VC Partners Meeting: GLU Investment Decision

Position 2 (CMS AI Optimization Platform) - $2M Pre-Seed Round

Date: November 13, 2025
Meeting Type: Investment Committee Decision
Company: GLU (positioning as CMS AI Optimization Platform)
Deal Terms: $2M pre-seed, $12M cap SAFE
Presenting Partner: Sarah Chen

Attendees

Investment Committee Partners: - **Steve Blank** - Customer Development Partner - **Eric Ries** - Lean Startup Partner
- **Geoffrey Moore** - Market Strategy Partner - **Clayton Christensen** - Innovation Partner - **Peter Thiel** - Zero to One Partner - **Sarah Chen** - Presenting Partner (Deal Lead)

Meeting Transcript

SARAH CHEN: Good morning everyone. Thanks for making time. Today we're reviewing GLU for our $2M pre-seed fund. The company is positioning as "The CMS AI Optimization Platform" - they help businesses optimize content for AI discovery across uniform CMS platforms like Shopify, WordPress, Squarespace.

The founder is Rahul - he's built two prior companies in ecommerce content, has $1M of his own capital invested, and claims to have discovered a key technical insight about CMS uniformity that unlocks massive TAM expansion.

Their pitch: AI is transforming content discovery across the web. They start with Shopify

ecommerce merchants, then expand to WordPress publishers, then other uniform CMS platforms. They're claiming this isn't an "ecommerce company" but rather "the AI optimization layer for all CMS-managed content."

Let's open it up. Steve, you usually start with customer discovery - what do you see here?

STEVE BLANK: *[leaning back, arms crossed]*

Sarah, I'm immediately skeptical. Let me tell you why.

They're telling us they're going to start with Shopify merchants, prove the model, then expand to WordPress publishers. That's two completely different customer types. Have they talked to 100 WordPress publishers about this problem? Do they know WordPress site owners will pay for what Shopify merchants pay for?

[flipping through deck]

I see here: "Year 1-2 Shopify, Year 2-3 WordPress launch." This screams "we're making assumptions without validation."

Here's what worries me: Shopify success tells you NOTHING about WordPress success. Different customers, different pain points, potentially different willingness to pay. They could spend 18 months building for WordPress and discover publishers don't care about AI discovery the way merchants do.

Now, I'll give them credit - the Shopify piece is testable. They can talk to merchants, validate the pain, prove the model. That part follows customer development principles.

But the WordPress expansion? Pure hypothesis. Untested.

My position: I'm a NO unless they commit to parallel WordPress customer discovery in Year 1. I want to see 100 publisher interviews, a free WordPress plugin MVP to measure engagement, and explicit pivot criteria. Don't wait 18 months to discover you're wrong about WordPress.

[looks around the table]

If they agree to that, I could be convinced. But as presented? They're violating the first rule: get out of the building and talk to customers BEFORE building the product.

SARAH CHEN: Steve raises a valid concern. Eric, you're our lean startup expert - how do you see the MVP and validation strategy?

ERIC RIES: *[nodding thoughtfully]*

Steve's right about the customer discovery gap, but I want to focus on the build-measure-learn cycle here.

[pulls up timeline slide]

Look at their proposed timeline: "WordPress launch Year 2-3." That's not an MVP - that sounds like a full product launch. Where's the minimum viable product? Where's the fast learning cycle?

Here's what concerns me: they're planning to wait 12-18 months before testing their WordPress hypothesis. That's the opposite of lean startup methodology.

What they SHOULD do:

Month 1-6: Shopify MVP - Just ChatGPT and Google AI optimization - nothing fancy - Self-service app in the Shopify store - Measure: Do merchants install it? Do they pay? Do they retain?

Month 6-12: WordPress MVP - PARALLEL with Shopify scaling - Free WordPress plugin - just Google AI Overviews optimization for blog posts - Dead simple: basic schema.org structured data - Measure: Do publishers install it? Do they actually use it weekly? Will they convert to paid?

This is classic lean: build the smallest thing possible to test if WordPress publishers care.

[leans forward]

Here's my concern with their "Year 2-3 WordPress launch" language: it implies they're going to build a comprehensive product before testing the hypothesis. That's exactly backwards.

But here's what I LIKE about this deal:

The technical leverage is real. They claim 75-85% code reuse between Shopify and WordPress because both have uniform CMS architecture. That means their build-measure-learn cycle CAN be fast. They can ship a WordPress MVP in 3-4 months, not 12 months.

The CMS uniformity insight actually makes them MORE lean-compatible than if they were going Shopify → WooCommerce, because WooCommerce would require custom work per merchant. Can't run lean experiments when every customer needs custom implementation.

My position: I'm a MAYBE leaning YES - but only if they commit to shipping WordPress MVP in

Month 6-12 with clear validated learning metrics. I want to see: - 10,000 plugin installs - >50% weekly active usage - >8% conversion to paid tier

And I want a pivot decision at Month 12: if WordPress validates, persevere with CMS strategy. If it fails, pivot to Shopify-only ecosystem play.

No 18-month build cycles. Ship fast, learn fast.

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SARAH CHEN: So we're seeing a pattern - both Steve and Eric are saying "the strategy could work but the execution plan needs discipline." Geoffrey, you've been quiet - what about the market strategy here?

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GEOFFREY MOORE: *[adjusting glasses, speaking slowly]*

I'm going to be the contrarian here. I think everyone's missing the bigger risk.

[stands up, goes to whiteboard]

Let me draw this out. There's a chasm - you all know my work - between early adopters and the early majority. Most startups die in that chasm.

Shopify merchants: These are visionaries. Technology enthusiasts. Small business owners willing to try new AI tools, even if they're rough around the edges. They're early adopters. GLU can sell to them.

WordPress publishers: *[pauses]* Are they early adopters? Or are they pragmatists?

[writes on whiteboard]

Think about it: - Tech bloggers, developer blogs, SaaS content sites = early adopters - General publishers, news sites, lifestyle blogs = early majority

If GLU launches "to all WordPress publishers," they're trying to jump the chasm in one leap. That's how companies die.

Here's what terrifies me about their pitch: they're treating "WordPress publishers" as one homogeneous market. It's not.

There are 60 million WordPress sites. Maybe 5 million are tech-savvy early adopters. The other 55 million are early majority who need proven solutions, case studies, social proof.

Steve's worried they haven't validated WordPress at all. I'm worried that even if they validate it

with tech bloggers, they'll assume that means all WordPress publishers will buy. Wrong.

[returns to seat]

My position: I'm a NO on their current plan, but a YES if they segment WordPress properly.

What they must do: - Year 1-2: Dominate Shopify early adopters (tech-savvy merchants) - Year 2-3: Target WordPress early adopters ONLY - tech bloggers, developer blogs, SaaS content sites - Year 3-4: If successful with WordPress early adopters, THEN consider mainstream WordPress publishers

Build a bowling pin within WordPress. Don't try to bowl the whole WordPress alley at once.

And for God's sake, don't assume the self-service model that works for tech-savvy Shopify merchants will work for mainstream WordPress publishers. Those are pragmatists who may need more hand-holding, more case studies, more proof.

Actually, here's what I really like about this deal: the uniform CMS insight means they CAN segment properly. They're not trying to go Shopify → WooCommerce where fragmentation forces them to build services. They can stay self-service and just be more careful about which WordPress segment they target first.

That's strategically sound. But they need to demonstrate they understand the chasm exists within WordPress itself.

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SARAH CHEN: So Geoffrey is conditional yes, pending segmentation discipline. Clay, you've been taking notes - jobs-to-be-done perspective?

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CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN: *[looking up from notes]*

Thank you, Sarah. I've been thinking about what job these different customers are actually hiring GLU to do.

Let me be clear about something: I actually think this could be quite elegant if they understand the jobs correctly.

[pulls out paper, draws diagram]

Shopify merchant's job: "Help my customers discover my products when they're shopping using AI assistants"

- Functional dimension: Increase sales through AI-mediated discovery

- Emotional dimension: Don't become invisible as AI takes over commerce
- Social dimension: Stay competitive with other merchants

WordPress publisher's job: "Help my readers find my content when they're searching"

- Functional dimension: Increase traffic to generate ad revenue
- Emotional dimension: Maintain relevance as AI starts answering questions directly
- Social dimension: Compete with other publishers for attention

[looks up]

Now, are these the SAME job or DIFFERENT jobs?

They're related but not identical.

Merchants care about sales - direct revenue, transactional urgency. Publishers care about traffic - indirect revenue through ads, attention economy.

The success metrics are different. The urgency is different. The ROI calculation is completely different.

But here's what I find compelling: the functional mechanism GLU provides - AI optimization - actually serves both jobs reasonably well. It's not a stretch. Google AI Overviews launched in May 2024 and publishers are seeing 20-40% traffic declines. That pain is real and urgent.

However - and this is important - **they may need different positioning for publishers**.

Instead of "AI optimization for CMS platforms," publishers might respond better to "Traffic recovery from AI Overviews" or "Protect your content discovery from AI intermediation."

Same technology, different framing for different jobs.

[sets down paper]

My position: I'm a YES, but with a requirement.

Before they launch WordPress broadly, they must validate the jobs-to-be-done framing with 50+ publisher interviews. Questions like: - What problem are you hiring a solution for? - How do you currently solve this? - What would make you switch? - How do you measure success?

If they discover publishers are hiring them for a fundamentally different job than merchants - say, "help me create content" rather than "help me optimize for discovery" - then the WordPress product might need to be more different from Shopify than they think.

But if the job is similar - "optimize my content for AI discovery" - then the technical leverage is real and this could work beautifully.

I actually love the CMS uniformity insight from a jobs perspective: it means they can serve the same core job (AI optimization) across different customer types without rebuilding the technology. That's powerful.

The risk is assuming the job is identical when it's merely similar.

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SARAH CHEN: Clay is a yes with jobs validation. Peter, you've been very quiet. Zero to One perspective - can they monopolize this market?

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PETER THIEL: *[leans forward, intense]*

Everyone's talking about customer validation and jobs and market segmentation. Fine. Important. But you're all missing the fundamental question:

Can they monopolize anything?

[pause]

Let me tell you what I see: they're planning to launch 5 platforms in 5 years. Shopify, WordPress, Squarespace, Webflow, HubSpot.

That's not monopoly. That's spreading thin.

[counts on fingers]

Year 1-2: Shopify Year 2-3: WordPress
Year 3: Squarespace Year 4: Webflow Year 5: HubSpot

Here's what's going to happen: - They'll have 15% of Shopify merchants - 8% of WordPress sites - 5% of Squarespace - 3% of Webflow

They'll be "pretty good" across five platforms. Know what that gets you? Nothing. Second-place in five categories means you lose to the specialist in each category.

[slams table]

This is the opposite of Zero to One.

Zero to One means: pick a small market you can actually dominate. Be a monopoly there. THEN

expand.

What they SHOULD do:

Year 1-2: Don't just "launch" Shopify. DOMINATE Shopify. - Target: >25% market share of Shopify merchants using GLU for AI optimization - Be THE solution, not A solution - Make Shopify synonymous with GLU for AI discovery

Year 2-3: If you've monopolized Shopify, THEN monopolize WordPress. - Target: >15% of WordPress sites (9 million sites!) - Be THE WordPress AI optimization plugin - Don't move to Squarespace until you own WordPress

Year 3-4: Only if you've monopolized BOTH Shopify and WordPress should you even think about Squarespace.

[leans back]

Here's what I actually LIKE about this deal - and why I'm ultimately going to vote yes:

The CMS uniformity insight is exactly the kind of secret that creates monopolies. It's non-obvious. Most people think "ecommerce companies should expand to other ecommerce platforms." Wrong. This team figured out that Shopify's uniformity is shared by WordPress, not WooCommerce.

That's the kind of counterintuitive technical truth that Zero to One companies are built on.

One WordPress plugin serving 60 million sites - that's monopoly scale. But only if they actually penetrate deeply, not spread across platforms superficially.

And here's the other thing I like: this isn't a horizontal expansion into "all content." They're specifically targeting UNIFORM CMS platforms. That's a category they can own: "AI optimization for uniform CMS platforms."

Not "AI optimization for everything" - that's too broad, can't monopolize.

Not "AI optimization for ecommerce" - that's WooCommerce fragmentation hell.

"AI optimization for uniform CMS platforms" - that's a category they can define and own.

My position: I'm a YES, but they need to rewrite their timeline:

- Monopolize Shopify before launching WordPress
- Monopolize WordPress before launching Squarespace
- Deep before wide

If they try to do 5 platforms in 5 years without achieving monopoly in any of them, they'll fail. The specialists will beat them in each vertical.

But if they monopolize Shopify, then monopolize WordPress, then carefully expand - they could build something truly valuable.

My vote: YES, contingent on monopoly-first execution discipline.

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SARAH CHEN: *[looking around the table]*

Okay, so let me summarize what I'm hearing:

Steve Blank: NO on current plan, YES if they add WordPress customer discovery in Year 1

Eric Ries: MAYBE leaning YES if they ship WordPress MVP fast (Month 6-12) with pivot criteria

Geoffrey Moore: NO on current plan, YES if they segment WordPress (start with tech bloggers only)

Clayton Christensen: YES with jobs-to-be-done validation before WordPress broad launch

Peter Thiel: YES if they monopolize Shopify before WordPress, WordPress before Squarespace

[pause]

I'm hearing a lot of "yes, but" around the table. Let me share my own diligence.

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SARAH CHEN: I spent the last two weeks pressure-testing this with Rahul. Here's what I learned:

First, on Steve's customer discovery concern: When I pushed him on WordPress validation, he initially said "we'll launch Year 2-3." I said that's too late. After some back-and-forth, he agreed to: - Start WordPress publisher interviews in Month 6 of Shopify launch - Ship free WordPress plugin MVP by Month 12 - Set explicit pivot criteria: >50% weekly engagement, >8% paid conversion - If WordPress fails, pivot to Shopify ecosystem strategy

So Steve, your concern can be addressed with term sheet conditions.

Second, on Eric's MVP concern: Rahul claims he can ship a basic WordPress plugin in 3-4 months because of the CMS uniformity. I had our technical advisor review his architecture - it checks out. The code reuse is real. So the lean cycle CAN be fast.

Third, on Geoffrey's segmentation concern: When I asked Rahul "who in WordPress are you targeting first," he said "all WordPress publishers." I pushed back hard. He eventually agreed that tech bloggers, developer blogs, and SaaS content sites are the natural early adopters. So we can require segmentation discipline in the investment terms.

Fourth, on Clay's jobs concern: Rahul actually has good intuition here. He mentioned that publishers might respond better to "traffic recovery" framing than "AI optimization" framing. So he's already thinking about jobs-to-be-done even if he doesn't call it that.

Fifth, on Peter's monopoly concern: This one took the longest. Rahul's current deck says "5 platforms in 5 years" because he thinks that sounds impressive to investors. When I explained why that's actually a weakness, not a strength, he got it. He agreed to reframe as "monopolize Shopify, then monopolize WordPress, then expand."

[pulls out term sheet]

Here's what I'm proposing we require:

Investment Terms: - $2M pre-seed at $12M cap (standard for this stage) - Board seat with quarterly reviews - Explicit milestones for next funding tied to execution discipline

Required Milestones:

Month 6 (Steve's concern): - Deliver: 50+ WordPress publisher interviews - Deliver: Free WordPress plugin MVP launched - Criteria: Evidence of customer discovery work

Month 12 (Eric's concern + Peter's concern): - Deliver: 10,000+ WordPress plugin installs - Deliver: >50% weekly active usage, >8% paid conversion - Deliver: >15% penetration of target Shopify merchant segment - Pivot decision: Continue with CMS strategy OR pivot to Shopify ecosystem

Month 18 (Geoffrey's concern): - Deliver: WordPress product segmented to tech-savvy early adopters only - Evidence: Clear segmentation strategy, not "all WordPress"

Month 24 (Peter's concern): - Deliver: >20% market share in target Shopify segment before Squarespace launch - Criteria: Demonstrated monopoly in first platform

If they hit these milestones, they've executed with the discipline we're all asking for. If they miss them, we have board seats and can course-correct.

[looks around]

My recommendation: YES, with these execution milestones as investment conditions.

This team has found a genuine technical insight - uniform CMS architecture creates adjacency that's non-obvious. That's valuable. They have $1M of their own capital invested and 70% code reuse from prior work. That's de-risking.

But they need execution discipline that addresses everyone's concerns. We build that into the deal terms.

What do you all think?

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STEVE BLANK: *[nods slowly]*

If those Month 6 and Month 12 milestones are in the term sheet - actual deliverables, not just "we'll think about it" - then I can vote yes.

I want to see evidence of customer discovery work. Interviews, engagement data, conversion metrics. Not a PowerPoint that says "we think WordPress will work."

I'll vote YES with those conditions.

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ERIC RIES: *[flipping through revised timeline]*

Month 6-12 WordPress MVP with clear validated learning metrics addresses my concern. If they ship fast and measure rigorously, we'll know by Month 12 if the WordPress hypothesis is right.

And I like that you built in the pivot option. If WordPress fails, pivoting to Shopify ecosystem (Position 5) is actually a great backup plan. Low risk, proven playbook.

I'll vote YES.

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GEOFFREY MOORE: *[thoughtful]*

The Month 18 segmentation milestone is critical. I want to see them target tech-savvy WordPress early adopters, not chase the entire WordPress market.

If they can demonstrate that discipline - resisting the temptation to go broad too fast - then they can cross the chasm properly.

I'll vote YES, but I want explicit evidence of segmentation strategy at the Month 18 board meeting.

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CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN: *[smiling slightly]*

Sarah, you mentioned Rahul already thinking about "traffic recovery" framing for publishers. That's exactly the jobs-to-be-done thinking I want to see.

If they do the interviews, test the messaging, and validate they're solving the right job - not just "publishers are like merchants" - then this could be quite elegant.

I'll vote YES.

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PETER THIEL: *[drumming fingers on table]*

The Month 24 monopoly milestone is what I care about. Twenty percent market share in target Shopify segment before launching Squarespace.

If they achieve that - genuine monopoly in one platform before expanding - then the expansion strategy makes sense.

If they try to launch Squarespace at Month 24 with only 10% Shopify penetration, we have a serious conversation about focus.

[pause]

The CMS uniformity insight is real. It's the kind of secret that creates valuable companies. But only if they execute with monopoly discipline.

I'll vote YES, contingent on the Month 24 monopoly milestone.

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SARAH CHEN: *[looking around the table]*

So we have unanimous YES votes, contingent on execution milestones being written into the investment terms.

Let me be clear about what we're agreeing to:

We're investing in: - The technical insight (uniform CMS = adjacency) - The team's prior execution (Bonzai, GLU V1) - The $1M founder capital already invested

We're requiring: - Customer discovery discipline (Blank) - MVP speed and validated learning (Ries) - Market segmentation strategy (Moore) - Jobs-to-be-done validation (Christensen) - Monopoly-first expansion (Thiel)

We're NOT investing in: - "5 platforms in 5 years" spray-and-pray approach - Assumed WordPress success without validation - Broad market attack without segmentation - Expansion before monopoly

[pulls out laptop]

I'll draft the term sheet with these milestones. Rahul gets his $2M at $12M cap, we get board oversight and explicit execution gates.

If they execute with discipline, this could be a category-defining company - the AI optimization layer for all uniform CMS platforms, $90B TAM.

If they don't, we have pivot options and board control to protect our downside.

Vote Count

In Favor: 6 (unanimous) - Steve Blank (conditional on customer discovery milestones) - Eric Ries (conditional on MVP speed milestones) - Geoffrey Moore (conditional on segmentation milestones) - Clayton Christensen (conditional on jobs validation) - Peter Thiel (conditional on monopoly milestones) - Sarah Chen (deal lead)

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

Investment Decision: APPROVED

Terms: - $2M investment at $12M post-money valuation cap (SAFE) - Board seat for Sarah Chen - Quarterly board reviews

Required Milestones:

Month 6: - 50+ WordPress publisher customer discovery interviews - Free WordPress plugin MVP launched - Evidence of customer validation work

Month 12: - 10,000+ WordPress plugin installs - >50% weekly active usage among plugin users - >8% conversion to paid premium tier - >15% penetration of target Shopify merchant segment - **GO/NO-GO DECISION**: Continue CMS strategy OR pivot to Shopify ecosystem

Month 18: - WordPress product segmented to tech-savvy early adopters (tech bloggers, dev

blogs, SaaS content) - Evidence of segmentation discipline (not targeting mainstream publishers yet) - Early adopter playbook documented

Month 24: - >20% market share in target Shopify segment - Evidence of category monopoly before Squarespace launch - If launching Squarespace: must demonstrate Shopify monopoly achieved

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Post-Meeting Notes

SARAH CHEN *(to team)*: I'll send the revised term sheet to Rahul by end of week. Key message: "We love the CMS uniformity insight and we're investing. But we're investing in disciplined execution, not spray-and-pray platform expansion."

Action Items: - Sarah: Draft term sheet with execution milestones - Sarah: Schedule kick-off call with Rahul to review board expectations - Investment team: Conduct final reference checks - Legal: Prepare SAFE documentation

Next Steps: - Term sheet to Rahul: Friday Nov 15 - Due diligence completion: Nov 22 - Funding close: Dec 1 - Board meeting #1: March 2026 (Month 6 milestone review)

Why This Deal Works (Post-Meeting Reflection)

All six partners identified risks in the original positioning, but all six also saw the core insight as valid:

The Insight: Uniform CMS architecture creates technical adjacency that customer similarity doesn't

Why it survived scrutiny: - Blank: Can be validated through customer discovery - Ries: Enables fast MVP and learning cycles
- Moore: Allows proper segmentation and chasm crossing - Christensen: Serves related jobs-to-be-done across customer types - Thiel: Creates monopoly opportunity through category definition

What changed: Execution requirements became much stricter

The bet: CMS uniformity insight + execution discipline = category-defining company

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Meeting Adjourned: 11:47 AM