

How today's fastest growing B2B businesses found their first ten customers

Lenny Rachitsky

17-21 minutes

Hello, and welcome to a **free monthly edition** of my weekly newsletter. I'm [Lenny](#) and each week I tackle reader questions about product, growth, and working with humans, and anything else that's stressing you out at the office 

If you're not a paid subscriber, here's what you missed this month:

1. [A framework for evaluating startup ideas](#)
2. [Advice for surviving reorgs](#)
3. [Roadmapping tips](#)

To receive this newsletter weekly, consider subscribing 

"In the early days of Figma, we talked with practically every designer we knew. In search of more feedback, we turned to Twitter which I realized we could use to determine the most influential designers. After getting the data, I further filtered the list to people that were personally inspirational to me. Then I cold emailed / found introductions to many of these people and showed them Figma."

— Dylan Field, CEO

Here, Dylan shares how he leveraged (what turns out to be) *two of three* growth levers used by essentially every B2B businesses to get started:

1.  **Tapping your personal network** (i.e. his friends)
2.  **Seeking out your customers where they are** (i.e. Twitter)
3.  Getting press

Below, you'll learn how twenty other hyper-growth B2B businesses found their earliest customers — including stories from Shopify, Stripe, Airtable, Plaid, Gusto, Salesforce, Slack and many more. A number of these stories are being shared publicly for the first time. In a follow-up post (for paid-subscribers only), I'll share how these companies *closed* their first ten customers.

Why first *ten* customers? Because that's when you're most scrappy and [doing things that don't scale](#). In follow-up posts, I'm also going to look into how these companies approached their first 100, and then 1,000 customers. Stay tuned.

I hadn't actually planned on digging into this topic, but immediately after publishing [a piece about early consumer app growth](#), I began getting this question from B2B founders. I couldn't resist digging in, and I'm happy I didn't. I ended up spending 40+ hours digging through old interviews, seeking out warm introductions to founders, and sliding into countless DMs. It turns out getting these early B2B stories was a lot harder than it was for consumer apps _(`)_/

This post was only possible thanks to the generosity of countless founders, early employees, and tons of helpful Twitter friends who contributed to this post in some way. You can find the full list of contributors at end of the post. Thank you all ❤️

Without further ado, let's dive in!

Finding your first ten B2B customers

	Bottom-Up / Self-Service	Sales
1. Tap your personal network e.g. friends, former colleagues, investors, incubator peers	 Figma  slack  asana  coda  Amplitude  Airtable  stripe	 carta  looker   workday  okta  GUSTO  INTERCOM
2. Seek out your customers where they are e.g. online communities, Hacker News, door to door	 Figma  PLAID  Dropbox  shopify  New Relic  ATASSIAN  Amplitude  Segment	 Square
3. Get press e.g. an orchestrated launch	 canva  twilio  slack	

Biggest takeaways:

1. Only **three** sourcing strategies account for every B2B company's very early growth (unlike the **seven** strategies for consumer apps). Thus, your choices are easy, yet limited.
2. In practice, it's even easier — almost every B2B business BOTH hits up their personal network AND heads to the places their potential customers were spending time. The question isn't *which* of these two routes to pursue, but instead how far your own network will take you before you move on.
3. It's a huge advantage to have a strong personal network in B2B, which you can also build by bringing on a connector investor or joining an incubator such as YC.
4. Tapping your personal network is even more important if you need to "sell" your product (i.e. not going bottom-up), likely because early customers need to have a reason to trust you.
5. Getting press is rarely the way to get started

Read on for the strategies and stories. Just for fun I've included screenshot of what each company's website looked like early-on 😊

Key question: Who in your network could be a potential customer?

Slack — Friends

Introducing Slack: your searchable, infinite brain

Slack is zero-effort knowledge management. All your team communications are shared, indexed, archived and ready for instant retrieval. When you need it, it's all right there.

Sign up to get free access to the preview release.

Every team selected to participate in the preview release will receive a \$100 credit.

"We begged and cajoled our friends at other companies to try it out and give us feedback. We had maybe six to ten companies to start with that we found this way. The pattern was to share Slack with progressively larger groups. We amplified the feedback we got at each stage by adding more teams."

— Stewart Butterfield, CEO ([source](#))

Asana — Friends and former colleagues

asana: [Blog](#) [Jobs](#) [Company](#)

[Sign in](#) | [Join the beta](#) | [Sign up for updates](#)

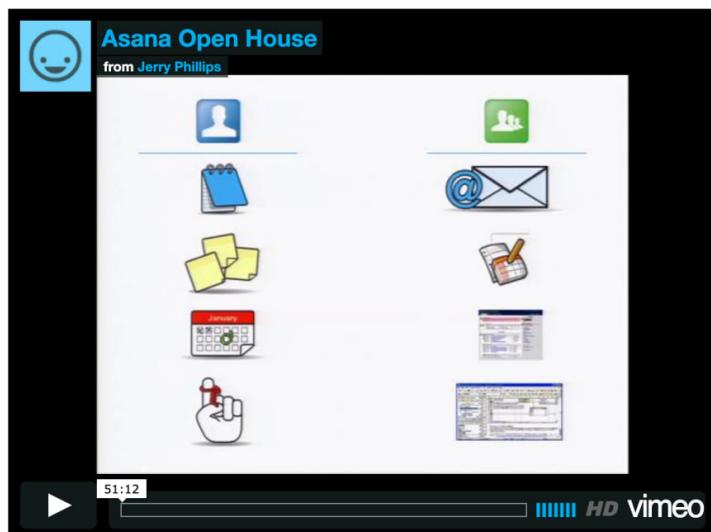
Asana builds software that helps people work together more effectively. We're currently in private beta. We're based in San Francisco, and [we're hiring](#).



Asana demo & vision talk

by Justin Rosenstein on February 7th, 2011 at 12:05 pm

We recently hosted an open house at our offices in San Francisco, where we showed the first public demo of Asana and deep-dived into the nuances of the product, the long-term mission that drives us, how the beta's going, and more. We were really excited to be able to share what we've been working on and why we're so passionate about it, and hope you enjoy this video of the talk:



About Asana

[What we are building](#)
[How the Beta is going](#)

Subscribe

[Entries RSS](#)
[Comments RSS](#)

Categories

[company](#) (4)
[culture](#) (1)
[design](#) (1)
[eng](#) (2)
[product](#) (5)
[Uncategorized](#) (1)

Archives

[February 2011](#) (1)
[January 2011](#) (2)
[November 2010](#) (1)
[October 2010](#) (2)
[June 2010](#) (1)
[February 2010](#) (1)
[November 2009](#) (1)

"Almost all of (our first ~15 users) are people we are personally close to. We're currently focused on making them really happy with their experience – rounding out the feature set, responding to their feedback, fixing bugs, and improving performance.

As that continues, we'll continue to roll the alpha product out gradually to more and more people. There probably won't be any particular floodgate moment, more of a steady influx of new users."

— Justin Rosenstein, CPO and co-founder ([source](#))

Salesforce — Former colleagues

The screenshot shows the homepage of salesforce.com. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, PRODUCTS, CUSTOMERS, PARTNERS, NEWS, and ABOUT. Below the navigation, a banner reads "Take The Tour | In The News | Employment | Contact Us | The Foundation". The main headline is "The Market Leader In Online Sales Force Automation" followed by "THE END OF SOFTWARE". A large paragraph explains the service's benefits, mentioning enterprise-class sales force automation as a subscription service online. It highlights that users can securely access, manage, and share sales information across their company anytime, anywhere. It also mentions that the first five licenses are free for three months if registered by November 30, 2000. To the right, there's an "Announcements..." section featuring the IBM logo and a link to an alliance announcement. Below that is an "In The News..." section with a PC Magazine logo and a link to an article about customer relationship management. At the bottom left, there's a "Get Started Now!" section with links for "Sign-up Online" and "Call 1-800-NO-SOFTWARE". On the far left, there's a "Secure Customer Login" section with fields for User Name and Password, and a "Go!" button. At the bottom center, there's a "TAKE THE TOUR" button and a "Take the Tour" link with a description of what users will learn.

"It was challenging to convince prospects to try our service, and it was especially challenging to convince the first one. Most people don't want to be the first to take a giant risk. Realizing that truism was pivotal. We finessed our strategy to target pioneers who saw an opportunity to participate in something new and exciting.

That first pioneer came in the form of Blue Martini Software, one of the small software companies in which I had previously invested. I knew I was asking for a favor when I called the founder, [Monte Zweben](#), but I also knew I was offering something that he really needed. [...]

We did not have a formal sales organization at this time so in our quest for early customers, everyone on the salesforce.com team was encouraged to contact anyone he or she knew in any industry, or at any start-up. Diane Mark, our product manager, won our second client while she was standing in line at the local market, Mollie Stone's. She ran into a former colleague who was working as a sales manager at iSyndicate, a company that sold syndicated content over the Web. She asked him what the company used to manage its sales process. "ACT! And Excel," he replied. "It's a mess."

— Marc Benioff, CEO ([source](#))

Carta — Investors



“Our very early customers came from two places:

1. **The angel investors in our company:** Andy Palmer from [Tamr](#) was an investor in eShares, and brought it into his company early on.
2. **Sister portfolio founders:** We had this personal connection to them through our investors.

Other than that, it was just **working the network.**”

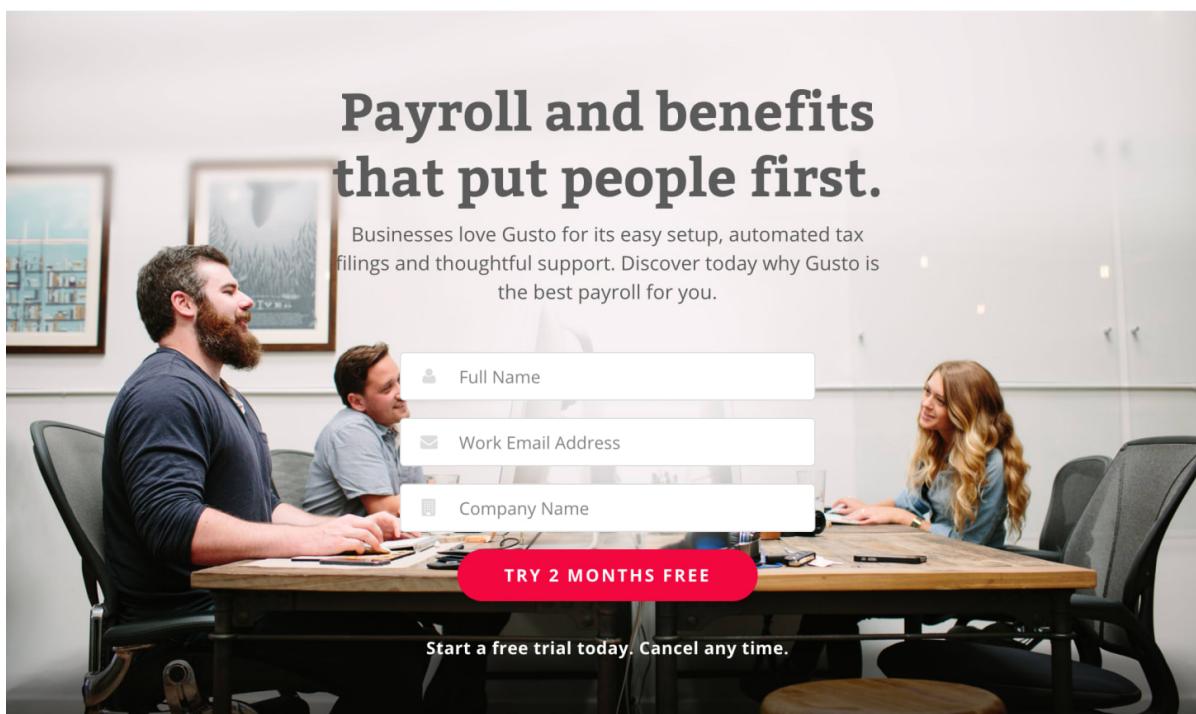
— Joshua Merrill, ex-CPO

Gusto — Friends and incubator peers



PAYROLL HEALTH BENEFITS WORKERS' COMP PRICING MORE ▾

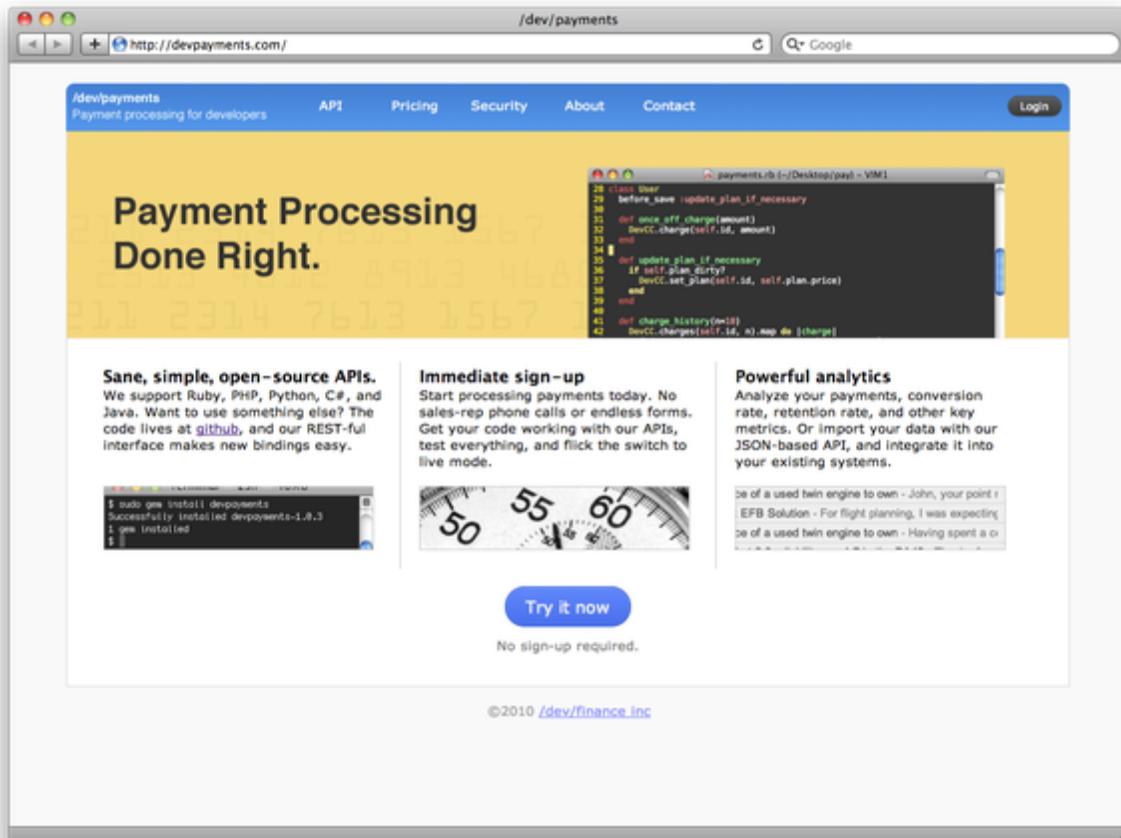
TRY 2 MONTHS FREE



“**Gusto's first 10 customers came from friends we knew** who were just starting their businesses in CA. **Mostly new tech startups from our YC batch, but also non-tech small businesses** (like a children's swimming camp) that we happened to know through family and friends. We basically (three founders) went around telling everyone we knew that we're building a modern delightful payroll and HR system and asked if they'd know someone who'd be interested in trying it out.”

— Tomer London, CPO and co-founder

Stripe — Friends and incubator peers



"At YC we use the term *Collison installation* for the technique they invented. More diffident founders ask *Will you try our beta?* and if the answer is yes, they say *Great, we'll send you a link*. But the Collison brothers weren't going to wait. **When anyone agreed to try Stripe they'd say 'Right then, give me your laptop' and set them up on the spot.**"

— Paul Graham ([source](#))

"Our first user actually became one of the first employees at Stripe. **I had known Ross Boucher for a couple of years.** We were working on a payments system, and he needed a payments system, so I just suggested, hey, do you want to try this out? I didn't emphasize how early on it was was."

What indicated to us that there was something interesting here was that our friends who were using it asked if they could invite their friends, and those people invited their friends, and it spread through word of mouth process."

— Patrick Collison, CEO ([source](#))

Amplitude — Incubator peers



Actionable mobile analytics

Understand your users. Take action.

TRY DEMO

Actionable analytics

Learn not only what your users are doing, but why they're doing it. Find out what you need to do to increase your conversion and engagement rates. Find out which groups of users have the most success with your app, across sources, dates, and devices. Use data to improve your app.



"Amplitude's first customers came from the YC network. Spenser and Curtis were working on another startup called Sonalight during YC and built an early version of Amplitude to answer why users weren't retaining – other YC companies in their cohort wanted to use it too since they had questions existing tools couldn't answer. They quickly realized Amplitude was their biggest opportunity."

— Tai Rattigan, ex-Head of Partnerships

Workday — Former colleagues



The New Generation of Enterprise Applications.

- Home
- Today's Realities
- Our Vision
- Leadership Team
- Job Opportunities
- Contact Us

"I have teamed with some of the brightest minds in the industry to create the next generation of applications to meet the demands of today's extended enterprise."

It's a new day."

— Dave Duffield



➤ Tell a Friend

Share this site with someone who'd be interested in knowing more about Workday.

Workday™ will provide a revolutionary application platform and the next generation of business applications to drive your enterprise's performance. Our applications will be dramatically easy to use, be responsive to your organization's changing needs and will significantly lower your total cost of ownership.

"Workday's earliest customers consisted mostly of midsize-company **CEOs who knew the founders**. They bought the friendship, not the software."

— Dave Duffield, ex-CEO ([source](#))

Looker — Former colleagues and investors

The screenshot shows the Looker homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for BENEFITS, PRODUCT, WORKFLOW, PRICING, and a purple 'Free Trial' button. Below the navigation is a large image of a computer monitor displaying a complex dashboard with multiple tables and charts. To the left of the monitor, there is a graphic of three dots connected by lines, labeled 'The power of SQL'. Another graphic below it shows a series of dots connected by lines, labeled 'Query-based discovery'. The main headline reads 'Query-Based BI' and the sub-headline says 'An entirely new approach to analytics for your organization.' A 'Learn More' button is located on the left side. At the bottom, there is a callout box with the text 'Simple to use. Quick to implement. Powerful Business Intelligence and Analytics for any organization.' followed by two buttons: 'Free Trial' and 'Pricing'.

"Networks are one of the most important but often overlooked opportunities in the B2B space. **Looker was fortunate enough to acquire its first 10+ customers via networks** (and we continue to benefit from networks to this day). This wasn't just our personal network, but **our customer's & investor's networks as well**. To get the most out of these networks we simply did two things:

1. Spent endless energy on making our early customers as successful and happy as we possibly could.
2. Asked our customers to share their success with others by putting a few simple programs in place to allow them to evangelize."

— Keenan Rice, early employee and VP Strategic Alliances at Looker

Coda — Former colleagues



Sign in

It's a new day for docs.

For years, your team has been split across spreadsheets, docs, and apps.

It's time to bring us back together.

Your email

Request an invite

"When we started Coda, we decided to build in stealth so we could stay focused on the product and stay out of the public eye. Our first alpha trial was with **a small startup run by a past colleague of mine from YouTube**. The whole company used the product productively for a couple months, but then they all churned in one day. It was a low point for us — losing 100% of your user base in one day is tough!"

Thankfully, the startup CEO was very supportive and gave us great feedback —the team was aligned with the vision of what we were building, but required a list (a long list!) of specific action items to complete before they would try Coda again. That feedback motivated us and led to a much better product. Key lesson: the customers you lose may be the source of your best feedback."

— Shishir Mehrotra, CEO

Okta — Former colleagues



Why Okta? Products Solutions Customers Partners Company

Free Trial

Take a Tour Call Sales: 1-888-722-7871 Login

On-Demand Identity & Access Management

Single sign-on, user management and reporting for all your cloud and web applications. [LEARN MORE](#)

Free Trial

Take a Tour



Latest News: January 28, 2011 - [Okta: One Stop Shopping with Single Sign On?](#)

"We reached out to our networks, folks we knew in IT from Salesforce.com and past jobs. We networked aggressively on LinkedIn with our alma mater networks etc. We asked our angel investors and combed their LinkedIn networks. I had a target of 15-18 net

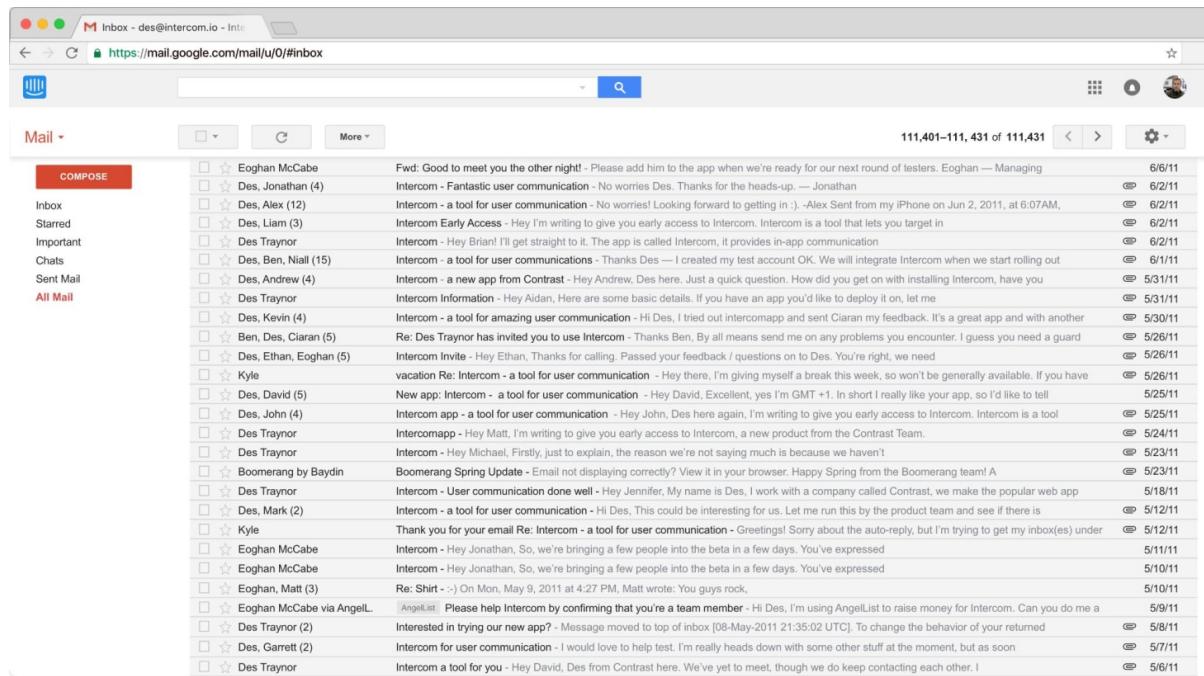
new IT folks / different companies to talk to every month for the first 6 months and probably hit 85% + of my quota.”

— Frederic Kerrest, COO and co-founder

Intercom — Former colleagues

“It was basically ‘Do things that make people find out about Intercom’. Our previous businesses had helped us grow a network of people who would listen to us, so they were the first people we reached out to. So all day every day I’d email people to tell them about Intercom, show them what Intercom might look like for them, and hear their feedback. I did this 100% by hand and if I was to do it all again today I’d still do it by hand. Honestly.

This is what it looked like:



The screenshot shows a Gmail inbox for the user 'des@intercom.io'. The inbox is filled with numerous messages, mostly from 'Des' and other team members. The messages are listed in chronological order, with the most recent at the top. The subject lines of the messages are mostly promotional or informational, such as 'Fwd: Good to meet you the other night!', 'Intercom - Fantastic user communication', and 'Intercom Early Access'. The messages are timestamped with dates ranging from May 2011 to June 2011. The inbox interface includes standard Gmail controls like 'Compose', 'Inbox', 'Starred', 'Important', 'Chats', 'Sent Mail', and 'All Mail'. The message list is scrollable, with a visible scrollbar on the right side of the inbox area.

— Des Traynor, CSO and co-founder ([source](#))

Key question: Who are your target customers, and where they currently spending time, online or offline? e.g. communities, forums, offline events

Shopify — Ruby on Rails community



- [Hello](#)
- [Snowboards](#)
- [Bindings](#)
- [Goggles](#)
- [All](#)
- [Blog](#)

Blowout Deals

Carbon 900 bindings 180\$
Arbor: Legacy 199\$

Andrew Robinson Brings Snowdevil to Europe!

Earlier this year Tobi and I were wondering where our furthest customer would come from. Since Snowdevil was only set up for North American purchases, we were pleasantly surprised when Andrew Robinson emailed us asking if **we ship to Germany!** Andrew ended up buying a Never Summer Legacy 166 and recently sent us some pictures of himself and his NS Legacy boarding at 3000m on the Hintertux glacier in Austria!



"When I built [SnowDevil](#) (my online snowboard store), some colleagues in the Ruby On Rails developer community asked if I'd license the code from our store. That pointed me to building Shopify."

We had an early waitlist, with a few thousand emails that we launched to. This was in 2006. Looking back, it actually set the pattern for a lot of SaaS. We launched the beta and had a few hundred stores. Still some of those cohort selling today!"

— Tobi Lütke, CEO

New Relic — Ruby on Rails community

Log In
RailsLab
RPM Status
Blog

RPM
Get RPM
Support
About

Don't Wait for Management!

You're 2 minutes away from knowing more about your web application performance than ever before.

New Relic® RPM™ is the revolutionary on-demand tool used by more than 2,500 companies to monitor, troubleshoot and optimize their Java, Ruby, and JRuby applications. RPM works for apps in the cloud or in the datacenter. Get the power of expensive, complex IT tools – without the expense or the complexity! Simple. Powerful. On-Demand Application Performance Management. [See how »](#)

[Learn more about RPM Lite »](#)

Start Monitoring

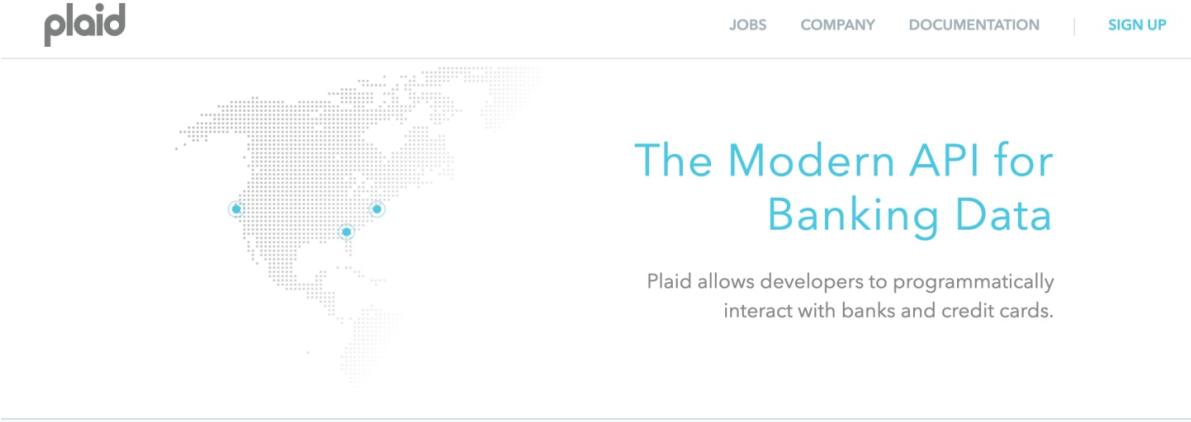
"New Relic started in late 2007, focused squarely on the relatively small but rapidly growing Ruby on Rails market. At that time, Rails was growing in reputation but, it was

far from mainstream...I figured it was a good market opportunity for a new startup: not too big to attract a ton of well funded competition, but large enough (and more importantly growing quickly enough) to support an early stage company.

Rails developers are known for adopting the latest technologies, and passionately supporting products that rock, while brutally and vocally criticizing products don't meet their high standards. **We were not the first product to target the Rails market, but we believe we had a strong product that immediately earned the support from thought leaders in the rails community. These included highly visible members of the Rails community like DHH, Tobi Luetke, Rick Olson, Obie Fernandez, Tom Mornini and many others.** This kind of endorsement can't be bought; it needs to be earned. It had amazing impact on our early traction."

— Lew Cirne, CEO ([source](#))

Plaid — Online developer and PM communities



The Modern API for Banking Data

Plaid allows developers to programmatically interact with banks and credit cards.

A REST API FOR YOUR BANK

Integrate in minutes and get high-quality transactional and account data from most major financial institutions. Every transaction includes unique merchant names, street addresses, geocoordinates, categories, and more.

ADD USER	UPDATE USER	CURL	JS	RESPONSE	JSON
\$ curl -X POST https://tartan.plaid.com/connect \				{ success: true,	
-d client_id=test_id \				accounts:	
-d secret=test_secret \				[{ _user: '52301da7b45ecb6bd7000002',	

"Prior to Plaid, we spent 9 months building consumer financial products, and ended up deciding to create Plaid out of our own frustration with the lack of good infrastructure. We actually became our own first customer. From there, **we mostly grew through word of mouth in the developer and product manager community.** We invested in meeting founders of fintech companies, learning their problems, and seeing how Plaid could help. **Lots of time spent on forums, IRC, meetups, and working with startup accelerators.**"

— Zach Perret, CEO and co-founder

Figma — Twitter

The Collaborative Interface Design Tool.



"In the early days of Figma, we talked with practically every designer we knew. In search of more feedback, **we turned to Twitter** which I realized we could use to determine the most influential designers. After getting the data, I further filtered the list to people that were personally inspirational to me. **Then I cold emailed / found introductions to many of these people and showed them Figma.** At the time, Figma was early, but this resulted in all sorts of incredible feedback. As we evolved the product, we kept these designers in the loop about what was changing. By the time we launched, we had built a relationship with these customers and many amplified our message.

Fun fact: Coda (then called Krypton) was the first team to adopt Figma!"

— Dylan Field, CEO

Square — Going door to door to SMBs

Looking for your receipt?

Mobile number or email Amount paid Find Receipt

Sign In

Instant receipts.

0 to \$60 in under 10 seconds.

Start accepting payment cards immediately with Square. No contracts, monthly fees, or hidden costs. Effortlessly manage all the money you take with an easy and intuitive interface.

Swipe it.

Read payment cards from any device with an audio input jack, including your mobile phone. Accepting payments has never been faster or more convenient.

Text and email receipts. Lose the paper.

As a payer, get your receipts sent to your email or mobile phone instantly and access them securely online. You can also use a text message to authorize every payment in real-time. [View sample](#)

Pay quickly, securely.

Create a Square payer account to speed up and secure every payment. With photo verification, Square users can visually confirm you are the card holder.

Get real rewards.

If you frequent a place that accepts Square, we'll let them know you're a repeat customer. That 10th cappuccino may be on the house, no paper coffee card required.

Do well by doing good.

Square will donate a penny of every transaction you take to a cause of your choice. Working together to better the world, one small step at a time.

Interested in using Square? Let us know:

Email address Submit

"Jack 100% tapped his personal network to get 'Clubhouse'-type people on Square, **but they didn't really create repeat usage or become real customers.** Cheri Mims of Lillybelle Flowers and Sightglass Coffee were **actual merchants we could walk to and speak with.** They were our first real every-day-use customers. We could visit them multiple times per week to see what worked and what didn't, allowing us to refine the product. We continued to reach out to local businesses we patronized and convinced some of them to use Square when we were still quite young."

— Cameron Walters, Square founding team

Atlassian — Open source community

» About Atlassian

Atlassian is a professional services company providing [support](#) for Enterprise Java (J2EE) development and software. We currently support two particular J2EE servers, [Orion](#) from [IronFlare](#) and [OC4J](#) from [Oracle](#).

Getting started with Orion and J2EE? Atlassian now provides [free Orion installation support](#) - email us to try it out!

Atlassian offers a variety of [support options](#) for J2EE and Orion specific issues. [Contact us](#) for more information.

» Knowledge Base

The Atlassian knowledge base is the most comprehensive database of searchable Orion documentation, tutorials and support information.

A few of the key searchable resources are:

- [Orion](#) documentation and APIs
- [J2EE](#) specifications and APIs
- [OrionSupport](#) articles
- IronFlare "[orion-interest](#)" mailing list
- Atlassian's own case notes

» Latest Headlines

ORACLE

OC4J 1.0.2.2.1: Bug Fix Release

Oracle has released a new version of OC4J - 1.0.2.2.1 (get it [here](#)). This release fixes a few outstanding bugs in 1.0.2.2, see the readme.txt contained in the download for details.

These fixes will also be released by IronFlare in the next version of [Orion](#) (1.5.3).

ATLASSIAN

HOWTO: Securing A Directory

Today we look at how to quickly [secure a directory](#) under Orion/OC4J using basic authentication and the XMLUserManager.

ATLASSIAN

FAQ Launched - Your Questions Answered

We've written up many of the most popular questions that get asked of Atlassian into a [FAQ](#). If your question is not answered in the [FAQ](#), you an [ask it here](#) and witness our legendary service in action.

IRONFLARE

Orion Server Growth: 4400% in 12 months

“Open source helped. Communities (mailing lists! newsgroups! IRC!) helped.

Constant marketing (Jira Jira Jira Mike was my name for a while). Free beer. Uneconomic prices. Great customer service.”

— Mike Cannon-Brooks, CEO

Segment — Hacker News

 [Hacker News](#) [new](#) | [threads](#) | [past](#) | [comments](#) | [ask](#) | [show](#) | [jobs](#) | [submit](#) lennysan (772) | logout

▲ Show HN: Analytics.js – The analytics API you've always wanted ([segmentio.github.com](#))
326 points by ianstormtaylor on Dec 12, 2012 | hide | past | web | favorite | 67 comments

▲ alexatkeplar on Dec 12, 2012 [-]
This is a cool idea for a project! The closest equivalent I'm aware of is Qubit OpenTag (<https://github.com/QubitProducts/OpenTag>).
I'm interested in adding SnowPlow support to this (<https://github.com/snowplow/snowplow>) - our tracking API is very similar to Google Analytics's.
We've just gone through the quite involved exercise of mapping SnowPlow to Google Tag Manager (<http://snowplowanalytics.com/blog/2012/11/16/integrating-sno...>) so I was a bit surprised in the code to see this mapping for GA events:

```
track : function (event, properties) {
    window._gaq.push(['_trackEvent', 'All', event]);
}
```

I'm a bit confused by this - how would I use analytics.js to pass through all the valid data that I can log in a GA event or indeed SnowPlow event - <https://github.com/snowplow/snowplow/wiki/javascript-tracker..>

I think you might be making the assumption that events consist of an event name plus arbitrary JSON envelope. This is a very MixPanelish view of the world - it doesn't really translate to Google Analytics, Piwik, SnowPlow, Omniture...

“At the very beginning we actually launched as an open-source library on [Hacker News](#). It took off there, blew up basically over night. Our first customers were the folks hanging out on [Hacker News](#). It was basically small companies for the most part. Founders who were looking for better ways to instrument their web applications and mobile apps with this sort of analytics tracking.”

— Peter Reinhardt, CEO ([source](#))

Airtable — Hacker News

2. 🚪 **Seek out your customers where they are:** online communities, offline events, door to door

3. 📺 **Get press:** Orchestrate a launch

Key questions to ask yourself:

1. Who in your network could be a potential customer? How could you quickly build a network?
2. Who are your target customers, and where they currently spending time, online or offline?
3. What's a unique and untold story you can pitch press?

That's it for this week! [Hit me up](#) if you have any stories, feedback, or insights to share. Otherwise, see you next week!

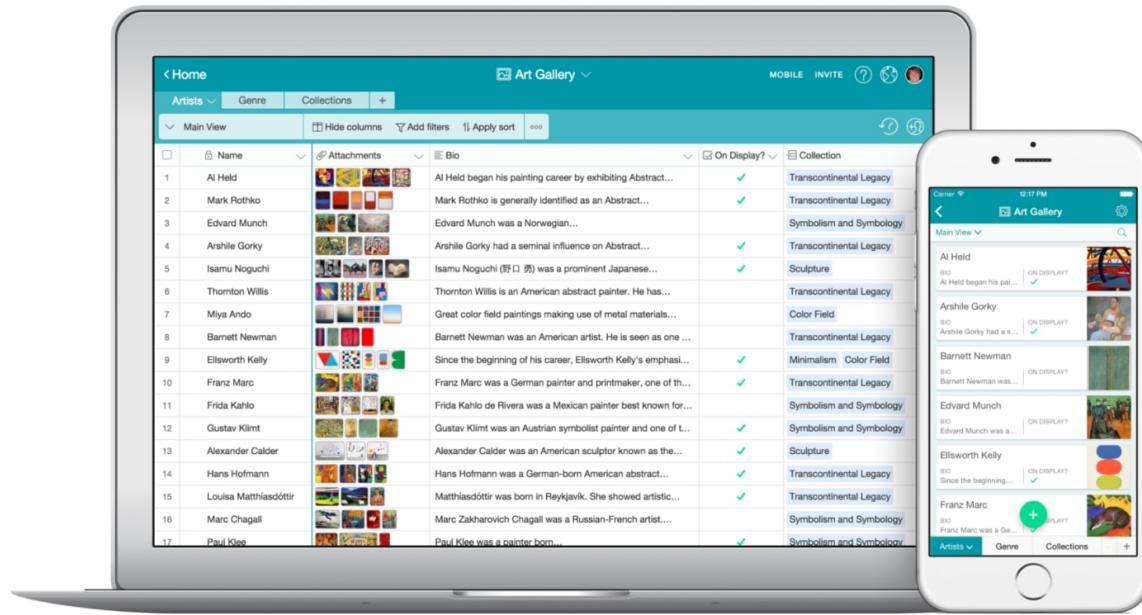
Thank you 🙏

Andreas Birnik, Cailen D'Sa, Cameron Walters, ChenLi Wang, Dennis Yang, Dylan Field, Frederic Kerrest, James Beshara, Joshua Merrill, Keenan Rice, Kenny Mendes, Lou Kosak, Madelin Woods, Merci Victoria Grace, Mike Cannon-Brooks, Nate Bosshard, Nick Crocker, Peter Kazanjy, Semil Shah, Shishir Mehrotra, Tai Rattigan, Tobi Lütke, Tomer London, Vrushali Paunikar, Zach Perret

If you're finding this newsletter valuable, consider [sharing it with friends](#), or [subscribing if you aren't already](#).

Sincerely,

Lenny 🖐



On the surface, it's the spreadsheet reimagined

"It was friends and family first, then Howie posted the beta on Hacker News (which is how I found the product myself). After that, the biggest mechanism was word of mouth by *far*.

At the time we hadn't even actually committed to primarily focusing on B2B — when I joined, we were doing both B2B AND B2C."

— Anonymous early employee

Dropbox — Hacker News



"Drew created a simple video, demoing the product, and **published it on April 2007 on Hacker News** with the title "My YC app: Dropbox – Throw away your USB drive. That video brought the first users to the emerging Dropbox."

— John Popel ([source](#))

Key question: What's a unique and untold story you can pitch press?

Canva

Canva: Design is All Around



"Because we had some high profile investors we'd been fortunate to **receive a bit of press** around our 'stealth startup' and had 50k people signed up on our waiting list. We desperately wanted to ensure they liked our product when we launched."

— Melanie Perkins, CEO ([source](#))

Twilio

[Free Trial](#) | [Login](#)



How twilio Works Pricing FAQ Docs Forum My Account Search...



TELEPHONY IN THE CLOUD

Twilio provides an in-cloud API for voice communications that leverages existing web development skills, resources and infrastructure.



CONNECT AND COORDINATE BY VOICE

Build sales automation systems, order inquiry lines, CRM solutions, call routing apps, phone trees, appointment reminders, custom voicemail apps, and a whole lot more.



SIMPLE, POWERFUL, PAY-AS-YOU-GO

Everything you need in just 5 API building blocks. Reduce the cost of developing, deploying and managing voice apps by paying for capacity when you need it, not before.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[GET STARTED](#)

In November 2008, Twilio [launched](#) on **TechCrunch** in private beta. A couple days before the news, Dave McClure (angel investor and founder of [500 Startups](#)) used the service to [rickroll](#) Michael Arrington of TechCrunch, resulting in the company's [first press hit](#). ([source](#))

Slack

“With help from an impressive press blitz (based largely on the team's prior experience — i.e. use whatever you've got going for you), they welcomed people to request an invitation to try Slack. On the first day, 8,000 people did just that; and two weeks later, that number had grown to 15,000.

The big lesson here: Don't underestimate the power of traditional media when you launch."

— Stewart Butterfield, CEO ([source](#))

In summary

The three strategies to acquire your first ten B2B customers

1. **Tap your personal network:** friends, investors, former colleagues