

Venture Sprint Primer



Venture Sprint

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The Venture Sprint is a five-day hybrid accelerator sprint designed for founders and innovators who want to validate their market, build real traction, and scale with purpose before pouring too much into product development.

This primer gives you a clear sense of what drives the Venture Sprint and whether this is the moment for your team to step into it.

Why a New Approach?

“ Because the first thing a startup needs to build today isn’t a product. It’s a human story that cuts through the AI-fueled noise of mediocrity.

Mitch, Silicon.Garden



In the age of Generative AI, the startup script is flipping. Bringing ideas to life and into the hands of customers has never been easier.

But here’s the catch: startups rarely fail because their ideas are bad, or because they couldn’t build them. They fail because they run out of time and money before figuring out what the market actually demands. And it’s almost never the first idea.

I was reminded of this at a founder meetup at our local innovation hub. That’s where I met Pete. He told the story of his foodie startup. In light of climate change and rising food prices, they saw a market for burger patties with fewer animal-based ingredients, replaced by healthier, cheaper, and more sustainable vegetable alternatives. Meat, but with vegetables.

With his finance background, Pete had a strong network. He and his team secured funding early, and researchers began creating patties with less meat and more vegetables. Developing a scientifically sound, production-ready recipe turned out to be incredibly hard. It took them two years to get it right, and by then, their financial buffer was running low.

That’s when they made a painful discovery: their market didn’t exist. People wanted either meat or vegan; almost no one wanted something in between. Two years in, with a lot of product optimization behind them, they knew they had to pivot or close the company.

The pivot worked. They repositioned as the go-to healthy burger for kids, and parents loved it. In a period of extreme stress, the team reached out to partners and eventually found the perfect fit. After two years of building the product, the team, and the partnerships, they finally succeeded. I wish this were a typical startup story. But as we all know, not everyone makes it that far.

Another team I worked with, a corporate product team aiming to revolutionize how researchers access clinical data and accelerate drug development, was in its third year of development when funding dried up. And rightly so. They had failed to prove their market in over three years. The reasons were many.

One question remained: how could they have tested their leap-of-faith assumptions on day one, instead of minutes before bankruptcy? And why didn’t they?

tl;dr

Building distribution first drives momentum and growth faster than perfecting your product.



By that time, we were more than a decade into Lean Startup and Product Discovery, and several decades into design. I spoke with countless startup founders and corporate product leads. Literally all of them were practicing Lean Startup, Design Thinking, and Agile already to some degree.

The truth? Startups rarely fail because they don't know "how to startup." We've made huge progress in professionalizing how companies are built. Even in corporate contexts, teams don't fail on methods.

Now founders are founders, and you rarely find them in corporate halls. They're a special breed, often smarter than average, fiercely autonomous, and unshakable in their drive to push through the messy process of creating something fundamentally new.

Yet even founders fail, often for very human reasons. Their fear of failure. Their perfectionism. A lack of supportive networks. An unwillingness to face market realities that might tell them early on: wrong track, try something else.

Founders often build too much and test too little. And now, with AI tools lowering the barrier to building, the situation might become worse, not better. Everyone is a builder; everyone is a creator. Creating meaningful things can be so rewarding.

Building a new product, creating a new piece of artwork, publishing a new article all feels like progress. But more often it is not. At early stages, it is progress only if it generates insights about your market.

A prototype? Yes, of course, but the build trap is lurking behind every corner, and before you realize it, you find yourself spending weeks building something that no one ever asked for. When you build a prototype, you should not do so to prove you can do it or to please an early customer. When you build a prototype, you should do so to learn more about the market, and it turns out, often you'd rather prototype a sales conversation than a product.

Because the first thing a startup needs today isn't a product. It's a story that cuts through the AI-fueled noise of mediocrity. That's why we created the Venture Sprint: a toolbox to test ideas in radically short cycles, and build distribution before perfecting the product.

35%

**of startups
fail on the
market.**

57%

**of failing
startups still
invest more**

Is the *platform*
burning?



Yes! We think so.

The numbers are relentless. More than a third of startups fail in the market, and the economics tell a clear, hard story.

The good news is, much of this failure is avoidable.





That's a

120-Billion-Euro Global Problem

*) Global VC investment hit \$368.3B in 2024, but with a third of startups failing, that's a \$120B problem, measured not just in money, but in lost potential and stalled progress.



An avoidable

Waste of Energy and Time

for every founder.



And an opportunity to

Solve Urgent Global Challenges

more effectively.

“



Big problems don't always need big solutions. In fact, focusing on what matters most, keeping it simple and executing fast works better than sticking to the playbook or overthinking the perfect plan. The Venture Sprint will help you focus on the market by testing distribution first.



Venture Sprint

Building Early Distribution

Early founders often mistake building for progress. But nothing moves until real people respond. Distribution is how you find them, learn from them, and let the market show you what matters.

Build distribution first, and you'll build the product that's worth it.

Have you ever launched something new and no one noticed? You're not alone. Building distribution first is the strategy that sparks momentum from start.

A product only matters when people can find it, share it, and see why it fits. Instead of perfecting features in isolation, meet people where attention already flows.

Khan Academy reached learners on YouTube. Notion let its community create and share templates. In both cases, distribution carried the idea farther than any marketing plan could. Real usage shapes the product, networks carry the message, and growth happens naturally.

Distribution isn't just a channel. It's the fastest way to test demand. How much product do you need? Often... none at all.

How Distribution Moves the Needle.

There is a moment in every early venture when the work feels clean and safe. You build your product. You sketch personas. You imagine markets that might care. It feels productive. It feels smart. It feels like building.

But building without distribution is just motion without momentum.

What Distribution Really Means

Distribution is not a sales function and not a go-to-market-channel. It is the ability to reach people, shape conversations, and create pull before you ever push a product forward. It is how ideas travel. It is how trust forms. It is how markets notice that you are here and that you matter.


When we talk about distribution first, we are talking about your time, your energy, and your presence. More time in the world. More contact with real people. More experiments that reveal truths you cannot invent from behind a whiteboard.

This principle asks founders to do far more distribution than building. And it asks them to do it early, before the product feels ready and before the story feels polished. Because the market teaches you faster than any methodology ever will.

There is no perfect playbook for starting something new, because the moment it becomes a playbook, it stops giving anyone an edge. Innovation is inherently competitive. Ideas, resources, and bright minds are all vying for space. You earn your place by learning faster than others, not by following the same instructions.

This is why the Venture Sprint is method agnostic. It offers tools, but it does not worship them. Tools evolve. Markets move. A canvas that helped yesterday may be outdated today. And a workshop that felt smart on paper can become an excuse to avoid the uncomfortable work of facing the market.

Many founders spend weeks inside rooms, cycling through exercises that promise clarity while delivering very little. They interview random people because the template told them to, not because those voices matter. They collect insights that never meet reality. The playbook becomes a distraction.



Truth is, the market is the only place where anything real happens. Every hour spent imagining the world outside the building is in fact an hour spent inside it.

Shoshana and Danny's Turn

On one of the early Venture Sprints, Shoshana reached a breaking point. After an hour of refining personas she paused, took a breath, and said what many founders think but rarely say out loud.

“WTF. This is not how it works for me.”

And she was right. She did not need imagined personas. She needed real humans, real conversations, real signals. So we left the workshop behind and stepped into the world where her market already lived.

For years, Shoshana had been building relationships. She had grown a WhatsApp community of more than a thousand people. She had distribution long before she had her new business. When the moment came to test an idea with Danny, they did not need a playbook. She had people ready to listen and respond.

Together, they turned the Venture Sprint into a live exploration of their market. They tested, learned, adjusted, and tested again. A couple of online sessions were enough for focus and for holding the frame. Everything else happened where it mattered, in conversation with the community they had earned.

This is what distribution first looks like. It is fast. It is grounded in reality. And it works.

Shoshana and Danny are accomplished founders with distribution in their DNA. Most founders start from a different place. Many are builders at heart, equipped with their craft and a determination to learn. For them, distribution can feel like a wall. But it is not a wall. It is a practice. And like any practice, it grows through repetition.


Early on, founders do not only need to build distribution. They need to embody it. Their presence, their curiosity, their conversations, their willingness to be visible. This is how traction forms.

The Distribution Power Behind Apple

We often celebrate Steve Jobs for his vision and his relentless focus. He had a remarkable ability to strip complexity away until only the essential remained. He created rules that were simple to say, difficult to execute, and transformative when applied.

What we talk about less is that Jobs was a distribution mastermind. Long before the first iPhone reached a shelf, he had built a global audience that was leaning in. He himself became a leading figure of a generation of creatives. Apple stores became stages. Product launches became cultural moments. People camped outside for hours, not just to get the gadgets, but to glimpse the future.

This was distribution at its highest form. Not just reach, but fandom.



Part of the magic came from how Apple controlled its stories. Secret rooms with restricted access. Projects hidden behind codenames.

Teams siloed in quiet corners of the company. Small leaks that spread like wildfire. Each hint fed anticipation. Each silence amplified curiosity. Jobs understood that distribution is not just about what you say. It is also about what you choose not to say. The world waited. The world watched. And when the product arrived, the narrative was already owned. Apple didn't just launch products. It built an audience first and everything else followed.

But here is the catch.

Distribution means nothing without real demand. If you are not solving a painful problem or tapping into a meaningful desire, the market will not pull you forward. Distribution is not a shortcut to turning a lukewarm idea into a thriving business. More spend on channels that do not convert will not reveal new truths and doing more of the same will not move the needle.

Early-stage distribution is not about scale. It is about creating signals that matter. It is your way of listening to the market, learning what resonates, and positioning your venture where demand already wants you to go.

Owning the Narrative

Likewise early stage distribution is not a sales tactic or a growth hack. It is the narrative you hold and the trust you earn. It begins with who you are as a founder and extends into the impact your product creates in people's lives.

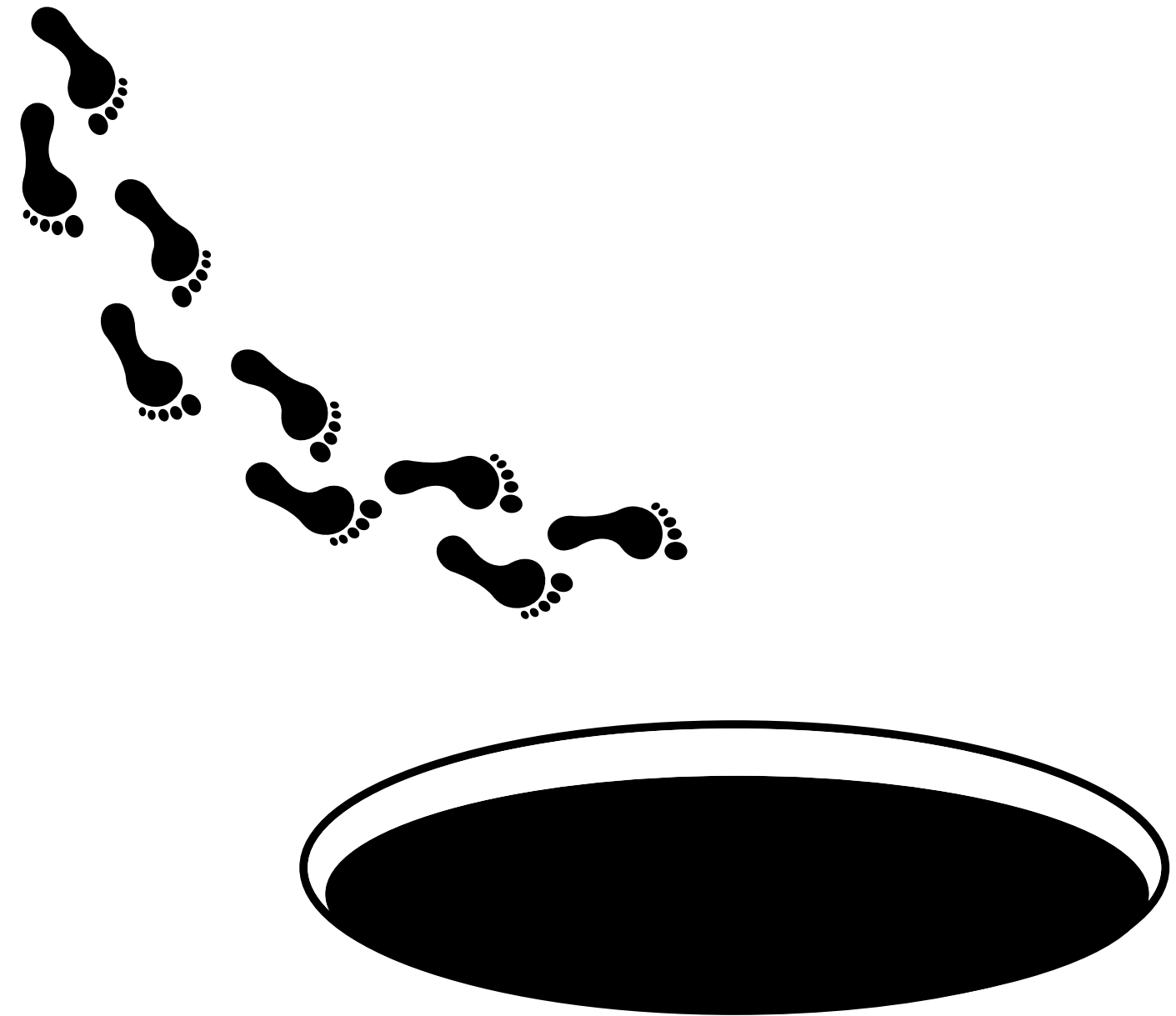
When you practice distribution first, you stop fantasizing about a market and start meeting it. You stop relying on playbooks and begin writing your own. You move from imagining momentum to creating it. Because in the end, distribution is how ideas find their place in the world.

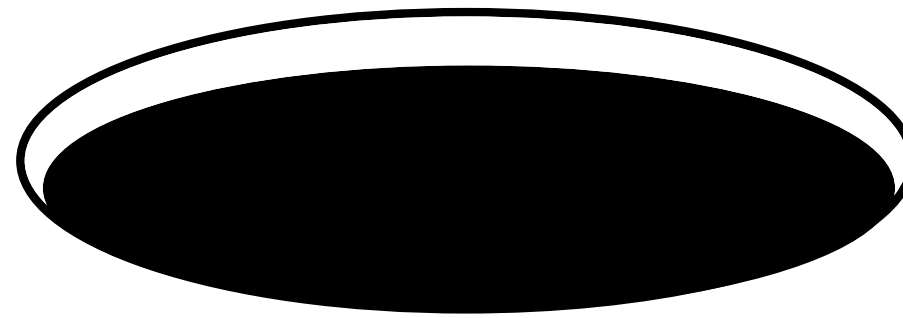
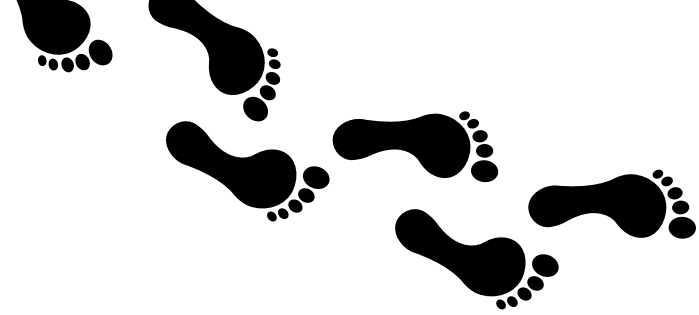
Mind the Traps That Steal Momentum

Most people in the startup world can recite build, measure, learn. Far fewer step into the market with open eyes and create something people genuinely want.

The Venture Sprint gives founders a steady frame, sharper sight, and the momentum to keep building what matters.

It helps them move past the quiet traps that dilute focus and pull good ideas off course, opening space for clarity and meaningful progress.





Founders' lives are full of traps. The most dangerous ones we carry inside.



Kevin, still perfecting the web site.



Lala, still working on the pitch deck.

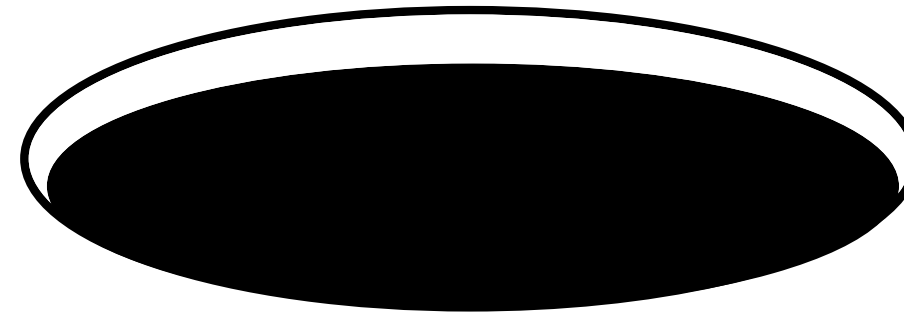
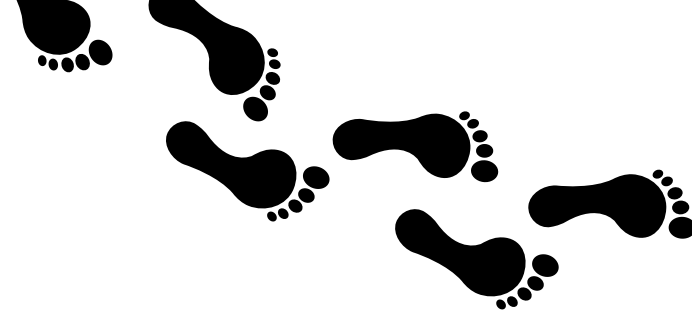


Bob, making AI do all the work for him.



Makena, networking on the beach front..

John Doe, trying to be more visible.



Our Inner Traps

We build because it feels safe

Founders live with uncertainty every day. It is tempting to retreat to the comfort of building. It feels productive, even when the real progress lies in building distribution and meeting the market early.

We fall in love too fast

It is easy to get attached to our own solutions. Ideas feel sharp and personal, so we overvalue them. That attachment often leads to overbuilding instead of learning through small, revealing tests.

We assume we already know

We are confident thinkers. Sometimes too confident. We believe we can predict what customers want and end up shipping features without testing real demand.

We look for proof, not truth

Signals get filtered through what we hope is true. We chase validation instead of challenge, proof instead of insight. Strong ideas grow when assumptions are tested, not protected.

We default to the proper playbook

Many founders bring old habits with them. Raise funding, hire early, build big. The familiar path feels responsible, yet it often postpones the moment that matters most: seeing if anyone cares.

We misjudge the timeline

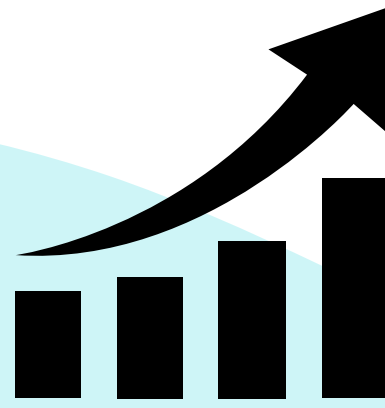
Building always takes longer than expected. Without small tests, timelines stretch and learning slows. Momentum fades in the gap.

We delay to avoid early failure

The idea of stumbling in public can feel risky. So we polish, wait, and overprepare. Testing safely and early reveals more than any perfect launch ever could.

We keep going because we already invested

Sunk effort can cloud judgment. We push forward even when the market signals a shift. Real progress starts when we listen again.



Instead we
should ...

Show, Not Tell.

During the Venture Sprint, we keep things simple. Pitch decks, landing pages, and polished website copy look productive, but they rarely teach you anything about the market.

Instead, bring your idea to life in the simplest way possible. Act it out. Pitch it like a story. Sing it. Sketch it. Let sticky notes and rough drafts carry the message, not slides.

Clarity comes from customers, not cosmetics. Don't polish for show. Test, learn, and iterate. Save the pitch deck for when you're ready to sell a real product or speak with investors.

Do, Not Talk.

Overthinking feels safe, but it keeps you from learning. Insight comes from trying something real in the market, not polishing plans in isolation.

Perfection is a delay tactic. Fear of being wrong pushes founders to wait for the "right moment" instead of meeting customers where they are.

Put distribution first. Launch something small, gather real reactions, and adjust with intention. Progress begins the moment people respond to your work.

Only the market tells the truth.

Test, Not Build.

Too many startups rush into building as if the product itself could summon a market. It rarely does.

Before you find real demand, nothing you create is a product. It is a question. A probe. A way to listen before you commit.

Keep every test lean enough to reveal what people actually care about. Make it safe to try, sharp enough to produce evidence, and simple enough to release into the world fast, ideally today.

Clarity arrives when you stop polishing and start learning.

Sell, And Adapt.

Resist the urge to build and perfect your prototypes too soon. Instead, find ways to sell your idea before building the product.

By selling, we mean offering something valuable and receiving something meaningful in return.

Sell the food before you build the restaurant. Sell the pre-order before you build the car. Sell what you have today.

Get into the mindset of building distribution before product and let the market guide and inspire your next steps.

Mastery begins when the tool disappears and only the work remains.

To support the process, we've developed a set of lightweight tools to help teams move from first idea to customer testing. Often in less than a day.

While the Venture Sprint approach is tool-agnostic, we've often found that existing tools carry too much overhead, especially in the fast-moving context of early-stage validation. To address this, we've created a focused set of tools designed to radically shorten the "time to insight."

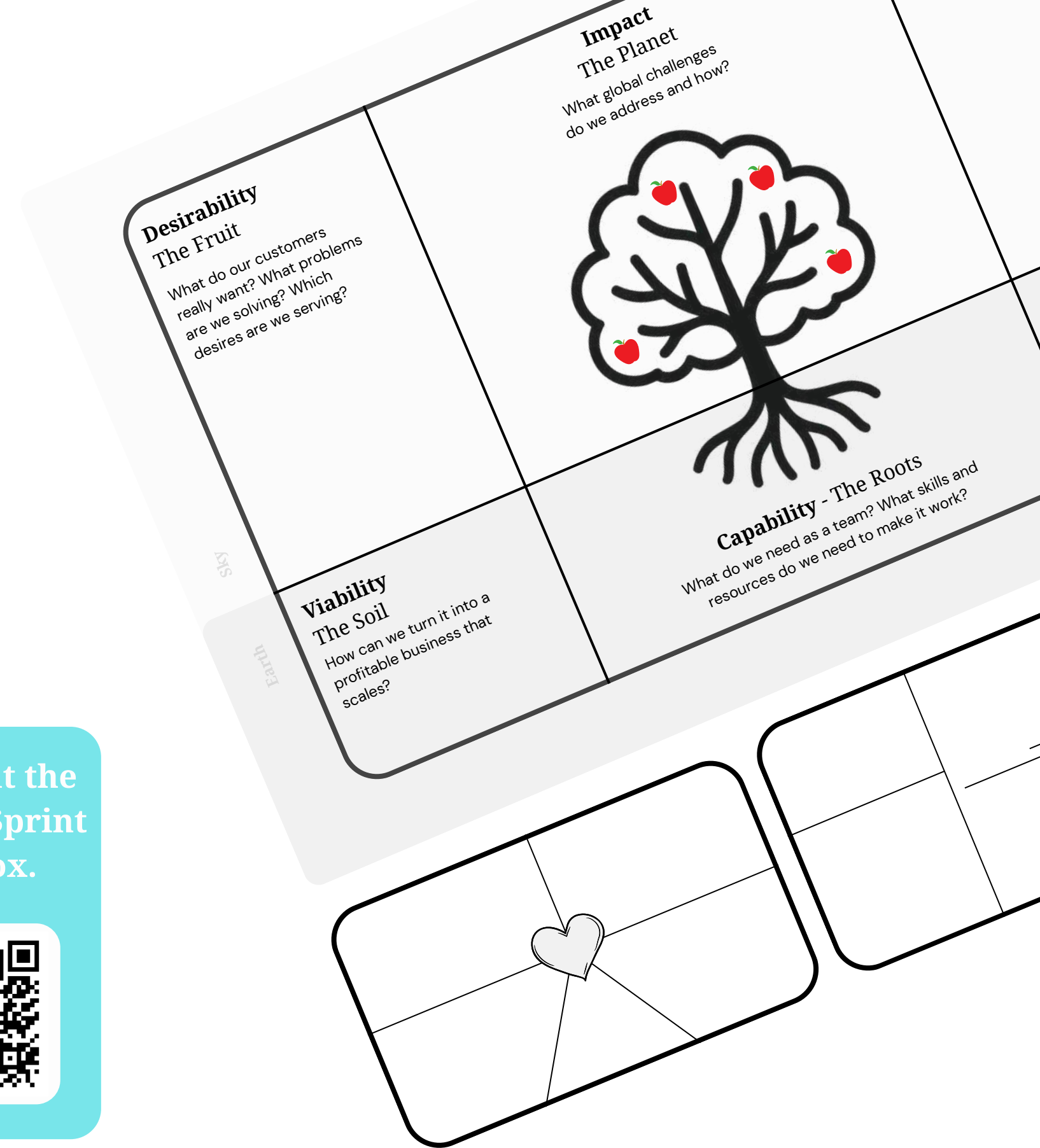
Our tools are intended for experienced facilitators, product teams, and innovation leads who want to accelerate learning, reduce friction, and test ideas quickly, but it's not the tools that make a venture, it's the people.

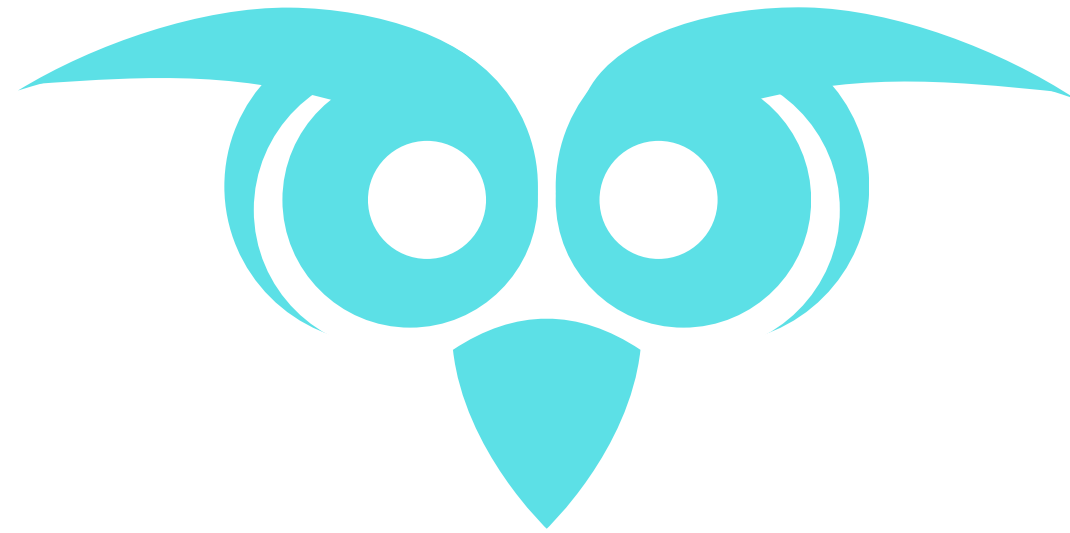
All Venture Sprint materials are provided under CC BY 4.0 and are continuously published on our community channels.

Check out the
Venture Sprint
Toolbox.



Or drop by on
VentureSprint.org for more.

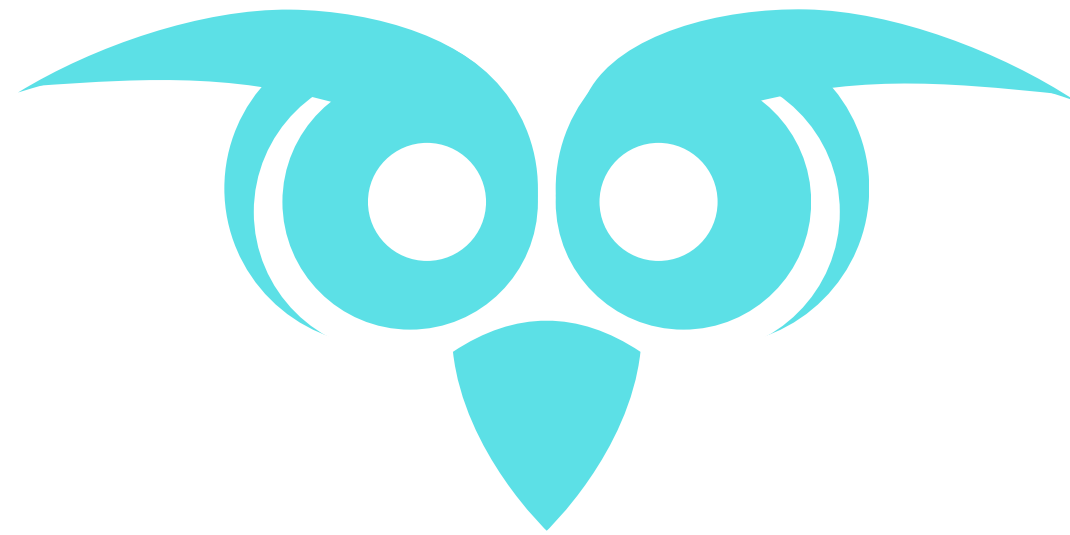




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The Venture Sprint is not a playbook. It is an accountability framework and startup operating system, that keeps founders focused on building distribution before perfecting the product.





Day 1

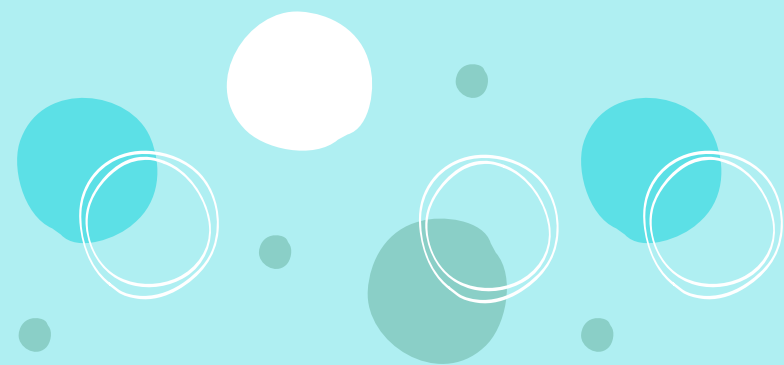
Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Ready to
step into a
sprint?



Will you
pivot or
persevere?

Before the Venture Sprint

A lot can be done before day one of the Venture Sprint. The deeper your understanding of the market beforehand, the more you'll get out of the sprint.

- Who are your customers?
- What problem are you solving?
- What makes your solution meaningful?
- How will you reach the people you want to serve?
- What assumptions shape your view of the market?

None of this is required beforehand. Still, clarity at the start expands what you can achieve. If you want support, explore our free Venture Toolbox or reach out for help with your prep-work.



Day 1

Align on
Market Tests

Venture Sprint

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Align on
Market Tests

Running market tests that
validate your assumptions and
build distribution.

Pivot or
Persevere?

Meet with fellow entrepreneurs, change makers and
investors and build global community

Celebrate
Progress

During the Venture Sprint

The Venture Sprint is a focused, execution-driven week designed to help your team deeply understand your market. Throughout the sprint, your team engages in the real work of market discovery and validation, including:

- Testing demand for your idea
- Sharpening your value proposition
- Preparing and running sales conversations
- Improving your messaging
- Testing distribution channels
- Creating content you can use immediately
- Building prototypes that generate new insights
- Expanding and refining your contact list

It's a highly practical, guided experience where rapid, customer-facing market tests are the default.

Day

Check-in

Align

Testing

Testing

Testing

Testing

Check-out

Meeting
the Community

Day 5

Pivot or
Persevere?

Celebrate
Progress



After the Venture Sprint

After the Venture Sprint, founders move ahead with clearer sight and momentum they can trust. They walk away with evidence, a focused path to traction. The work feels lighter because the fog of guessing has lifted.

It also reveals a few early stage truths that rarely get said out loud.

- Pivoting is the norm, not the failure.
- A real yes from customers is precious, not predictable.
- And early traction grows from distribution grit long before product polish.

Here's the shift.

Day 5

Pivot or
Persevere?

Celebrate
Progress

*After the Venture Sprint is
before the Venture Sprint.*



How often should you run a Venture Sprint?

For most product-heavy ventures, a focused Sprint twice a year sets the rhythm to stay close to the market and ahead of the guesswork. The deeper truth is this. Once you embrace distribution and feel its pull, you rarely let go. The Venture Sprint becomes the quiet operating system behind everything you do.

At the earliest stages, there is only one way to fail. You stop. And only one way to win. You keep going. You keep sprinting. It is the default, not the exception.

When Is the Venture Sprint the Right Choice for You?

When You Need Market Clarity

- When you have an idea but don't know the market well enough. Quickly test your assumptions with real market feedback to understand the landscape.
- When you're preparing for go-to-market (GTM) and need a solid, aligned foundation. Lay the groundwork for a successful launch with clarity and strategic alignment.
- When the market is shifting and you need more on-the-ground insights. Gain fresh, actionable insights to navigate changing market conditions and stay ahead of the curve.
- When you need a clear, compelling narrative to guide your story. Sharpen your pitch and refine your narrative to make it compelling for customers, investors, and your team.

When You're Making Critical Decisions

- When you're at a crossroads, facing critical decisions. Cut through uncertainty by testing your options and moving forward with clarity.
- When you need to make a tough pivot. Gather real feedback to assess whether a pivot is necessary and how to execute it effectively.
- When you need a reality check before going all-in. Validate your assumptions, test your product with real customers, and confirm you're on the right track before scaling.
- When you want to minimize risk before major investment or launch. Reduce risk by validating critical assumptions and gathering insights before committing significant resources.

When You Need to Build Momentum

- When you're looking to build early traction or momentum. Test key aspects of your business to gain early traction, showcasing growth potential to stakeholders.
- When you need to test and validate new ideas quickly. Fast-track validation of new products, features, or concepts to avoid costly missteps.
- When you want to build confidence in your product's market fit. Test assumptions and gather evidence to confirm your product truly resonates with your target market.

Who the Venture Sprint Is For?

Startup Teams

The Venture Sprint is designed to help startups validate their market-based assumptions as early and low-risk as possible, ideally before building the product or in its early development stages.

You will create evidence for your market and make meaningful progress based on actual insights. Our super lightweight and structured approach to market experiments will boost your confidence in achieving market fit.

Plus, you'll tap into an expanded network of entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and investors, strengthening your ecosystem.

Corporate Product Teams

Validate opportunities for improvement, accelerate innovation, and drive stakeholder buy-in with confidence. Our lightweight, structured approach to market experiments empowers corporate product teams to test ideas efficiently, de-risk investments, and make data-driven decisions.

Additionally, you'll connect with the startup ecosystem, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and innovators driving strategic growth.

Accelerators

Partnering with us means a stronger, investment-ready pipeline for your accelerator. We refine early-stage startups, ensuring they have validated business models before they reach you, reducing risk and increasing success rates. Plus, you tap into an expanded network of top talent and industry leaders, strengthening your ecosystem and giving you first access to the best emerging startups. Let's fuel the future of innovation together!

Venture Builders

Our Venture Sprint is your gateway to a steady stream of vetted, market-ready founders, reducing the time, cost, and risk of building startups from scratch. We validate business models, ensuring you work with stronger, de-risked ventures primed for growth. Plus, by integrating with our ecosystem, you gain access to top talent and industry leaders, strengthening your portfolio and positioning you as a leader in early-stage innovation. Let's build the future faster and smarter, together.

Innovation Hubs

We collaborate with impact-driven innovation hubs and co-working spaces to foster a global community and help their startups thrive. By hosting a Venture Sprint, co-working spaces position themselves as innovation hubs, attracting high-potential startups, investors, and industry leaders.

Beyond strengthening their community, they gain greater visibility and deeper engagement - all while increasing member retention and making their space a go-to destination for venture growth.



Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Will you
**pivot or
persevere?**

Global Venture Sprint

on Tour 2026



Coming to you soon.



The Global Venture Sprint is on Tour in 2026.

A five-day hybrid accelerator sprint hosted by innovation hubs worldwide. Its flexible format lets startups join the global community anytime, anywhere.

Where is your target market? Where is the talent you need? Where are investors active? Borders are just a mindset. We partner with innovation hubs across the globe to help founders grow faster and smarter.



**Impact
Founders**



**Apply for a
Venture Sprint**



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**Innovation
Hubs**



Global Sponsors

The Venture Sprint Community is backed by global sponsors who believe in the global impact that founders can make and want to help them succeed. Soon we will share who they are.



Stay Tuned.

Global Team

The Venture Sprint is brought to life by a global team of senior ecosystem builders, entrepreneurs, innovators and change makers with the shared mission of helping impact founders be more successful.



Amollo Ambole Ph.D.
Urban Futurist
Inclusion Champion



Verena Riedler
CEO and Chief
Impact Aficionada
at klimja.org



Aditi Sharma
IT Innovation Expert
at Siemens
Healthineers



Maryanne Akoth
Innovation Ecosystem
Builder



Sanna Koivu
Facilitator +
Improviser |
Passionate Agile
Advocate



Rafael Martins
Service & Product
Designer |
Sustainability
Expert | IxDF
Country Manager
BE



Sinan Eren
Tech Innovator,
Product Person

Michael Laussegger
Chief Enablement Officer



What Founders Say

Ultimately, we want to help impact founders succeed in the market, and what they say matters most to us.



Michael helped us gain rapid clarity and focus for our go-to-market strategy. The whole team benefitted from his guidance, his empathy, his genuine interest in our endeavor and his ability to build the plane as it flies.

Johannes Naimer-Stach
Co-Founder Academy for Climate Action



Atlas Ledger's team spent a few days with Michael during a sprint period that helped us refine our business model. Michael helped us position ourselves in the market, challenged our hypotheses, and understand our customers better. Michael supported us in structuring the design process and facilitated the team's discussions. It was also very helpful for the team to receive external feedback. Michael helped make sense of our collective thinking. He is highly skilled at using AI to make the process smoother and go straight to the essentials. Thank you, Michael, for all the help, and all the best to you.



Ayoub Derdabi
Co-Founder Atlas Ledger

Working with Michael in the Venture Sprint was a turning point for datamonkeys.ai. In just a few days, he helped us cut through the noise, focus on what truly matters, and turn vague ideas into concrete decisions.

What we appreciated most was his ability to keep the sprint moving at a strong pace without it feeling chaotic. He brought structure, clear frameworks, and just the right amount of pressure so that we actually made progress instead of circling around the same topics.

By the end of the sprint, we had a clear set of priorities, a sharper story to tell about what we do, and a concrete roadmap for our next steps. Michael's way of working is very hands-on, pragmatic, and honest – exactly what we needed as a startup team. We're very thankful for his support and happy to recommend working with him.



Markus Doppelreiter
Founder datamonkeys AI

I had the pleasure of working alongside Michael during a period of significant growth and change. His ability to motivate and inspire our team was truly remarkable. Michael thrived in our dynamic corporate startup culture, always finding innovative solutions to challenges. When we faced a crisis, his calm demeanor and strategic thinking helped us navigate through turbulent waters. I highly recommend Michael for any leadership role where adaptability, resilience, and a

I've really enjoyed working with Michael! We were a team of cats trapped inside of a small cage we had created for ourselves, ready to pounce and launch at each others throats. Fortunately, Michael came to rescue as our Senior Cat Herder and brought us out of that cage




Silicon.Garden
For a new kind of growth.


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