

MY FIRST MILLION | theHUSTLE

SO YOU WANT YOUR FIRST 100 CUSTOMERS?

Field Guide + Action Plan



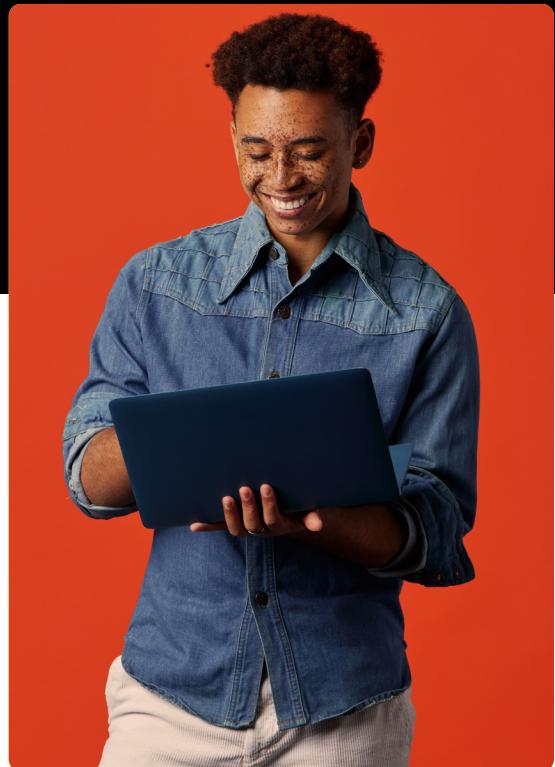
I SO YOU WANT YOUR FIRST 100 CUSTOMERS?

WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS FOR YOUR FIRST 100

Getting your first 100 (or 1000) customers is very different from getting your next 10,000. Most advice that focuses on scaling is irrelevant when you're starting from zero.

Your first customers require methods that don't scale. You need people to really love you, not just kind of like you.

Getting these first customers often comes from being naive and creative rather than following "best practices". Some of the biggest companies started by breaking all the rules.



IN THIS GUIDE:



Real stories and numbers
from Sam & Shaan



Rapid-fire wisdom



Putting it all into action
(worksheet included)

SWIPE FILE:

REAL TACTICS THAT HELPED SAM & SHAAN GET THEIR FIRST 100 CUSTOMERS

01 PIGGYBACKING & EVENTS

COMPANY: BUNK

Sam's first real startup out of college — a San Francisco-based roommate matching site.

Strategy: Piggyback on existing Craigslist traffic, and host in-person matching events

How Sam did it:

- Built a Weebly website
- Created HTML-rich Craigslist ads for each bedroom in a 4-bedroom apartment
- Found SF landlords with apartments to rent, and hosted events (parties) there for potential roommates to match with one another
- Charged both landlords and users for successful matches

Results:

- He gathered 10k users/week on the website (high rental demand in San Francisco)
- \$5k in sales within a few months

Key Learning:

- Find where your customers already are, and create value there
- Become a broker that connects supply and demand

02 STICKY CONTENT

COMPANY: ROOMMATES (BUNK2.0)

After Bunk got acquired for a small sum, Sam and the new owner turned it into an app.

Strategy: Created viral content specific to local communities

Execution:

- Sam and team made infographics about “typical roommates” for different city neighborhoods
- Researched Yelp to find out where these people shop, eat, hang out, and what they like to say about local establishments
- Tagged mentioned local businesses to increase sharing
- Used humor and stereotypes that resonate with the audience to boost social sharing

Results:

- The content was widely shared and picked up by mainstream media
- Gained 100k+ app users from only five city-specific infographics



Real infographic Sam made for Roommates

Key Learning:

“Niches make riches” — small, targeted content can get higher engagement than mass-market

03 DOOR-TO-DOOR (OR FLOOR-TO-FLOOR) SALES

COMPANY: CLOUD SUSHI

Shaan's first startup — a delivery-only sushi restaurant. This was before the rise of delivery apps like Uber Eats and DoorDash.

Strategy: Direct sales to office buildings, targeting gatekeepers

Execution:

- Shaan went floor by floor in skyscrapers for customer density
- Focused on office managers/front desk staff as “local influencers”
- Used qualifying questions like: “Do you ever do office catering?” to zoom in on potential customers
- Offered commitment-free, risk-free sample trays

Results:

- Profitable from the start
- \$13k revenue the first month, \$30k on the second

Key Learning:

- Every community has gatekeepers who have more influence than others; find and convert them first.
- Improve your pitch by actually using it on people — Shaan’s sushi delivery pitch on floor 20 of the skyscraper was way better than floor 2.

04 “BOOTH BABES”

COMPANY: BEER HUNT

Shaan's craft beer app

Strategy: Focus on small, highly engaged niche communities

Execution:

- Went to a craft beer tasting festival, dressed up Oktoberfest-style
- Hosted a branded Scavenger hunt, asking attendees to mark off things at the festival
- Winner gets a one-year supply of craft beer

Results:

- Collected email address 1,400 leads → 700 downloaded the app

Key Learning:

Early adopters from the right community become your natural ambassadors

05 CONTENT MARKETING & EMAIL FUNNEL

COMPANY: HUSTLE CON

Sam's million-dollar conference series

Strategy: Used blog posts and email marketing to build audience

Execution:

- Sam wrote blog posts about Hustle Con speakers, making them look like heroes — they would proudly share these posts in their own networks
- Shared those posts on the best-fit subreddits or Hacker News threads
- When people visit the Hustle Con website through these posts, Sam would capture their emails, and send those posts (and future blog posts) to them, like a newsletter

Results:

- A [blog post](#) about how Hustle Con made \$50k in seven weeks through the email funnel gained them their first 10k subscribers.
- Growing revenue and sweet margins, eventually reaching \$1m revenue per event

Hustle Con Revenue & Profit, Year 1-3 (USD)



Key Learning:

Create content that benefits multiple stakeholders, and let them be your distribution engine.

06 COMMUNITY BUILDING

COMPANY: TRENDS.CO

The premium research product spun off of *The Hustle*, with a paywalled newsletter and a Facebook community.

Strategy: Curated community with high-value members

Execution:

- Sam added influential people to the Facebook group without asking them to pay for Trends
- Wrote highly engaging introductions for these influential members
- Asked members to comment on posts (and even wrote the comments for them to share directly), sending community engagement through the roof

Results:

- Got acquired by HubSpot 18 months after launch
- \$400-500k/month in sales, 20k+ users before acquisition

Key Learning:

Quality of early community members matters more than quantity

07 DAVID BLAINE METHOD (THE MAGICIAN)

COMPANY: MILK ROAD

Shaan's famous crypto newsletter

Strategy: Create spectacle and high stakes to attract attention

Execution:

- Ahead of Milk Road launch, Shaan put \$1m into a public wallet
- Promised to turn it into \$10m by trading crypto
- Documented the journey publicly

Results:

- Built a highly engaged audience despite losing money
- Milk Road got \$250k subscribers; sold for millions after one year

Key Learning:

People subscribe to watch either success or failure, if stakes are high enough

BONUS CASE STUDIES: BIG COMPANIES STARTED SCRAPPY TOO

COMPANY: PRODUCT HUNT

Strategy: Manual, high-touch community building

Execution:

- Ryan Hoover woke up at 5-6am every day to work from a coffee shop
- He personally emailed/tweeted hundreds of people daily, acting as a “human notification system”
- Started with just 25 people on Linkydink (third-party tool)
- Personalized outreach: “Shaan, I know you looked at building something like this...”

Key Learning:

Early community building requires intense manual effort and personal touch

COMPANY: UBER

Strategy (or the lack of one): Breaking conventional startup “rules”

Execution:

- Founders weren’t working on Uber full-time
- Delegated the CEO job to Ryan Graves, who they found through X (then Twitter)
- Outsourced development to an agency in Mexico
- Continued despite \$5k/day regulatory fines

Key Learning:

Success can come from breaking “best practices” if the core idea is strong

RAPID-FIRE WISDOM

Do Things That Don't Scale

- Some “unscalable” things become scalable later
- Manual effort creates quality that automated systems can’t match
- Example: Early Airbnb — personally photographing properties

Three Learning Sources

- People who’ve done it before (mentors)
- People doing it alongside you (peers)
- People just starting (fresh perspectives)

Create Your “Binge Bank”

- Create content library before having an audience
- Allow future fans to go down the “rabbit hole” of your content
- Example: Macklemore’s early vlogs (700 views → millions)

Early Growth Focus

- You need 1,000 true fans, not mass appeal
- Quality of early adopters matters more than quantity
- Focus on depth of engagement over breadth

PUTTING IT ALL INTO ACTION

Here's a 3-phase framework to think about getting your first 100 customers:

The Manual Work Phase (0-25 Customers)

Do things that don't scale

Being small isn't a weakness - it's your superpower.

You can do things no big company can:

- Personally reach out to every potential customer
- Change your product overnight based on feedback
- Provide white-glove service that would bankrupt bigger companies

When you provide value consistently in these forums, you might get enough traction to borrow someone else's audience.

- Guest post on relevant blogs
- Appear on niche podcasts
- Partner with complementary products

The Momentum Phase (76-100 Customers)

Build your own flywheel

By now you should have real testimonials, case studies, and a small but mighty community. You can start leveraging them to build a content and referral engine:

- **Launch a referral program:** Give your customers rewards they'll actually want, like free months or exclusive features.
- **Make case studies:** Break down success stories into LinkedIn posts, tweets, and short videos. Focus on specific numbers and results.
- **Create intimate customer meetups:** Host small virtual or local gatherings of 5-10 users to build deeper connections and spark organic growth.

The Leverage Phase (26-75 Customers)

Find your “watering holes”

Your potential customers are already hanging out somewhere. Your job is to become a regular there.

Some examples:

- Subreddits
- Facebook Groups
- Discord servers
- Physical locations
- Industry events

YOUR ACTION PLAN

PHASE 1: MANUAL WORK (0-25 CUSTOMERS)

- Make a list of 100 people who have the problem you solve
 - Find their email/phone/social media (manually, one by one)
 - Reach out with a personalized message (NOT a template)
 - Think of at least one creative way to catch their attention (beyond a message)
 - Offer to solve their problem for free
-

PHASE 2: LEVERAGE (26-75 CUSTOMERS)

- List 5 online communities where your target customers hang out
 - Spend 1 hour daily helping people in these communities (no pitching)
 - Identify top voices, observe and learn from them
 - Create valuable content addressing common problems you see
 - Reach out to 3 complementary products for partnership opportunities
 - Contact 10 niche podcasts/blogs your customers follow
-

PHASE 3: MOMENTUM (75-100 CUSTOMERS)

- Pick your top 3 customers and turn their stories into a content series
- Set up a simple referral program (e.g. One month free for every successful referral)
- Schedule your first customer meetup (virtual or in-person)
- Create an “early adopter” benefits package and announce it to your first 75 customers
- Start a weekly customer interview series and share the highlights