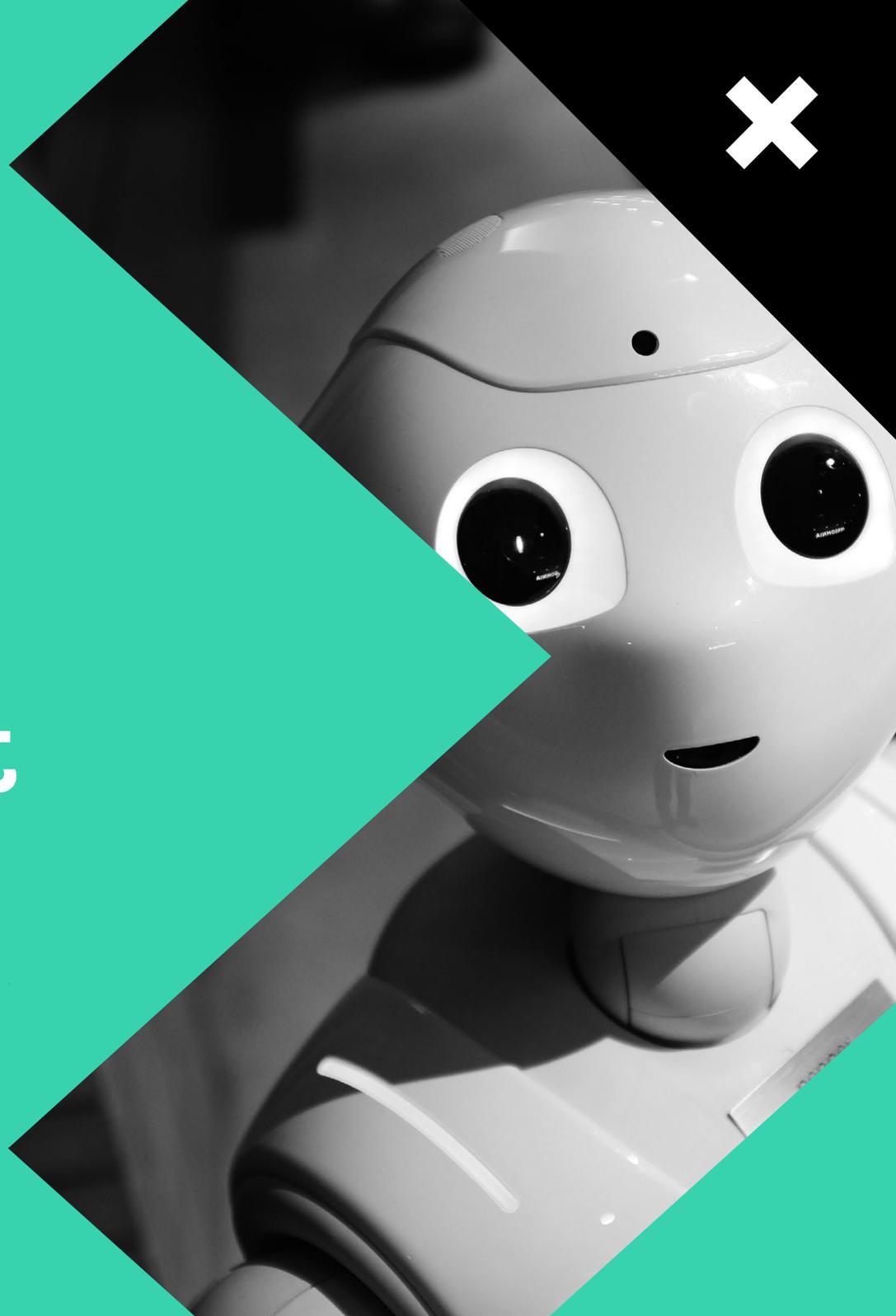**iCrossing**

How to launch a successful digital product

From ideation to go-live and beyond – a practical guide to taking a web or native application to market from the experts at iCrossing.

CONTENTS

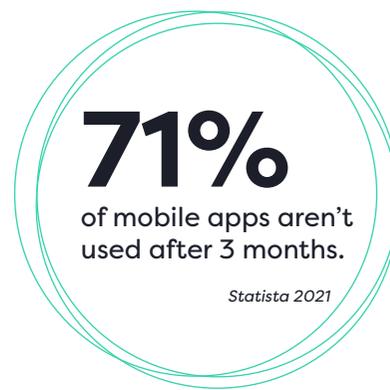# Now is the time for your digital win

Huge changes in consumer and lifestyle behaviours mean there's never been a better time to launch digital products and services. But success is far from guaranteed.

Since the arrival of the Covid-19, we've had to find new ways to work, learn, shop and socialise. Necessity, as the old proverb goes, is the mother of invention – and, boy, have we seen an acceleration of digital innovation and adoption! It's the perfect time to launch new digital products and services, right?

Well, yes – but with a hefty caveat. You're not the only one who has spotted the opportunity. Launching a digital product is always tough, but achieving cut-through and a commercially viable adoption rate in a crowded market is tougher. The internet and app stores are riddled with poorly conceived commercial flops. Success requires a rare blend of innovation, hard work and planning (not to mention a little luck).

Survival of the newest
There's also a phenomenon called 'survivor bias', which actually flatters many of the start-up statistics. According to the Ehrenberg-Bass

Institute, "Small brands are able to post higher percentage growth...because any growth is from a low sales base. But they are also more likely to fall completely out of the market than big brands. 'Survivor bias' can cause another error in analysing growth: it's only the shares of surviving small brands that are tracked so the average performance of small brands is inflated."

Our aim is to make you aware of some of the common pitfalls of product development – and impart a little wisdom on how to avoid them.

Over the years at iCrossing we've been lucky enough to get involved in creating digital products for a gloriously diverse mix of clients, from global brands to start-ups and everything in between. We've observed, and been part of, some success stories and of course some that fail. The aim of this guide is to make you aware of some of the common pitfalls with practical guidance on how to avoid them.

- Roger Barr,
Chief Digtal Officer

71%

of mobile apps aren't used after 3 months.

Statista 2021

"It's like MySpace for pensioners"
Seven digital product horrors to avoid.

1. **The white elephant** – The big idea that doesn't solve a problem or fulfil a genuine customer need.

2. **The empty Kool-Aid** – When founders trust their instincts so much they don't bother with research or expert advice.

3. **The Swiss Army spork** – The product with too many unvalidated features, wasting time and money.

4. **The smashed piggy bank** – Unrealistic revenue projections often result in the cash running out before commercial success can be achieved.

5. **The missing measure** – When teams prioritise features over analytics, they soon find there's no way to improve their product other than guesswork.

6. **The nodding dog** – Taking a product to market requires an diverse set of skills and experience – make sure you don't surround yourself with yes men.

7. **The leaky bucket** – No amount of marketing and PR can make up for failing to build growth and retention-orientated features early on in the product roadmap.
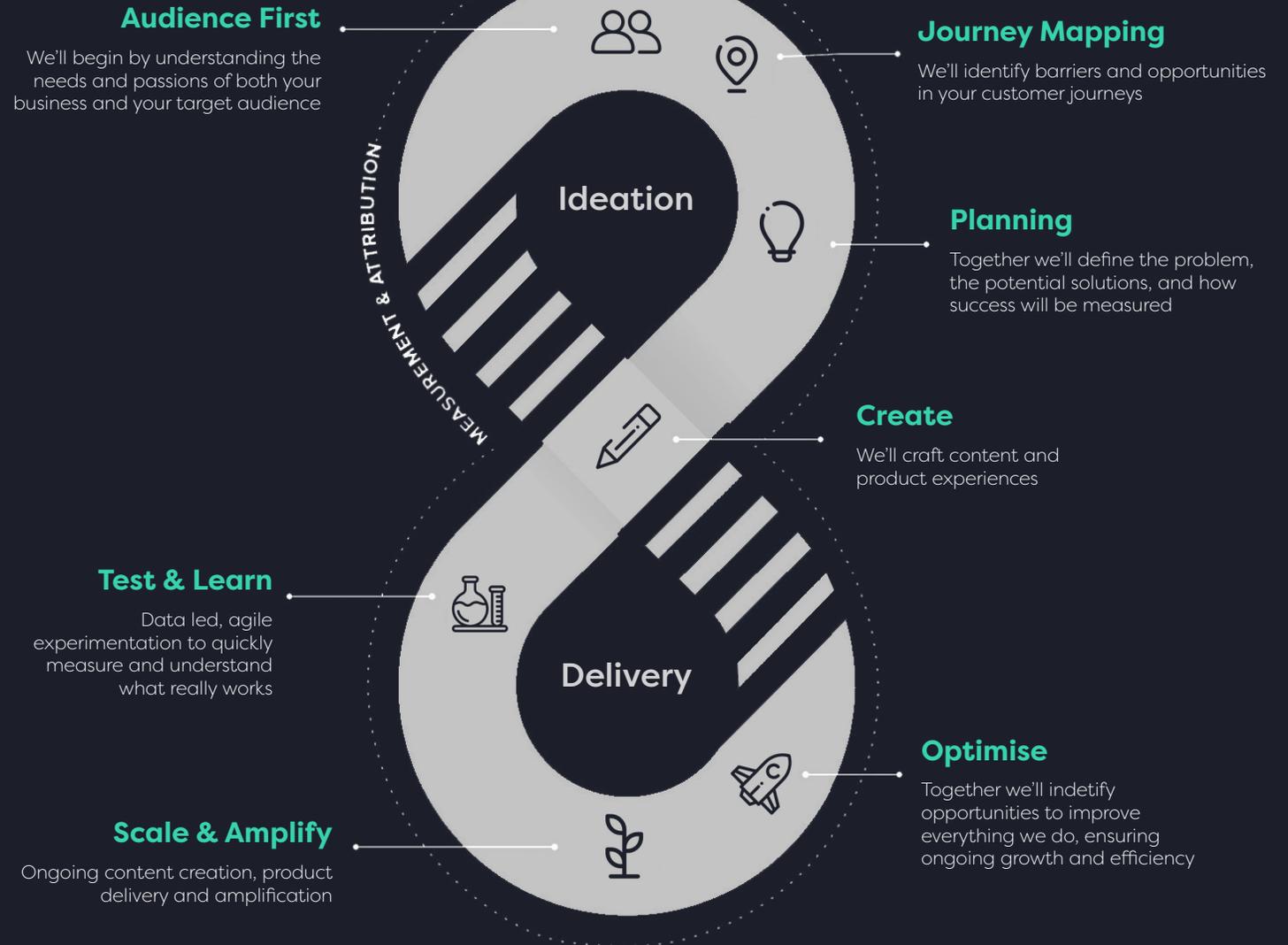
The virtuous cycle of digital product development

Most new digital products and services end in failure. But with the right approach and guidance you can maximise your chances of success.

We've broken this whitepaper down into five sections and, although at first glance they may appear sequential, it's fair to say that **launching and growing a digital product is actually a virtuous cycle of ideation and delivery.**

Start with understanding the needs and journeys of your target audience. Define their problems, brainstorm possible solutions, and work out how success will be measured.

Then you can begin the ongoing loop of prototyping to test your hypotheses, optimising based on the results and scaling to drive real business results.

Audience First

We'll begin by understanding the needs and passions of both your business and your target audience

Journey Mapping

We'll identify barriers and opportunities in your customer journeys

Planning

Together we'll define the problem, the potential solutions, and how success will be measured

Create

We'll craft content and product experiences

Test & Learn

Data led, agile experimentation to quickly measure and understand what really works

Optimise

Together we'll indetify opportunities to improve everything we do, ensuring ongoing growth and efficiency

Scale & Amplify

Ongoing content creation, product delivery and amplification

MEASUREMENT & ATTRIBUTION

Ideation

Delivery

How to launch a successful digital product.

1. Validating your Big Idea

1. Validating your Big Idea

Before you start on the arduous journey of turning your app dream into digital reality, dedicate a little time to planning your business case and testing the market.

130bn

The number of apps downloaded from from Apple and Google app stores in 2020.

- App Annie 2020

Product specialists will tell you that the process of validating your Big Idea never stops. And that's true. But it does have to *start* somewhere – which means you need something to validate. So before investing too much time and money, start by writing down all the good stuff swirling around in your head.

Step 1 - Start with 'Why?'

Why are you looking to invest time and effort creating a digital product and what are you trying to achieve? Having a clear purpose is really important.

Your 'Why?' will win you investment and attract people to work for you.

Your 'Why?' is what will win you investment and attract people to work for you. As Ted Talk superstar Simon Sinek explains, people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. That's why he puts 'Why?' at the [heart of his 'Golden Circle'](). Here's Simon's own 'Why?' statement: "To inspire people to do the things that inspire them so that, together, we can change the world."

And Airbnb's why: "To connect millions of people in real life all over the world, through a community marketplace – so that you can belong anywhere."

It may be that your 'Why?' evolves over time. Airbnb's did, as you'll see in [Chapter 4.]()

PITFALL: Lack of purpose. Many people start creating a product without a clear sense of why they're doing it.

TIP: Find your 'Why?' – A simple and clear purpose that guides all decisions and galvanises your delivery teams.

Step 2 - Identify your customer

It's important to have a very clear idea of the types of people who might use your product. The more you know about them, the easier it will be to empathise with them and create better digital experiences that will match their needs.

So start by defining (or refining) personas of your key types of potential customers.

If you're an established business, the ideal way to build personas is to bring people (and data) from around the business together in a workshop, focusing on different motivations that customers may have for engaging with your product. From there, you can begin to describe a typical customer for each motivation. Don't be shy of giving your customer personas a name, age, gender, occupation and photo – this helps to bring them to life. To help the process of persona creation you can download our **audience identities template**.

Ultimately your product or service should make the customer's life better to the point that they would be prepared to pay (with money, data or loyalty). This is your value proposition.

PITFALL: Target failure. "The good thing about Product X is everybody is our target audience."

TIP: Create detailed personas. Add summaries to the Customer Segments box in your BMC (see right).

How to build your Business Model Canvas

Populating the Business Model Canvas (BMC) should be a collaborative process, and it's important to involve as diverse a team as possible. The BMC exercise can take place in person (using paper or whiteboard) or virtually (with a shared presentation or, even better, a virtual whiteboard - see our **Miro template**). The canvas is a living document that you'll want to revisit as your digital product evolves.

Key Partners – Third parties who are critical to the success of the business. Who couldn't you do this without? Include suppliers, affiliates and sponsors.

Key Activities – The processes and tasks that are essential for your customers to be served. Focus on the activities that reflect your specialisms rather than standard back-office stuff.

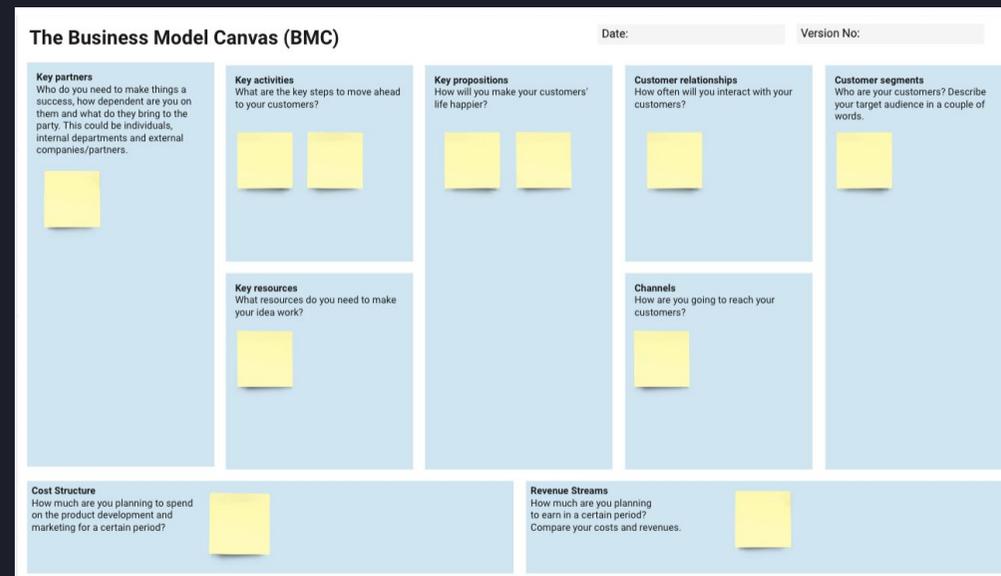*Key proposition – How will your product make your customer's life better?*

Customer Relationships – Are you after a long- or short-term relationship? Will you need to look after customers regularly? Can you rely on automation? Will your users become your advocates?

The Business Model Canvas (BMC)
Date: Version No:

Key partners
Who do you need to make things a success, how dependent are you on them and what do they bring to the party. This could be individuals, internal departments and external companies/partners.

Key activities
What are the key steps to move ahead to your customers?

Key propositions
How will you make your customers' life happier?

Customer relationships
How often will you interact with your customers?

Customer segments
Who are your customers? Describe your target audience in a couple of words.

Key resources
What resources do you need to make your idea work?

Channels
How are you going to reach your customers?

Cost Structure
How much are you planning to spend on the product development and marketing for a certain period?

Revenue Streams
How much are you planning to earn in a certain period? Compare your costs and revenues.

Customer Segments – Identify your key cutomer targets.

Channels – Where will you find your customers? This includes paid media, email marketing, display advertising, app store promotion and any other relevant channels.

Cost structure – What will it cost to provide the digital product or service – include people, hosting, support, software licenses and suppliers.

Key Resources – What are the assets that are core to the running of this particular business? Think about the people, technology and IP that the business couldn't do without.

Revenue Streams – How are you going to make money? Consider how your customers normally buy similar products and services. As well as one-off payments and subscriptions, you may want to think about direct retail, affiliate links and sponsorship or advertising.

Step 3 – Define the business case

The Business Model Canvas (BMC, see right) is a great tool to help you get started. It's a strategic template that allows you to capture the key parts of your commercial idea on a single page – helping you to rapidly define and communicate a business idea or concept. It doesn't just help you get your thoughts straight – it will prove invaluable in conversations with potential financial backers.
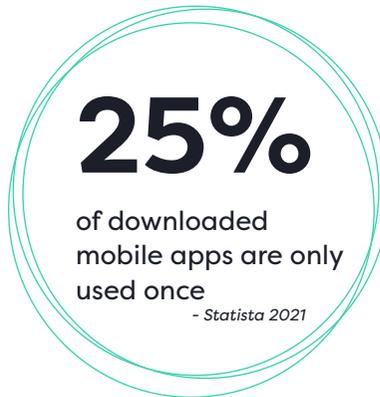
Pitfall: Running out of money. Many people overestimate how quickly they will generate revenues and underestimate the costs.

Tip: Using 'lean' start-up principles, do just enough to validate that you have something people are willing to pay for – and find how much they are prepared to pay.

Step 4 - Validate your assumptions

Now you have your Big Idea written down, you can begin testing your assumptions. This validation process – a combination of research, data gathering and canvassing opinion – will continue right through fundraising, build, launch and beyond.

Google Trends, **Similar Web** and **Semrush** have useful, free-to-use research tools to uncover customer sentiment – but nothing matches the power of speaking to real humans. Use your BMC to help you explain your idea in less than five mins. The more you practice the better you'll get at it.

25%
of downloaded mobile apps are only used once
- Statista 2021

It may be possible to create a basic prototype to get your idea across. **Proto.io** is a great tool even if you don't have any design skills.

Speak to a broad range of people that fit your customer segments (you may want to ask them to sign a non-disclosure agreement if you're worried about people stealing your idea). Start with friends and family, colleagues and subject matter experts before you consider spending any money on focus groups. Forging relationships with academics can pay dividends as it could lead to in-depth research.

Remember that you'll likely be looking to get financial support next, so think about what potential investors will want to hear. If you can back-up your idea with data you'll be in a strong position.

Even at this early stage, you'll get an idea of what does and what doesn't resonate. Don't be afraid to rework the contents of your BMC – the assumptions you have made can (and probably will) be thrown in the air by user testing. Better to discover that now.

Assuming you now know your idea is something worth pursuing, what comes next? The next chapter deals with getting financial support.

PITFALL: Creating a product that doesn't solve a problem or meet a customer need.

TIP: Focus on learning what the customer is really looking for and why your digital product should matter to them. Capture this in your BMC's Key Propositions box.

We can help...

Change.
Made Simple

iCrossing combines the capability of a digital transformation consultancy with the activation expertise of an agency. We help businesses unlock the power of digital, through creativity, content, data, media and technology to deliver real step change.

We believe that moving too slowly in digital is the biggest risk your business faces. If you are ready for a digital step-change, we are here to help.

**Call +44 (0)1273 827 700
or email results@icrossing.co.uk**

Digitising a painful offline swim lesson booking process

The 'Why?' behind our work with Everyone Active was centered around a pain point that was costing the leisure centre operator money and delivering a poor customer experience –both great reasons to build a digital product.

Trained front-of-house staff at swim centres nationwide were overrun by parents registering their children for the appropriate swimming lesson level to match their child's ability.

Digitising the complex process increased swim lesson sign-ups and reduced staff costs.

Meanwhile customers with kids completing a lesson level needed to transfer their child to a new session at a convenient date and time. The whole thing generated angry queues and a negative customer experience.

We helped digitise the complex process, providing a seamless experience to reduce burden on staff – and increase lesson sign-ups.

14,000
staff hours saved within 3 months by enabling online lesson bookings for over a hundred swim centres

ROI boosted by overhead savings

7 mins
to profile your child's swim capability, find convenient sessions for their level and buy online via Direct Debit

Safe profiling and easy transactions

>500k
monthly visits by parents exploring the most suitable and convenient lessons for their children

Technology built to scale

How to launch a successful digital product.

2. Finding financial & strategic support

29%

of UK start-up's failed beacuse they ran out of cash

- CB Insights 2019

2. Finding financial & strategic support

Whether you're an entrepreneur looking for external funding, or a director seeking internal investment, generating support for your Big Idea will be tough – but not impossible.

By now you've honed your elevator pitch and validated your idea – but your backers will want to know why the timing is right for your idea, and how it aligns to your brand's purpose and principles. It's also crucial to demonstrate that you have the right team to turn your concept into reality.

Preparing to pitch your Big Idea

So before you enter a room (or Zoom) to pitch for funding, craft your investor pitch deck and prepare. Make sure you know your product inside and out, and have informed answers to the questions your potential investors will have.

Make sure you know your product inside and out, and have informed answers to the questions your potential investors will have.

As an agency familiar with helping brands in this process, iCrossing has identified a number of questions (70 to be precise) that need to be considered before you step into

the dragon's den. Naturally investors want to make a solid investment in a good idea, but their reasons for investing will be varied. So do your research – see what they're talking about and sharing on LinkedIn, and try to understand what they'll be looking for.

Whatever their personal motivation, backers will be investing in more than an idea – they're investing in people. Have a compelling story to tell, know your 'Why?' and demonstrate your passion.

PITFALL: Presenting inflated numbers.

TIP: When it comes to finance and predicting revenue and growth rates, be realistic and believable. People know when they're not being given the full picture.

Achieving pitch perfection

A compelling and authentic backstory will gain buy-in from investors, will fuel your marketing and PR engine, and will help you connect with your audience. So take time to craft your narrative.

You're presenting one clear and compelling proposition, not a raft of ideas – so be succinct.

Be memorable and listen to what's being said and asked of you in the room. Focus on the story, not a dull litany of stats. Be personable, demonstrate your passion and build an emotional connection.

PITFALL: Geeking out. Getting bogged down explaining what the technology does and not focusing on the customer's digital experience.

TIP: The technology you plan to use to build your product is just the enabler to bring your Big Idea into the real world. Don't dilute the passion and enthusiasm by going too deep into the tech – focus on the customer value proposition instead.

Keep your proposition simple, and present it really powerfully at the outset (60 seconds or less if possible). Taking this approach will capture the attention of your audience and make a positive impression. Remember, you're presenting one clear and compelling proposition, not a raft of ideas, so do your best to be succinct.

Of course it's important to have a thorough and well-thought-through presentation. However, always be prepared to go 'off piste'. Some investors and stakeholders will ask questions that relate to content covered later in your deck, so be prepared to jump around and go with the flow of the conversation and dialogue.

How to create a investor pitch deck

Make sure your presentation flows and tells a clear story. Keep it short, make sure each slide has one clear takeaway and don't forget to summarise at both the beginning and the end!

Mission – Start with the mission of your company and customer proposition.

Market – State the market size and note the challenges (show you understand the market and the gap where you fit).

Challenge / solution – Capture the problem and customer pain points and show how your product is the solution.

Technology – Present the tech (keep it plain english, no techno-babble).

Competition – Identify the competition (be realistic, don't say 'there's no competition," there always is).

USP / Competitive advantage – Identify your unique selling point and competitive advantage (how are you better, more cost effective).

Partnerships – Note your potential partners and customers (these may already have expressed an interest) and also strategic alliances.

Revenue – Note how you plan to sell your product, who will buy it and what you expect them to pay. Also show the costs of your launch.

Forecast – Revenue projections over five years (be realistic, but show you will be profitable).

Team – Introduce your management team with headshots, background, and key strengths of your advisors and board members.

Achievements – Showcases your achievements to date (eg funding secured and hero customers).

Future – Outline your strategy, how you plan to spend the funding, when you think more money will be needed, and how you plan to exit.

Summary – Close with confidence, highlight the key points and capture your story in a memorable way. And remember to ask for the money!

PITFALL: Giving away too much equity in the first round, depleting the value to future investors in future funding rounds.

TIP: Make sure how you structure your deals right from the beginning. It's easy to get carried away and offer too much to investors which can cause issues later down the road when you want to raise more capital. Remember the deal needs to be representative of the investment being asked for, and the degree of return expected.

Building the right advisory team

However good your idea is, it won't succeed unless you surround yourself with good people.

If you don't have the right people around you at the right level, you're never going to move to the next stage.

Investing time in building your network will pay dividends – you'll gain knowledge and insight as well as confidence in talking about your idea. Don't be afraid to ask for guidance, or for introductions to specialists – you'll often find people are flattered to be asked for help and willing to share their knowledge for free.

Surround yourself with advisors that span all the critical areas of your business (such as marketing, brand, content, technology, product, legal and financial).

"Don't look at the money. Look at the people."

Jana Dowling, Founder and CEO of mental health app Arkeo and Head of Sweatcoin for Good gives shares her experience of starting up something new.

Cherry pick your investors. Don't look at the money, look at the people. Pay attention to the value they can bring to you. Last year we secured £1million VC [venture capital] funding and went to build out to a full version, then the VC didn't make the first payment because of Covid, and that was it. It doesn't matter what you have signed off – unless you have the firepower behind you to cite those legal documents, you can't make a VC pay. I thought "I've got to figure out how to make this happen in a completely different way. So that's what I did. And we've made it happen."

Work out how much you really need. I thought I needed a million but actually we've done it for £130K, which is insane. If you don't have a product, find ten people willing to invest £10K. We have a GP investing because she has nothing to give her patients [for mental health] – that gave me a great deal of validation. If I'd raised more, my life would have been much less stressful, but I probably would have wasted a lot of money.

Be honest and open. All our creditors agreed that I didn't have to pay them until we started turning over. No one sued us, I was honest with everyone about the situation and it paid off.

Nurture your network. I'm one human with a small amount of funding but I've been able to secure some large deals. All these deals have come from directly targeting and using my network, using LinkedIn, and putting myself in with the right people. Go to networking events, speak to people, introduce yourself, ask for intros to journalists, give your two-minute pitch, connect, build relationships and nurture them.

Surround yourself with good people. We could have built our product with a million pounds, but would it have been any better? Probably not, because I have the right advisory board around me. Everyone cares so much. If you don't have the right people around you at the right level, you're never going to move to the next stage.

Avoid bells and whistles. Look at the tech you need to build, and build the most basic version of it. Then you can upsell. The roadmap is what people are buying into. If I was to go back, I'd do it differently. I would build out visuals, build out what we know needs to happen. I'd have done user research, and then built it, and then done another level of user research, and then released it.

Be patient. I'm the worst for unrealistic timelines. I'd say double the time you think anything is going to take – just double it!

Tech takes longer than you think to build and test.

Test small. If you have 18 to 25 people from different demographics of your target audience, that number will give you a really clear understanding of what you're doing wrong, and where you can go and what you need to change and what you need to fix immediately.

Build a brand. Without the brand and the visual of the brand, it's very hard for anyone to understand it [when you're] trying to sell it to them. Once you've got your name and your colour palette and your logo, really you want visuals of what your product is going to look like (if your product doesn't exist) and then that has to go into your deck. And you want to be visual on social media. Because the first thing any investor is going to do now is look you up on Instagram or Facebook or Twitter.

Look for people who have have been on a similar journey. Advisors come in all shapes and sizes – only invite them to come on board in an official capacity when you're 100% certain they're a good fit. Never underestimate the time it takes to find the right people.

PITFALL: Fear of looking stupid often stops newcomers from asking questions of those who have experience.

TIP: Don't be afraid to ask. Unless you understand the basics, you'll never get to the trickier stuff.

Networking never stops

Never stop building your network. It's vital to grow your professional circle and continuously connect with new people, generating awareness of you as an individual and of the new product or service that you're bringing to life. And don't stop at LinkedIn – networking face-to-face in has so many benefits and you'll glean much more than you would through a virtual connection. So, go to investor community events, share your thoughts and hone your pitch.

Never stop building your network – it's vital to continuously connect with new people.

Finally, don't forget to thank the fellow travellers on your adventure, and acknowledge the part they play in your journey and your growth. And to be generous with the information you learn along the way –another generation of entrepreneurs and business leaders are just setting out on a similar journey.

How to speak start-up

Starting something from scratch isn't easy, but there's plenty of support – if you know the lingo.

Accelerators – Start-up support, from broad programmes like The Accelerator Network to sector-specific incubators such as the Sports Tech Hub.

Seed investment – Funding for proof of concept, usually from Angel investors, friends and family.

Series A funding – For development and talent once your concept and market is proven. May come from Angels, venture capital (VC) or hedge funds.

Series B funding – Investment from VC or private equity to consolidate and grow.

Series C funding – Investors inject capital focused on scaling the company. This funding could also be used to buy another company in order to build capability or take competition out of the market.

SEIS – HMRC's Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme helps early-stage companies raise funds through individual investors through a series of tax reliefs.

Crowdfunding – A multitude of platforms, such as Kickstarter, GoFundMe and Fundly, designed to bring together small-scale investors and start-ups.

$288bn

Global venture capital funding hit an all-time high in the first half of 2021
- Crunchbase 2021

How to launch a successful digital product.

3. Developing your brand and product strategy

3. Developing your brand and product strategy

Brand and product strategies provide your long-term vision, but should include enough flexibility to allow for course correction.

Your brand strategy and product strategy work are essential foundations of a successful product.

Building a brand encompasses a multitude of areas, from your logo to your tone of voice, but it all begins with your purpose, the 'Why?' you defined in **chapter 1**. Your brand transforms that purpose into personality, informing the way you act as well as how you look – and defining your work culture as well as the experience you want your users to have.
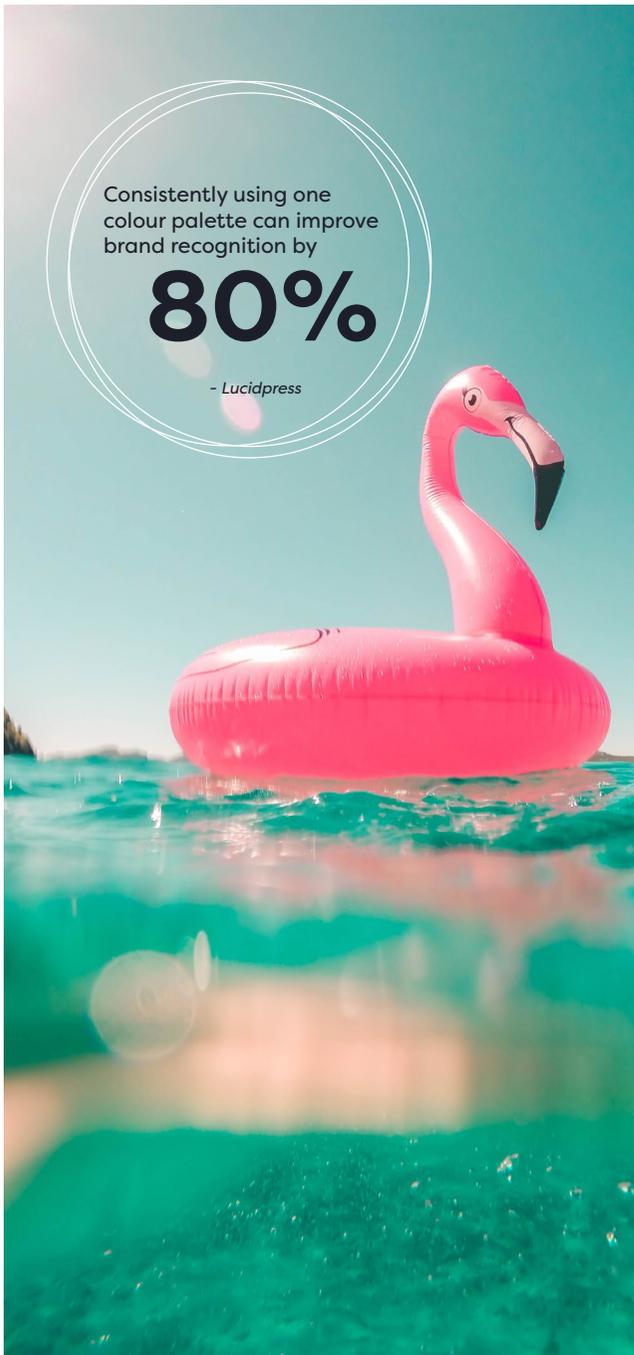
Don't be afraid to pivot: YouTube was originally conceived as a video-based dating service.

At this early stage we'd recommend that everything is kept lean and as flexible as possible until you've got some product and marketing learnings from your users. There may be some quite fundamental elements that need pivoting. Did you know YouTube was originally conceived as a video-based dating service with the strapline 'Tune in, hook up'?

Creating the digital-first brand identity
Your brand identity will be a ubiquitous part of your marketing, PR, sales and product building efforts. Here's what to consider:

1. **Domain name** Can you find a domain that works for you? **GoDaddy** is a great place to start and even if your ideal domain isn't available it may be possible to buy it through a broker. Ask yourself how important the .com domain really is – there are plenty of alternatives out there.

2. **Trademark** Do trademarks already exist for your name in its category? Check the **GOV. UK trademark site** for UK and EU trademarks, and **WIPO** for global trademarks. Consider engaging with lawyers who can carry out local and international searches.

3. **Keyword research** It's worth checking the cost of advertising against your brand name in Google search. If your name has close proximity to a larger brand this may cause issues. **Google's keyword planner** is a great tool for this.

Consistently using one colour palette can improve brand recognition by

80%

- Lucidpress

Once you have a name, you'll need to develop some visual assets. It's often cost-effective to employ branding specialists with experience creating digital brands for applications and digital services. They will help you create:

- Naming options
- Logo options
- Colour palette
- Typography
- Defining Photography / illustrative direction
- Brand guidelines
- Product mock-ups

Defining your digital product strategy
Before development begins, it's crucial that you invest time in turning your Business Model Canvas into a fully-fledged product strategy.

The product strategy sits at the intersection of what the market needs, what the business needs and what features the product will offer.

The product strategy sits at the intersection of what the market needs, what the business needs and what features the product will offer. It should define both the destination and provide the map that will help your team get there. For the delivery team, it's the north star they will use to plan and make decisions.

The key components of a product strategy are detailed below – some will have been identified as part of the BMC exercise:

- **Vision & mission** Remember your 'Why?' from **chapter 1**? It's time to bring to life a high-level, long-term view of where you want to be (your vision) and how you'll get there (your mission). Uber's mission is "Transportation as reliable as running water, everywhere for everyone."

- **Target group** Identifying the needs, wants and motivations of your target audience. This is where your user personas come in.

- **Challenges** The problems that your product will solve for the target audience – and the obstacles that stand in the way of success. Identify and document all the uncertainties paying particular attention to any aspects of the product that may never have been done before.

- **Business objectives** Detailing the business outcomes that the product will deliver. Make objectives SMART by ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

- **Product objectives** These SMART objectives relate to both the delivery of the product and the peformance after delivery.

- **Metrics** Your key performance indicators (KPIs) should be both organisational and product-specific, relating to desired outcomes crucial to success and important for decision making.

We can help...

Brand and Creative

We understand the importance of a well thought-out brand that also sets out to establish your brand purpose, appearance and behaviour. At the end of a multiday workshop with our creative team you'll have a new brand identity, encapsulated in an inspiring brand book that is a shining example of your brand experience.

Moreover, we will continue to work with you to ensure your brand remains relevant in this ever-changing world – making recommendations for adjustment and improvement as your brand evolves and grows – both on and offline.

Get in touch
To find out more contact our team of digital experts.

**Call +44 (0)1273 827 700
or email results@icrossing.co.uk**

It's important to recognise the difference between lag (like costs, revenue and NPS scores) and lead metrics. Product teams should focus on user-centric lead metrics such as engagement and retention rates.

- **Key features** Top-level description of the important areas of functionality.

PITFALL: Setting woolly objectives.

TIP: Use the 'SMART' framework to ensure goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

The Business Model Canvas covered in **chapter 1** is used to define your market and value proposition at a high-level. Roman Pichler has created the **product canvas** which works nicely with the BMC and is a good way of capturing the product strategy.

The section of the canvas called "Big Picture" is where you can start to define and prioritise the essential components of the desired user experience. This key section is really where the product strategy and product delivery intersect.

Once you've defined your product strategy, you can start to address design and technical considerations essential to delivering the first version of your product into the hands of users.

Building your product team

The skills and experience required to build a successful product are diverse. The key roles and responsibilities are detailed below:

1. Product owner
Both external- and internal-facing, the product owner understands the business priorities, owns the vision and the roadmap and interfaces with end users to get feedback. Crucially, they need the authority to make decisions.

2. Product manager
Internal-facing role running the product delivery team and ensuring that current and future work is identified in line with the goals and objectives of the product.

3. Product designer
Responsible for carrying out user experience workshops, journey mapping, information architecture, prototyping – and ultimately creating the user experience design that the engineering team will build against.

4. Technology lead
Will make strategic decisions about the technical direction and architecture used. The technology lead will oversee the engineering team to ensure that best practices are being followed.

5. Engineeers
Engineers come in many different flavours and are responsible for creating and deploying code.

6. Dev operations specialist
This role will oversee paid promotions on social, search and display and work with your PR team to make the most of influencers. They will also help to plan forthcoming content, utilising the real-time feedback and insights from your data.

7. QA tester
Last but not least, quality assurance (QA) plays a crucial role in successful delivery. Partners with the product manager and engineers to define and document user acceptance criteria, carry manual testing to identify and remove bugs, and input into the creation of automated tests.

95%

of product managers don't know how to code - and 60% want more techinical training

- Airfocus 2020

Building a brand for a digital-first private bank aimed at Switzerland's affluent mass market

Alpian needed a brand in four weeks. The iCrossing Brand Builder product offered the perfect approach. Working collaboratively with client stakeholders, we explored the aspirations and the values that would shape and guide their business and the behaviours required to have a disruptive but positive impact on banking.

We explored their aspirations and the values that would shape and guide their business.

Chosen from nine intial options, the final logo was built using a font sourced from a Swiss foundry and paired with an iconic '+' element. We also created a tone of voice that fit the visual style, helping Alpian take its first confident steps towards gaining full Swiss Private Bank status.

€11.5M

In 2020, Alpian's FINMA application to operate as a FinTech was successful and they subsequently undertook a €11.5M Series A funding round.

FINMA

Start-up

Alpian have been listed as one of 10 'Swiss Start-ups to Watch in 2021'.

EU Start-ups

$18M

In April 2021 Alpian announced it had secured $18M of Series B funding to launch the bank in the Swiss market.
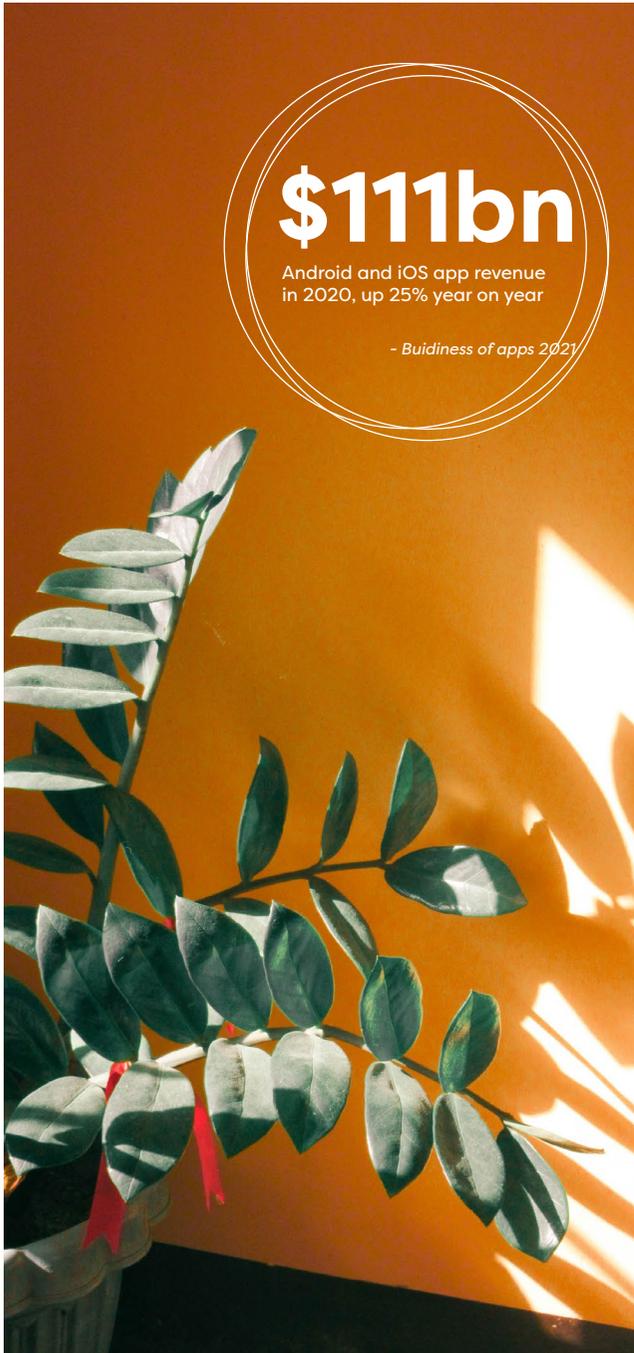
Alpian

4. Building your product: a virtuous cycle of ideation and delivery

$111bn

Android and iOS app revenue in 2020, up 25% year on year

- Buidiness of apps 2021

4. Building your product: a virtuous cycle of ideation and delivery

You've made it through concepting, business planning and strategy. You've found your advisors and set your goals. It's time for action – but don't forget to keep on validating...

You've reached product delivery stage. You will have already defined a clear vision, mission, your organisation's KPIs and your product's SMART objectives. These are fundamentals that you will need to keep at the heart of all decisions during your product delivery cycles.

Anything that is yet to be validated by the people who will use (and pay for) your product should be considered an assumption. And assumptions can be costly. That's why the golden rule for a successful product delivery is that you don't know anything until your audience tells you.

The golden rule for a successful product delivery is that you don't know anything until your audience tells you.

Your delivery process will be made up of a continuous stream of hypotheses. You should aim to prove or disprove these with real data as efficiently as possible. Keep this front of mind

when thinking about your product phases, the shape of your team(s) and the autonomy they operate with. The more experienced your team, the better they will be at devising and predicting the results of your tests.

PITFALL: Fear of failure. You're not hitting your goals – are your now throwing good money after bad?

TIP: Fail early, fail forwards. Keep your features lean and release frequently. Get comfortable with failure being a key part of the journey to success.

Learn to be lean

Resources are never limitless. You're racing to validate your idea in order to unlock further budget or upgrade your investor deck. You will need to be aggressive with the definition of 'lean'.

Avoid building features upon features based on unvalidated assumptions. Prioritise the features that are at the core of your product, that service an end-to-end journey and that provide you with valuable data. This approach will deliver unbiased signals to ensure you stay on the right track.

For example, you may believe user authentication is a valid product feature, but is it an absolute requirement right now? Are you capturing and storing personal data at this stage? Is this a feature that you need to prove or disprove? If authentication is required, do you really need to create a single sign-on for each social channel and a 'forgot password' method that relies on an email notification service?

PITFALL: Working linear not lean. "We need to get all the designs approved before we start to build."

TIP: Cut through the red tape. Don't create detailed designs and tech specs for a whole, featureful product. Validate your core product hypotheses and each feature hypothesis with the least amount of effort. Test potential solutions with wireframe prototypes and get comfortable collaborating over scamps drawn with pencil on paper.

Remember, your focus is not on what will make the product better but what will validate what the product should be. It's only your ego dragging you towards a slicker, more complete or featureful product that you can show off. The smart money is on knowing precisely what your users are telling you they need and will pay for. That's why it pays to work in the most nimble way possible.

How to deliver lean with rapid releases
Your Big Idea is really just a hypothesis; you believe that a significant number of people have a problem that your product will solve.

So, you must keep your focus purely on what is critical to validating this hypothesis. Anything else is a potential resource-sapping distraction that will limit how much you can validate and hamper your ability to pivot if feedback uncovers a different opportunity.

Your focus is not on what will make the product better but what will validate what the product should be.

Your product strategy will have identified and prioritised a series of broad themes – known as 'epics' – and specific features, each designed to take you closer to understanding what it takes to achieve your mission.

The finer detail for each feature is contained within user stories. Some of this detail will have been discussed while mapping out your product strategy, but only just enough to enable the team to estimate the effort required for each of their features.

The delivery phase of the project requires collaboration (usually led by the product owner) to construct the user stories in detail. To avoid overcommitting yourself, you'll want to split the end-to-end solution for each user story into bitesize chunks of effort. Focus on continually releasing these solutions into your product.

Lean success stories
Failing fast and learning to pivot was crucial to success for some of tech's biggest brands

Facebook started as FaceMash, a website where students could rate the attractiveness of two fellow students side-by-side. An early pivot saw Mark Zuckerberg (focusing on an art history exam) display two art images and provide a note sharing feature. The concept of sharing images and comments was born.

Airbnb (originally airbedandbreakfast.com) was created by three guys renting air mattresses in the loft of their San Francisco apartment. Their early exploration into revenue streams included guided tours of the city and a roommate matching service.

Twitter was originally conceived to broadcast an SMS text message to a small group, which is why tweets were originally limited to 140 characters. The learnings from an early prototype gave strong signals for success closer to the web-based format we're all familiar with.

eBay was launched as a favour to the founder's girlfriend. The problem it solved was to enable collectors of Pez (confectionery) dispensers to buy and sell them online. The lean delivery meant users were free to advertise products as they wished, and they rapidly diversified into selling other items. The concept of an auction site was born.

Product stages explained

What exactly does 'lean' mean for you? Well, that depends on what you're trying to prove:

Proof of Concept (POC) – An isolated feature or interaction that confirms how a user experience design or technical challenge can be solved.

Working Product Prototype (WPP) – A combination of features working together to validate a broader series of interactions; not considered a releasable product.

Minimum Viable Product (MVP) – The release (usually to internal users) of a core set of features that create a usable product experience – but only to enable you to learn how early adopters use your product and validate what they may be willing to pay for.

Beta Product Release – Once the MVP has validated your assumptions, the beta release helps iron out the bugs, provides a more polished user experience and addresses performance considerations in preparation to scale.

Minimum Marketable Product (MMP) – Beyond Beta, this is a set of 'must-have' features plus some 'nice-to-haves' that more completely address your audience's needs, creating quantifiable value for the business.

All too often an entire epic (representing multiple sprints of effort) will be worked on and delivered in a sizeable release. This not only makes it harder to prove which aspect of your release has worked, but it also means you're more likely to be burning resources based on assumptions.

The quicker you can create, release and measure, the quicker you can validate the hypothesis of the product or a specific feature. Don't forget there are usually a large number of ways to solve a problem. Rapidly creating a solution and releasing it quickly will leave you with more time and resources to either optimise that solution or move onto the next.

The lean team structure

Quick prototypes and rapid release cycles rely on small teams operating without bureaucracy, with minimal documentation and limited meetings. There's no better example of this than Clarence 'Kelly' Johnson's 'Skunk Works' approach to aviation innovation at Lockheed Martin (see box, right).

As a design and engineering process, the modern-day equivalent of the Skunk Works is the digital product squad. The principle is that your squad all share the same, simple mission. You have already identified what will be measured (KPIs) and how success will be evaluated (SMART objectives).

Your teams should be given autonomy but must all share the same, simple mission.

The Lean Machine: Kelly Johnson's Skunk Works

In 1943, Kelly Johnson told the U.S. Air Force that the first jet fighter could be created within six months. Despite access to unlimited resources, Johnson chose to work with a small team in a modest space built out of engine crates and a circus tent. Whatever used up time without advancing the project was banned: finished drawings were not required; shop men developed parts directly on the airplane; meetings were limited to two or three participants. As a result of this approach, the prototype jet was built and delivered in just 143 days – seven days ahead of schedule.

Crucially, your squad(s) should be given the autonomy to undertake any approach and pick up any tasks that will validate, create or optimise a feature which your strategy has identified and prioritised.

A squad's composition will vary depending on the product and resources. The key principle is collaboration, avoiding the creation of silos of user experience, design, engineering and analysis. A squad should include the fewest people necessary to represent the key functions of your product.

In a squad, there are no such things as 'design tasks' or a 'technical problems'. Addressing an item from the backlog must include input from all disciplines, working simultaneously within the rapid release cycle.

PITFALL: Struggling to scale. Your backers want more features, fast. But the team is struggling to keep pace.

TIP: Scale with small teams and the right tools. Cut out committee meetings, give your squads autonomy and clear goals. Focus on thrashing out solutions with inputs from all disciplines at all stages of the sprint.

The right tools to scale

You'll also need to lay down modern digital product processes and tooling. The emphasis on speed, while maintaining accuracy, has given birth to structured design systems using atomic design principles and collaboration tools such as Figma.

Of course, the engineers are in on the act too. They'll lead the squad on decisions regarding the code they write. If it's foundational code it must be written to last. The best way to ensure this happens is to follow **SOLID principles** – a set of design principles intended to make software designs more understandable, flexible, and maintainable. This ensures each component has an individual purpose and isn't tightly coupled or deeply interwoven with other concerns.

Measurement must not be an afterthought. Make sure you embed analytics into your feature delivery.

However, when time is short it's acceptable to write code in haste – as long as it's clearly flagged as needing to be rewritten once the feature has been validated (usually during the next round of funding). It's important that the product manager and the wider stakeholders have a firm handle on which features have been built for speed (and you may not want to build on top of) and which have been well architected to provide solid foundations.

70%

of app switchers do so beacuse the current app takes too long to load

- Think with Google

Baking measurement into your product
Analytics must not be an afterthought. The purpose of the rapid release cycle is to validate your feature as quickly as possible without bias. Validation requires clear measurement – so make sure you embed analytics into your feature delivery. Ideally your squads should include a business analyst but it's not uncommon for a product manager with a background in analysis to oversee this crucial element.

We can help...

Product design

At iCrossing UK we use a collaborative product design sprint process that is designed to answer critical business questions through a rapid process of product design, prototyping and testing ideas with real users and customers.

This approach help us to quickly solve design problems using a toolkit that draws from business strategy, innovation, behavioural science and design thinking. It also enables us to create an interactive, high-definition prototype to bring your ideas to life – it looks, feels and acts like a real world digital product that can be taken forward to user testing.

Get in touch

To find out more contact our team of digital experts.

**Call +44 (0)1273 827 700
or email results@icrossing.co.uk**

How to launch a successful digital product.

5. Growing your audience

91%

of shopping app users churn within 30 days of first using an app

- Statista 2021

5. Growing your audience

Audience growth is about so much more than marketing. Identifying your early adopters and turning them into advocates is crucial to success.

So everything's in perfect order and you're ready to take your product to market? Of course not, it doesn't work like that. Building digital success is not a simple production-line process. Audience growth requires the exact same approach as your product development – start early, create minimum viable marketing for your minimum viable product, and learn from the user feedback.

Don't wait until you've built it
It's never too early to find your early adopters. Even before you have a product to show, interested parties will be happy to provide feedback on your idea and your messaging (as we discussed in **chapter 1**).

It's never too early to find your early adopters... if nurtured, they'll often become loyal advocates.

Some of these people will be happy to be fellow travellers on your journey and, if nurtured with updates and early access, will often become loyal
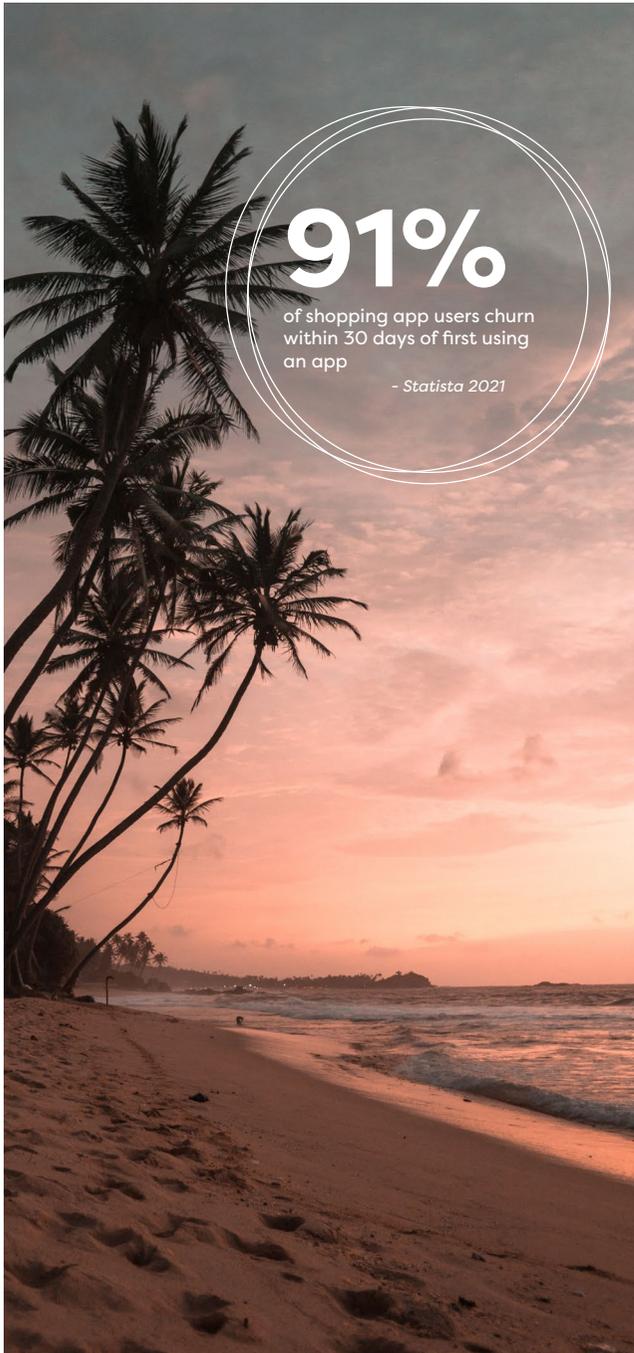
advocates. That's why it's worth scouring your network for suitable influencers. You don't need social media celebrities – just the kind of people who others turn to for advice or inspiration.

Keep your initial group of 'alpha' testers small – a handful will do. And don't just use them to test your product – get their feedback on branding and marketing, too. Give them options where possible.

> *PITFALL: Creating silos by separating marketing engineering and other functions.*
>
> *TIP: Don't give your marketing team different objectives to your engineers. Work as one!*

Email your alphas and ask what they'd like to see more of and what's not working. You'll uncover a great deal about what really matters to your users, and you'll be able to use these insights for marketing as well as product development. Don't forget to give them rewards for helping – a free in-app subscription or branded merchandise will do the trick.

Building your funnel

Once you have an MVP or beta product, you'll want to reach a wider audience. But don't put money into attracting them until you're certain that all your data paths have been set up so that you can trace which marketing activity your users arrive from, and where exactly they're hitting barriers.

It's important that you can measure this entire journey, from first to last action, because you're building a 'funnel' that runs all the way from acquisition at its wide end to conversion and retention at the narrow end.

A fantastic marketing campaign is a waste of money if your product is leaking users.

Every piece of the funnel is important. Just as a great product is pointless without users, so a fantastic marketing campaign is a waste of money if your product is leaking users and doesn't keep people coming back.

There will be some crucial measurements that you'll want to focus on, depending on your overall objective – for example ad performance, installs, first opens, registrations and first actions. But these key performance indicators are meaningless without some benchmarks to put them in context.

Industry benchmarks for ad performance, sign-ups and retention can be useful but they're often hugely generic – a supermarket and a high-end fashion boutique will be lumped together as 'retail', but they will experience hugely different performance. So the most important benchmarks are the ones you set yourself. Always aim to improve and optimise your baseline performance at every stage of the funnel, and fix any glaring problems as soon as they arise.

A strategic approach to growth

Once you've constructed your funnel and set up metrics and benchmarks, it's time to put your hard work to good use. Your upper-funnel KPIs will allow you to identify drop-off points in your acquisition journey and work out how to retarget potential users who have shown interest but dropped off along the way. The aim of your retargeting should be to remind them of the emotional state they were in before they were distracted.

There's plenty you can do to help yourself within the app stores too – indeed, a whole new discipline of App Store Optimization has sprung up in recent years. Look for tools that help you see how your product page ranks against competitors. Initially most installs will come from internal app store search.

PITFALL: Multiple stakeholders overseeing a product and pulling in different directions.

TIP: Empower a single product owner who sits above both teams and takes desicisions based on the data.

Top tips for app marketing

Build advocates – Reward power users to increase advocacy, asking for feedback and making sure you're prioritising the development that your audience is asking for – and turning it into social proof.

Look for the hook – Keep an eye out for new problems that your app can solve, and if you find one then solve it publicly (with the help of a PR professional!)

Be humble – Don't be fixed on what the app is for – be ready to pivot at any point, following the functionality that people are actually using rather than the stuff you think they should use.

Make friends with machine learning. – When you start, you may know nothing about your audience, so let the ad networks do their job and start optimising to those audiences that are most successful. Paid social may be your most expensive platform, but it'll give you the best demographic data. Google, meanwhile, offers scale but not much contextual information.

For those users who've already installed your app, you'll need to make sure your email and in-app notifications are working hard, and part of your strategy should be dedicated to uncovering the triggers that drive these engagements.

An advocate is worth a thousand adverts. Your app will only take off if your users are telling their friends.

One team, one vision
Be ready to experiment, learning from the data and accepting when your assumptions are proved wrong.

168mins
Average daily time using apps for US consumers - 20 mins more than watching TV

- Tech July 2021

In order to do this, it's crucial that your marketing and engineering folk are working alongside each other with shared goals – ideally with a data analyst providing the glue between the two. Because while paid specialists can get people to your app, and your developers can build the product, it requires an analyst to uncover what's happening throughout the journey, pulling insights into a growth plan to guide the next round of development and marketing.

It's also essential to have a single product owner who sits above both teams who understands the development roadmap and current user data. As well as providing direction, the product owner should be the primary contact point for all other stakeholders in order to ensure the project is not dragged off course by those with the loudest voices.

Virality is your route to success
An advocate is worth a thousand adverts. There are millions of apps out there, and yours will only take off if your users are telling their friends to give it a go. That's why it's crucial to give your users as many chances to share as you possibly can. Everything you do should be designed with sharing in mind: your adverts, your content, your user's in-app activity and anything in between.

Encourage your users to post reviews on the app stores. Don't fear bad reviews – just make sure you're doing a good job of community management, responding to those reviews (good and bad), showing you care. Keep working hard to protect and enhance your reputation – success is within reach.

We can help...

Change. Made Simple

iCrossing combines the capability of a digital transformation consultancy with the activation expertise of an agency. We help businesses unlock the power of digital, through creativity, content, data, media and technology to deliver real step change.

We believe that moving too slowly in digital is the biggest risk your business faces. If you are ready for a digital step-change, we are here to help.

Get in touch
To find out more contact our team of digital experts.

**Call +44 (0)1273 827 700
or email results@icrossing.co.uk**

Talk to the digital product specialists

Roger Barr
Chief Digital Officer

A digital evangelist with a passion for a data-led agile approach, Roger is obsessed with innovation, excellence, and the ever-changing way people are using technology to enhance their lives. Roger's career started as a developer at Pentland Group, where he helped to launch some of the first e-commerce platforms back in the early 2000s. Since then he has progressed to agency leadership with strengths in business development and technology.

At iCrossing, Roger is responsible for leading a team of digital consultants, product managers, designers and engineers. Roger is the brains behind destinations and mobile applications for brands including Five Guys, Timberland, Jaguar LandRover, Adidas, Speedo and Sport England to name but a few.

Get in touch: **roger.barr@icrossing.co.uk**

Tim Dodd
Head of Product and Technology

Tim's multi-disciplinary background is a rare mix. His commercial, creative and development experience is something he draws on daily as the person to oversee iCrossing's Digital Product Team.

Tim has used his 17 years experience of working with start ups, SMEs and household brands to shape iCrossing's approach to product design and engineering. He is frequently found bridging the gap between complex engineering challenges and the commercial-speaking board room audience.

A number of well-known brands and big players in their sector have benefited from Tim's expertise. These include Dali, Everyone Active, Gladstone Software, Microsoft, Sharp Corporation, Sport England, Yahoo! and Volvo.

Get in touch: **tim.dodd@icrossing.co.uk**

Are you ready to make a digital step-change?

We believe that moving too slowly in digital is the biggest risk your business faces. If you are ready to move faster in digital, we are here to help.

Get in touch

✖ www.icrossing.co.uk

✖ Email: results@icrossing.co.uk

✖ Tel: +44 1273 827 700