

Product Validation Toolkit

3 tests to run before you hire a developer

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How to use this toolkit

Most products don't fail because of bad ideas or bad code. They fail because something got built that nobody needed, in a way nobody understood.

Big tech companies test every feature before investing a dollar, or spending a minute of engineering time. This is what makes the difference between a successful product and the rest. This becomes even more important at a time when AI makes building much cheaper and accessible. The people who will succeed are the ones with the right approach.

This toolkit gives you the same three tests as I ran for more than 15+ years leading product and design at companies like Expedia, Nordstrom or OfferUp. The same steps, simplified, so you can run them without a tech background.

Run them in order:

1. **Problem:** Is this pain real, frequent and costly enough to act on?
2. **Concept:** Does your solution make sense to the people who have the problem?
3. **Usability:** Can they use your prototype without you?

Already launched with no traction? Start on page 6.

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Test 1: Problem validation

Goal: Confirm the problem exists for people other than you.

Who to talk to: 10–15 people who match your target user. Not friends, family or coworkers: they're biased and usually too similar to you.

I recommend 10 to 15 participants here because you will often discover patterns for a subset of your initial, less precise user target. This number allows you to still get reliable information.

Don't:

- Pitch or describe your idea
- Ask leading questions ("Isn't it frustrating when...?")
- Ask "Would you use...?" or "Would you pay for...?"

Check 4 things:

Check	What you're learning
The problem	Does it actually happen to them?
Frequency	How often? Weekly pain behaves very differently from yearly pain.
Cost	What it costs them in money, time, stress or guilt
Current solutions	What they do today, including offline workarounds. That's your real competition.

Question example:

1. Tell me about the last time [situation] happened.
2. How often does that happen?
3. What did you do about it?
4. What did that cost you: time, money, energy?
5. How did it make you feel?
6. What have you tried to fix it? What worked, and what didn't? Why did it work or didn't?
7. If this were solved tomorrow, what would change for you?

You have a good problem to solve if: most people describe the problem in their own words, recently, and have already tried to fix it.

Red flag: "Yeah, that's annoying... but it's fine."

Bonus: Write down their exact words and situation. This is gold: that's your future marketing copy, and launch strategy

Test 2: Concept validation

Goal: Learn whether your solution makes sense to them before anything is built, and whether they would pay for it or not.

This is NOT a prototype. A prototype gets people reacting to buttons, colors, copy and designs. At this stage you want them reacting to the *idea*.

Storyboard template (fill in 4–6 frames):

Frame	What to show
1	The person and the moment the problem hits
2	What they do today, and the friction
3	They discover your solution
4	The key steps of using it
5	The outcome: what's different now
6	The monetization step: how frequently and how much would they pay for it

Paper, slides or Canva all work. Stick figures are fine.

How to run it: take 5 people through your storyboard, ideally people from Test 1. Then stop talking and listen.

Question examples:

1. In your own words, what does this do?
2. Where does this fit in how you handle [problem] today?
3. What's missing? What did you expect to see?
4. What would make you NOT use this?
5. What do you pay today to deal with this, in money, time or tools?

Signal ladder (weakest → strongest):

"Cool idea" → "I'd probably use that" → "When can I try it?" → "Can I show this to someone?"

Your concept works if: they can explain it back to you, and you hear the top two signals more than the bottom two.

Next step: build a landing page to start collecting emails (use your users' own words to advertise it!) and a clickable prototype in parallel.

Test 3: Usability validation

Goal: Find where people get stuck before a developer builds it.

What you need: a clickable prototype. Figma, Lovable or linked slides are good enough for this. You want it to look as close to your very first version of the product as possible: using fake data but still working when people click through elements they can see and interact with.

Script:

1. "There are no wrong answers. I'm testing the product, not you."
2. "Please think out loud as you go."
3. Give them **one real task**: "Book your first appointment." "Find an activity for Saturday."
4. **Then say nothing. Don't help.** Not once.
 - a. *Note: keep your feelings to yourself, sometimes users will totally miss a button that is right in the middle of the screen and that's ok. Do not show your frustration or impatience. This is learning.*
5. After: "What was confusing? What did you expect to happen?"
6. After: "If this product was available on the app store today, would you use it?"

Note down*:

- Where they paused
- Where they clicked the wrong thing
- What they said out loud ("Wait, where do I...")
- Whether they completed the task

* You can also record these sessions and rely on the transcript instead but always ask the users if they agree first, and beware of AI slop in transcripts. Always have a pen and paper with you is my advice.

Test with 5 people. That's usually enough to surface the major issues. If major things do come up early on, fix them before continuing this phase. If you are building this on your own, you might need multiple rounds of 5 testers to get to a good v1 version to launch.

Your product is in a good place if: most people complete the main task without help.

Already launched? Run it backwards

Symptom	What is broken	Go back to
Few sign-ups or downloads	The problem isn't painful enough, or you're reaching the wrong audience	Test 1: Problem
They sign up but don't use it or pay	The solution doesn't fit how they think or work	Test 2: Concept
They use it but don't pay	The monetization model does not fit with how they use the product	Test 2: Concept
They start but get stuck or drop off	It's hard to use	Test 3: Usability

Adding features won't fix a skipped test.

Spending money on marketing will not fix this either.

Want to go deeper?

This toolkit shows you *how to collect* the signals. Knowing *what they mean*, and what to build next, is where most people get stuck.

► Watch the free masterclass: [\[link\]](#)

 Book a free strategy call: [\[Link\]](#)

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