have an immediate monetization strategy via referrals.

WIRECUTTER is a product review website that was sold to *The*

New York Times for more than \$30m. According to reports, mattress review website owners are often millionaires.⁵¹

Productize bureaucratic or legal services

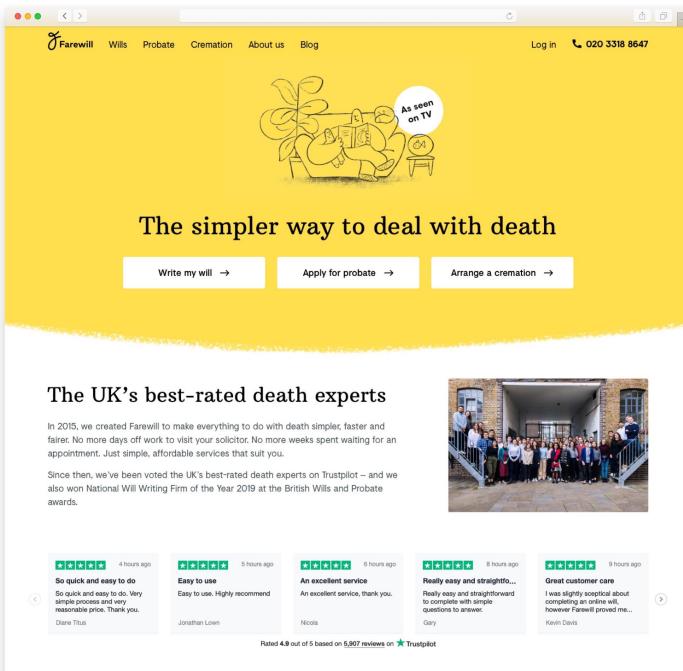


Figure 17.3 Homepage of Farewill, a service providing death-related services in the UK

Bureaucratic processes are often perceived by many as a waste of time and can frequently be automated. It is especially true of legal services, which are avoided because of the seeming complexity, hassle, and price.

However, many such processes are quite standard. They are relatively light on customization needed, and can be easily automated. There is thus a huge opportunity for companies to

simplify such processes. Here are a few examples:

- AirHelp is making it easy to claim compensation for flight delays or cancellation from airline companies.
- LetterDash connects customers with local attorneys who can send their cease and desist or demand letters.
- Farewill creates an easy interface for death-related services i.e. writing a will, arranging cremation, or applying for probate.
- Taxfix is making tax returns for employees easy in the EU.

Step 2: Create a matrix combining product models and your Audience List

Identify segments you want to focus on from your Audience List, for example:

- Co-working tenants
- Co-working spaces
- The sustainability conscious
- Airbnb hosts
- People with back and neck pain
- Cyclists
- Remote workers
- Gyms

Step 3: Look for opportunities

Here are some ideas that the combinations of the inputs above led me to. As always, some are more interesting than others, but all of them would need validation:

- *Co-working tenants + comparison tools* — Here, you could create a website consolidating co-working spaces in your country or city. It should allow comparison between co-working spaces based on different factors (price, location, size, etc.), as well as adding additional information layers like food options, transportation, accumulative commute time, etc.
- *Cyclers + curation* — You could create a route builder for cyclists. It would allow them to find trips fitting their preferences like landscape type (city, nature, mountains, water), length, duration, complexity, etc.
- *Gyms + DIY kits* — You could create prepackaged and premixed ingredients for smoothies and shakes in edible bags so it can be put directly into a blender with water or milk. It could be frozen if it included fresh vegetables or fruits. Otherwise, it would include only dry ingredients.
- *Co-working spaces, Airbnb hosts, gyms + sustainable alternatives* — Consider building an agency helping businesses to become more sustainable in order to attract new customers. Such an agency could prepare a plan, execute it, educate the staff, and produce marketing materials to communicate their new sustainability agenda externally.
- *Cyclists + sustainable alternatives* — This is a good combination because there's probably a significant overlap between people who cycle and those that care about the environment. One option could be to build sustainable cycling appliances; for example, there is no sustainable rain cover for bikes currently available. Most of the bike covers produced today are made of polyester

or nylon. Neither are biodegradable, so they will sit in a landfill for 20–200 years if not recycled properly, and both are sourced from oil.

- *The sustainability conscious + planners* — You could create planners for people who want to get closer to a zero-waste lifestyle. It could include tips and tasks for each week, with a goal to educate and create habits decreasing waste.
- *People with back pain + comparison tools* — back pain is the leading cause of disability, preventing many people from engaging in work. Half of all working Americans admit to having back pain symptoms each year⁵². We could create a resource consolidating and producing high-quality information on back pain treatment, back pain relief, and management. Such a resource would include comparisons of different techniques for reducing back pain, including yoga, physiotherapy, massage techniques, rollers, etc.
- *Remote employees + analytics* — This is not necessarily relevant only to remote employees, but it would be especially beneficial for them. You could build a productivity analytics tool to track work productivity and provide insights on how it could be optimized; for example, which hours are the most productive, how caffeine or power naps affect productivity, and at what times do they seem to work best.

W H E R E T O F I N D M O R E I D E A S

All products are remixes of problems, ideas, and existing products. Creating these remixes is often a process of connecting the dots. To make these connections more likely, we need to increase the pool of dots we can possibly connect. That's why being exposed to ideas, products, and problems is so helpful.

Here's a list of sources that are helpful in exposing yourself to more dots.

Getting exposed to ideas

Here are some resources I find helpful:

- **Crowdsourcing platforms** — Kickstarter and Indiegogo have thousands of innovative ideas being crowdfunded, which may spark our own creative thinking.
- **Trends reports** — These reports recognize and explore new ideas that are emerging and becoming a force in the market. Two resources that come to mind are Trends.co and TrendHunter.com.
- **Business reports** — Reports on specific industries can provide insight into problems. For example, "The 2020 State of Remote Work⁵³", a report by Buffer and AngelList, explores the biggest struggles of remote workers: collaboration and communication, loneliness, not being able to unplug, distractions at home, time

zone differences, etc. All of these problems are potential opportunities for product ideas. One of the websites you can use for such insights is Statista.com.

Interact with people

Besides consuming information from the web, a good way to get exposed to ideas is through people; they can filter a lot of the noise for you and might provide valuable insights:

- **Serial entrepreneurs** — People who have had several businesses are probably very good at coming up with ideas and have plenty of them. Most of them have more ideas than resources and time and usually don't mind sharing some of them.
- **People from “unsexy” industries** – Talk to people in businesses like logistics, trash management, and funeral organizing. These are things that many entrepreneurs would avoid, which probably means that they are underserved in terms of creative solutions and promise opportunities for innovation. People working in these industries could be the key to understanding what problems they are experiencing and what needs to be solved.
- **Meetups** — I'm co-organizing the monthly IndieHackers meetup in Berlin. It's a casual meetup without an agenda, where small business owners (or sometimes aspiring business owners) gather and exchange experiences and ideas. People building their own businesses are solving problems every day and they always have insights on problems, frictions, and opportunities for improvement. These meetups are thus

invaluable for isolating problems, getting feedback on your ideas, and providing a forum for ideation.

Resources that curate problems and ideas

This list includes resources sharing problems or ideas, sorted from most to least useful:

- **Startupsfromthebottom.com/ideas** — Each problem in this collection comes with a short backstory, a monetization strategy, a deep dive, and validation. All ideas are created by the entrepreneur and consultant, Brian Thomas.
- **Ideaswatch.com** — This resource is not maintained, but it allows people to submit business ideas and get feedback. It has a couple of thousand ideas to draw on.
- **Openideo.com** — The IDEO design agency shares challenges to which anyone can submit solutions. You have the opportunity either to join someone in building a solution you feel passionate about or to see a variety of possible solutions to one problem.
- **Probststack.io** — This community allows anyone to submit problems they think need solving. People vote on whether they think the problem has merit which provides validation of need.
- **Requestforproduct.co** — This curates all tweets with a *#requestforproduct* hashtag.
- **Fiveideasaday.com** — This newsletter sends you five product ideas a day. Most of them aren't in-depth and don't even mention the problem they are solving, but they can still be useful for inspiration.

- **Problemoftheday.co** — This website collects and curates tweets starting with the phrase, “Can someone invent...”
- **Ideasareworthless.io** — This website isn’t updated anymore, unfortunately. It allowed users to post product ideas and let others vote for those that resonated with them.

Resources listing existing products

While observing existing products, you can reverse-engineer them to understand what problems they’re solving and attempt to solve them more effectively or in a different way with your product. It’s also a good exercise in learning how to analyze different aspects of business. When looking at products, ask yourself what makes them (un)successful or (un)popular, as well as what challenges and opportunities exist.

- **Producthunt.com** — This is probably the most active website with new (mostly) tech products upvoted by the community daily.
- **Betalist.com** — This is similar to producthunt.com. It’s a community of makers and early adopters showcasing their startups and exchanging feedback.
- **Ycdb.co** — A database of companies that participated in YCombinator.
- **Getlatka.com** — This is a database of top private SaaS companies that can be sorted by industry, team size, revenue, funding, etc.

HOW TO PRIORITIZE IDEAS

After having an idea, your next step would normally be idea validation. The main reason companies fail is because they build products or services people don't want, so the validation step is crucial. To learn exactly how to do that I recommend you read the book, *Validating Product Ideas: Through Lean User Research*, by my ex-colleague, Tomer Sharon.⁵⁴

Although, before you start putting effort into validating one of your product ideas, you want to make sure you proceed with the idea that aligns the most with your values and goals. By doing that, you maximize the chances of building a business that will allow you to have the impact and income that you want.

Each of the ideas in your list will have upsides and downsides. Some may look more financially promising but require initial funding, others will have a big impact but won't align with your own skills and will require hiring staff on day one. None of the ideas will be perfect, but you want to evaluate such trade-offs and be aware of them from the beginning to ensure you pick the optimal path.

I've built a three-step method for prioritizing ideas in order to decide which one I should move forward with.

Step 1: Define your goals

During the ideation process you're already going to be

naturally biased toward your set of goals. But *defining* such goals can help you to do the first filter and make sure that the ideas you proceed with maximize the chances of achieving them. Here are some of the initial aspects you want to evaluate your ideas against.

	WEEKEND PROJECT	BOOTSTRAPPED BUSINESS	MULTIMILLION- DOLLAR COMPANY
Profit	\$	\$\$	\$\$\$\$
Team size	1	2	5
Skills	1	2	5
Funding	\$	\$\$	\$\$\$\$
Time	1	2	3

Figure 18.1 Normally, as a bigger business, you'll require more resources like people, skills, funding, and time. The profit potential will grow accordingly.

The first thing you should define is your **project type**. Decide if you're intending to build a weekend project, a bootstrapped business, or a multimillion-dollar company. In many cases, a side project can become a full-time business later on, so something that starts small can grow in the future. However, you need to decide what your initial plan is. For example, building a plug-in is more likely to be a small project or company, compared to creating a new marketplace which can be scaled quickly and become a big business. It's better to be aware in advance of your current ambitions and choose

ideas accordingly.

Here are some critical aspects of your business that will be affected by the type of project you're building:

- **Team and skills** — Do you want to mostly take advantage of your own skills or would you prefer to work in a team by hiring employees and freelancers, or finding business partners who will have skills you don't have? If your idea is an iPhone app and you happen to be an iOS developer, it could be easy to build it alone, although without a technical background you would have to find a partner, freelancer, or a full-time employee to do the software development.
- **Funding** — What type of funding would you be open to? The range is broad, starting with no funding and building a bootstrapped business. Alternatively, it could be a small business funded by friends and family, or a large project with financing from venture capital.
- **Time** — How much time are you willing to dedicate to this project? Is it a weekend, part-time, or full-time project?
- **Profit goals** — How much money are you aiming to make with this business? How much time can you spend on it until you want or need to start making money?

After defining what type of business you want to build, filter out the ideas that do not fit your current goals. Your goals are likely to change in the future, so these filtered out ideas aren't going to be wasted; you're just putting them aside to focus on ideas that are right for you at this point.

For example, if you're only just starting to build your own products, your strategy might be to launch a couple of small

projects. This way you can practice, learn, and build a revenue stream that can support you while you start working on bigger ideas which might take longer to generate profit.

Step 2: Evaluate personal fit

Now you have a list of ideas that fit the type of business you want to build. While we just evaluated them against more “dry” and practical requirements, we want to make sure it’s a good fit for you personally.

Here are three aspects I evaluate my ideas against:

- **Product/founder fit** - Broadly this considers whether the founder has the skills, time, and passion to build the product. I usually look at it from a more specific angle using a technique that I learned from a successful entrepreneur. I told him about a new business I was planning to start. He suggested I imagine myself working on it a year after launch. More specifically, to imagine a typical day, what tasks I might be doing during the day, and the type of people I would have to spend my time with (customers, partners, and employees). I should ask myself if I enjoy doing these tasks and working with these people. For example, if you’re building an indie iOS app, your day will probably consist of support questions, bug reports, feature requests, and ad performance optimization. Running a website consolidating co-working spaces in your city will mean communicating with sales people and community managers working at co-working companies on a daily basis. Would you enjoy doing that? If your answer is no, it’s a strong indicator that you

should consider removing this idea from your list.

- **What will you regret not building?** - Asking this question helps you to understand which ideas you feel most strongly about, and which you're more likely to continue working on and not giving up. It's a good indicator of which ideas you should prioritize.
- **Special requirements** - You might have other agendas or goals in building your business. It might not be a mandatory condition but something you'd be very happy to implement. I usually mark ideas that have this feature in my list, and they will have an advantage. For me, a special requirement would be involving my parents in my business, and providing them with income and an occupation. For you, it might be supporting a specific community through your business, or serving an audience that is especially important to you.

Step 3: Put the ideas into an impact/effort matrix

Now you're left with a list of ideas that fit the business type you want to build, as well as your personality and values. The final step in idea evaluation is to decide which one will have the biggest impact and require the lowest effort. We're going to put each idea into a decision-making tool – an **impact/effort matrix**.

Each axis will be a combination of several factors:

IMPACT/EFFORT MATRIX

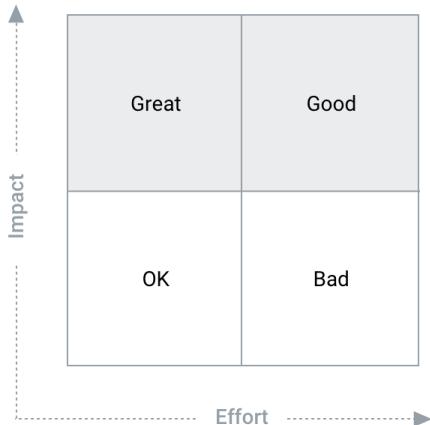


Figure 18.2 An impact/effort matrix, used to evaluate business potential

Impact:

- Reach — How many customers could this product potentially reach?
- Value for customer — How meaningful and satisfying is this solution for the customers?
- Potential revenue — How big is the potential financial gain of this product?

Effort:

- Time — How much time do you need to launch and maintain this product?
- Funding — How much money is needed to launch and maintain this product?

You need to decide how important each of these aspects is to you and how much weight to give them in your assessment. Maybe funding is not a problem for you, so you could mostly take into consideration time factors in the effort axis. If your goal is to create a source of revenue as quickly as possible, you could give this more weight over reach and value for the customer on the impact axis.

Ideally, after putting the ideas onto the matrix, you want to pursue those that are in the “great” or “good” areas which represent big impact potential and low effort.

Matrix use example

Here is how I'd place some of the ideas I mentioned in this book on an impact/effort matrix:

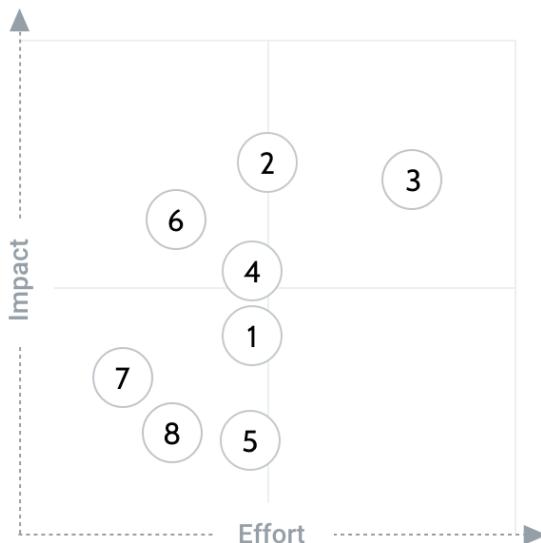


Figure 18.3 Business ideas placed on an impact/effort matrix

1. A browser add-on showing language complexity ratings for books and movies on Amazon, Netflix, etc.
 - *Assuming there is no legal problem with analyzing copyrighted materials for language complexity, a product like this would have medium revenue potential and require medium effort.*
2. A smartphone app for posture tracking to avoid or relieve back pain.
 - *Considering I can't build this myself, such an app would require initial funding from my side in order to pay for app development. Even though the scope of the app is well-defined, there are no products that currently track inclinometer data in the background, so it makes the R&D effort hard to measure; I'd define it as medium at a guess. The potential financial gain could be high considering people are already paying for physical posture trackers like UPRIGHT.*
3. Prepackaged ingredients for healthy smoothies and shakes.
 - *This product probably requires some innovative R&D and relatively complex operations, making the effort high, although it could make healthy nutrition more accessible to many people which could mean high impact.*
4. Air quality evaluation service for offices and homes.
 - *Existing equipment could be used, and operations could be scaled gradually, so the effort is potentially relatively small. Such a product would increase*

people's productivity, so the impact is high, especially when the service is provided to office spaces housing multiple people.

5. Replicating an iOS app for scheduling WhatsApp and SMS messages.
 - *The well-scoped nature of the product makes it relatively low effort, although external development is needed. However, the impact is medium-low because a product solving this problem already exists, even if it's not perfect.*
6. A rentable kit of appliances for back pain relief.
 - *Similar to #4, existing equipment can be utilized and operations can be scaled gradually. It makes the effort relatively small when the possible impact could be high, especially when the service is provided to offices where multiple people are present.*
7. A website aggregating existing and offering new tours on sustainability topics: visiting landfills, recycling centers, sustainable farms, and restaurants.
 - *Such a website could be built relatively quickly with minimal effort, although the impact is quite low compared to other ideas on the list, since such a project is very niche.*
8. Rain covers for bicycles from sustainable materials.
 - *Production could be outsourced to a local producer relatively easily meaning low effort, although the impact is also quite low because it might be too niche an audience.*

After evaluating these ideas and placing them on an

impact/effort matrix, we can see that the optimal ideas that should potentially move forward to validation are #6 and #2.

You can find a link to the canvas for prioritizing your ideas at the end of the book.

F R A M E W O R K C H E A T S H E E T

#1: Solving your own business problems

1. List things that you've worked on.
2. List inefficiencies:
 - *What did you spend a lot of time on?*
 - *What did you spend a lot of money on?*
 - *What processes frustrated you?*
3. Explore intersections to find problems.

#2: Productizing your own life experiences

1. List the life experiences you've acquired.
2. List the frictions you encountered:
 - *What level of research did they require?*
 - *Which experiences required hiring a consultant?*
 - *What mistakes did you make?*
 - *What aspects did you wish someone would have told you about in advance?*
3. Simplify the experience for others.

#3: Insider ideas

1. List the internal processes of organizations with which you're familiar.
2. List the opportunities these organizations didn't pursue.
3. Explore the product ideas that emerge.

#4: Vision-based ideas

1. Define your vision:

- *Bring something positive closer*
- *Move away from something negative*

2. Find the reasons the vision is not a reality:

- Negative — *What causes this problem?*
- Positive — *What prevents it from happening?*

3. List ways of solving these obstacles.

#5: Cross-industry product innovation

1. Make a list of valuable products that:

- people from other industries use.
- you use, or have read about or seen recently.

2. Adjust these products to your industry/audience.

#6: Improve abandoned but useful products

1. Find in demand products with a low rating (less than 3.5 stars), that have a lot of downloads/users but which haven't been updated for a long time:

- *appannie.com*
- *Chrome Store*

2. Build better versions of these products.

#7: Localization of existing solutions

1. List countries, regions, and languages you're familiar with.

2. List products worth replicating that:

- *other people you know find useful.*

- *you use, have read about, or have seen recently.*
3. Bring the product to a new country or language.

#8: Automate marketplace services and products

1. Find automatable services.
2. Build products automating the services.

#9: Product unbundling

1. List products that your audience uses.
2. Analyze the features, platforms, and audiences:
 - *Extractable features*
 - *Unsupported platforms*
 - *Niche audiences*
3. Convert the opportunities to products.

#10: Data sets

1. Explore data sets:
 - *data.gov*
 - *data.gov.uk*
 - *data.europa.eu*
2. Find audiences who will benefit from it.
3. Provide the data to the audience.

#11: Web search analysis

1. Use tools to analyze the most common search engine questions:
 - *answerthepublic.com*
 - *keywordtool.io*

- keysearch.co/tools/brainstorm-niche-ideas
2. Search for the topics relevant to your Audience List.
 3. Find problems that people are looking to solve.

#12: Identifying your audience's problems

Build a table with three columns: Audience, Problems, Solutions

1. Add your Audience List.
2. Explore the problems they encounter.
3. List ideas to solve these problems.

#13: Selling pickaxes to gold miners

1. List trends (pick trends you'd enjoy serving, that you're part of, or that are relevant to your Audience List.)
 - TrendHunter.com
 - Explodingtopics.com
 - Trends.co
2. Find opportunities to serve the *participants* in the trend.

#14: Scientific research

1. Go to scientific research aggregators:
 - sciencedirect.com
 - researchgate.net
 - sciedaily.com
 - jstor.org
2. Search for the topics relevant to your audiences.
3. Solve problems exposed in the research.

#15: Business model patterns

1. List business models patterns:

- *Add-on; advertising; access over ownership; brand trust production; certification and compliance; community building; customer loyalty; direct-to-consumer; disintermediation; eCommerce; experience; embedded social enterprises; flat fee; fractional ownership; high-quality content; integrator; lower barriers to entry; lead generation; long-tail; lock-in; luxury experience; marketplace; peer-to-peer; pay-as-you-go; research; referral; rent instead of buy; spare change use; subscription; white label*

2. Build a matrix using your Audience List.

3. Find product ideas in the intersections.

#16: Analyzing common goals

1. Split the Audience List into individuals and businesses.

2. Build an audience/goals matrix:

- *B2C: Complying with regulations and laws; saving money; saving time; earning more money; acquiring experience; becoming healthier; getting rid of bad habits; improving productivity; connecting with like-minded people; educating themselves; increasing security; finding a job*
- *B2B: Finding new customers; increasing sales; increasing average sale size; reducing churn; increasing leads; improving social media engagement; increasing customer engagement; increasing customer retention; increasing customer satisfaction; improving*

customer loyalty; reducing expenses and saving money; saving time; complying with regulations; improving operations and efficiency; recruiting talent; retaining talent; improving employee productivity

3. Find opportunities.

#17: Product models

1. List product models:

- *DIY kits; analytics tools; version control and collaboration tools; planners; comparison websites and tools; sustainable alternatives; curation products; from digital to physical; review websites; productize bureaucratic or legal services*

2. Create a matrix combining product models and your Audience List.

3. Look for opportunities.

F R A M E W O R K C A N V A S E S

To make it easier to use and practice some of the techniques, I prepared printable canvases for these five approaches:

- #1: Solving your own business problems
- #12: Identifying your audience's problems
- #15: Business model patterns
- #16: Analyzing common goals (B2B + B2C)
- #17: Product models
- How to prioritize ideas

Use the matrices in #15, #16 and #17 to find interesting ideas at the intersections and write down a reference number at these points to identify your idea. Then write down the ideas, numbered accordingly, on a separate sheet of paper, and explore each one in more detail.

You can download the canvases at <https://productideasbook.com/canvas>.

E N D N O T E S

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
List_of_Israeli_companies_quoted_on_the_Nasdaq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Israeli_companies_quoted_on_the_Nasdaq)

² [https://www.statista.com/statistics/1071105/value-of-investments-
by-venture-capital-worldwide-by-key-market/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1071105/value-of-investments-by-venture-capital-worldwide-by-key-market/)

³ [https://seekingalpha.com/article/4151094-how-israel-became-
startup-nation-3rd-companies-on-nasdaq](https://seekingalpha.com/article/4151094-how-israel-became-startup-nation-3rd-companies-on-nasdaq)

⁴ [https://mytefl.com/2018/11/08/8-statistics-that-show-just-how-
big-the-demand-for-tefl-teachers-is/](https://mytefl.com/2018/11/08/8-statistics-that-show-just-how-big-the-demand-for-tefl-teachers-is/)

⁵ <https://optimizemybnb.com/>

⁶ [https://finance.yahoo.com/video/mend-app-aims-help-
over-191727686.html](https://finance.yahoo.com/video/mend-app-aims-help-over-191727686.html)

⁷ <http://cdn.bancodasaude.com/attachment/spineee.pdf>

⁸ [https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2014/nov/24/
text-neck-how-smartphones-damaging-our-spines](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2014/nov/24/text-neck-how-smartphones-damaging-our-spines)

⁹ [https://thriveglobal.com/stories/why-do-google-and-apple-want-
you-to-use-your-phone-less/](https://thriveglobal.com/stories/why-do-google-and-apple-want-you-to-use-your-phone-less/)

¹⁰ [https://techcrunch.com/2020/02/03/asana-files-to-go-public-
says-it-will-do-so-via-a-trendy-direct-listing/](https://techcrunch.com/2020/02/03/asana-files-to-go-public-says-it-will-do-so-via-a-trendy-direct-listing/)

¹¹ [https://www.ft.com/content/
53ab02ba-1840-11ea-9ee4-11f260415385](https://www.ft.com/content/53ab02ba-1840-11ea-9ee4-11f260415385)

¹² <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/CHKP:US>

¹³ <https://dovetailapp.com/>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzrOmf8sxkw&t=369s>

¹⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

¹⁶ <https://www.drawdown.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions>

¹⁸ <https://www.iucn.org/content/primary-microplastics-oceans>

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/feb/12/seafood-microfiber-pollution-patagonia-guppy-friend>

²⁰ <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/product-lifespans>

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/03/lifespan-of-consumer-electronics-is-getting-shorter-study-finds>

²² <https://www.dw.com/en/would-durability-labels-help-people-shop-greener/a-42604293>

²³ <https://appannie.com/>

²⁴ <https://www.indiehackers.com/interview/3aa3037doc>

²⁵ <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/free-visio-viewer-mac-win/mcpmofnlkemfkhgngcdppgbhncofImpe>

²⁶ <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/signily-keyboard-sign-language/id995022521>

²⁷ <https://apps.apple.com/app/id1145815975>

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/23/a-beginners-guide-to-fossil-fuel-divestment>

²⁹ <https://fossilfreefunds.org>

³⁰ <https://www.indiehackers.com/@indieorburst/how-to-find-product-ideas-by-analyzing-saas-pricing-pages-e444406627>

³¹ <https://apps.apple.com/app/id1510607687>

³² <https://apps.apple.com/de/app/daftcloud-for-soundcloud/id1320450034?l=en&mt=12>

³³ <https://latecheckout.substack.com/p/the-guide-to-unbundling-reddit>

³⁴ <https://nomadlist.com/open>

³⁵ <https://www.minnpost.com/cityscape/2013/01/how-cycling-can-be-dangerous-your-health/>

³⁶ <https://cdixon.org/2011/02/05/selling-pickaxes-during-a-gold-rush>

³⁷ <https://getlatka.com/companies/onfleet>

³⁸ <https://twitter.com/awilkinson/status/1232342520710828032>

³⁹ https://www.sciencedaily.com/news/science_sociey/public_health/

⁴⁰ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283236205_Associations_of_Cognitive_Function_Scores_with_Carbon_Dioxide_Ventilation_and_Volatile_Organic_Compound_Exposures_in_Office_Workers_A_Controlled_Exposure_Study_of_Green_and_Conventional_Office_Environ

⁴¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236139028_The_Effect_of_Noise_on_Human_Performance_A_Clinical_Trial

⁴² https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/665048?seq=1%2525252523metadata_info_tab_contents

⁴³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5308171/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/11-trillion-dollar-reward>

⁴⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195666317303549#bib53>

⁴⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/business/paper-calendars.html>

⁴⁷ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/524158/umfrage/umsatz-von-check24/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/green-generation-millennials-say-sustainability-is-a-shopping-priority.html>

⁴⁹ <https://www.vooberlin.com/>

⁵⁰ <http://jessicahische.is/incodemode>

⁵¹ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3065928/sleepopolis-casper-bloggers-lawsuits-underside-of-the-mattress-wars>

⁵² <https://www.acatoday.org/Patients/What-is-Chiropractic/Back-Pain-Facts-and-Statistics/Back-Pain-Facts-and-Statistics>

⁵³ <https://lp.buffer.com/state-of-remote-work-2020>

⁵⁴ <https://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/lean-user-research/>