Test Your Startup Idea in One Day

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Start with a landing page for your product or service idea, promote it, and gather feedback from potential customers.

In the early stages of building an idea, customer discovery is a critical step. Customer discovery is when you interact with potential customers in an effort to learn more about their needs, as well as how they think and behave. But customer discovery is also one of the biggest barriers for entrepreneurs. It's scary to go out and interview people, and finding people to interview is challenging.

My work involves helping companies and students use online tools to start and grow their innovative ideas and initiatives. Through applying this process to my own projects, and using it to jumpstart others, I've managed to condense it down into a few easy-to-follow steps.

The method outlined here is not a replacement for customer discovery, but it can be used prior to conducting interviews to quickly learn what the market thinks of your idea. For those of you familiar with the term, this is a modification of "The Landing Page Method" - where an early-stage entrepreneur will put an idea up on the web as a landing page, and look for customers. I've met Silicon Valley startups that began using this method, and even DropBox (now valued at over $7B) started using this method. It's most useful for very early-stage entrepreneurs, including students, who have an idea and are in the customer discovery phase. If you're still trying to figure out if your idea has product-market fit, this strategy is going to be useful to you. I'll describe the steps below, but here is a video in case you'd find it helpful to watch me walk through the steps on-screen.

Link to video

Step 1: Sign up for a website builder

First, you will need to set up a landing page.

Web development has become shockingly simple to get into, thanks to no-code website builders. If you have experience with one, and you like it, use it - but I personally recommend https://carrd.co (https://carrd.co/) . It's free plan gives us access to all the features we need, including a succinct ".carrd.co" domain name so you don't need to purchase a domain.

If you have not used a website builder before, you will have to sign up for a free account on Carrd, and create a new website from the dashboard.

Step 2: Design your landing page

Now we need to make that website, and your product, look as real as possible. We want site visitors to believe your product is on the market, and something they can purchase.

In designing your page, I recommend using a template on your chosen site builder. Unless you're a practiced designer, it's going to be difficult to make your page look legitimate without time and experimentation.

Carrd has many templates, including landing page templates, you can use when setting up your website.

Step 3: Add a 'Buy Now' button

You may design your landing page however you want, but you must include a "Buy Now" button. This may vary depending on your product, but you need some way for users to get involved, purchase your product, or subscribe, etc. I'll use a "Buy Now" button for this example.

In Carrd, you would add an element from the top bar via the "+" icon, then select "Button."

I also encourage you to add a priced dollar amount to, or near, the Buy Now button. We want users to know how

much the product would be before they click it - that will give us more reliable data in the future.

Step 4: Connect a digital form

Once you have a landing page you're happy with, we will need to add a way to stay in touch with customers if they liked your product, so we'll create a simple form. There are digital tools we can use to do this too. I like to use https://tally.so(https://tally.so/) , but Google Forms is simpler, and both are free.

The form must ask for the user's email, so make sure to add a question like "What is your email?" You may also add other questions if you like. Once you've created a form, you can connect the published form link to the "Buy Now" button.

If someone signs up with this form, we'll be able to see their submission, and their email, in the form tool's database. We can then use the customer's email to keep them updated about our progress on the product in the future. It's also important to let the customer know you're still in the early stages, and that the product is not yet complete - but that you will reach out once your product is ready to ship.

Our form will not collect payment information, or ask the user to purchase our product. We are not selling anything - This is an early market test. However, if customers click the "Buy Now" button, and are sent to the form, we want to know who they are. They're interested, and although we have nothing to sell them now, it would be useful to keep in touch, because they might be our customers in the future, once our product is completed.

Step 5: Publish your landing page

On Carrd, click the "save" icon to publish your website.

At this point, if all previous steps have been completed as well, your website will be up on the internet. That means that if users visit your landing page and are interested in your product, they can click the "Buy Now" button and sign up on the digital form.

If a user goes through those steps then you, theoretically, have a future customer. Not yet a paying customer, but you did find someone who has taken several steps to indicate a strong interest in your product. That's really valuable information for you and others, like partners or investors, who might want

evidence of your company's product-market-fit.

You essentially have a customer without even building your product. That's incredibly powerful evidence that people want your idea, and would buy what you're selling. It proves your idea is a good idea, and the more signups you can get, the more proof you have.

Nobody is going to find and visit our landing page, however, if we don't advertise it. In order to realistically test if people will click that "Buy Now" button, we need to get our ideal customers to visit the landing page.

Step 6: Promote to any personal outlets

This step is optional, as it depends on if you have any personal avenues to advertise through.

If you know how to run ads, and are comfortable with spending the money, you are welcome to use them. If you or a business partner have an online audience in your target demographic, promote your website to them. If your idea is targeted at a local audience, try putting up posters.

Step 7: Find and join digital communities

Even if nothing in Step 6 applies to you, you can find communities where your ideal customers hang out online.

If I'm selling a skateboarding product, I need to find online communities of skateboarders. Generally, the best place for finding these communities is Reddit and Facebook groups, but Slack groups, Discord groups, and independent online forums will also likely exist in your niche.

Find those communities by google searching for them. Join them, and observe how they operate. Look through each community and find which posts were popular.

We are NOT going to promote our product in these groups directly. All communities online, almost universally, hate being advertised to because many join and immediately try to sell their products.

Step 8: Post to those communities

Now we want to get in touch with those communities by posting.

We don't want to look like we are advertising, so we are going to instead make posts that ask questions, and ask for feedback. [Here's an example of such a post on a subreddit](https://www.reddit.com/r/sweatystartup/comments/ilb8zq/can_we_use_minecraft_for_coworking/) (https://www.reddit.com/r/sweatystartup/comments/ilb8 zq/can_we_use_minecraft_for_coworking/) , where I ask for feedback, and briefly mention at the end of the post that I've got an online form that's related to my question. DO NOT link your landing page directly in the post - most communities will consider that advertising, and ban you or take down the post.

Then, we need a post we make in a community to start growing. This is difficult, and won't happen immediately, so we should make multiple posts in different communities and customize our posts to each community so they blend in. On Facebook and Reddit the "rules" for the community will be visible at the top of the group page, and some communities will simply be unusable for our purposes, even if they are big and full of potential customers.

For example, there's a subreddit r/skateboarding that's by far the most popular community online for skateboard enthusiasts and skateboarders themselves. However, the rules clearly state they only accept posts that are original videos of skateboard tricks. We can't ask questions and we can't ask for feedback in an entertainment-focused community like that, so we'll have to find others if we are trying to advertise to skateboarders.

Step 9: Subtly advertise in a comment

If we asked the right questions in the right communities, some of our posts should start growing. On Reddit, that means the post will get a lot of comments and "upvotes" - on Facebook a growing post will get comments and "likes."

Once a post starts doing well, and members of the community are commenting, we can learn more. Ideally, a comment will ask for a link to your website, but if they don't you can get creative. For example, with a separate Reddit or Facebook account, your friend or partner could comment on your post asking for the link to your landing page or signup form.

Now to the community, it doesn't look like you're self-promoting, it appears to be genuine community involvement. After you leave a comment, or have a

friend leave a comment, you reply to it from the account you made the original post on. NOW you can link to the website, and a surprising number of people will go through comments on Reddit, instead of just reading the original post.

On a successful Reddit post, you can get hundreds of people visiting your landing page just through a link in a comment. It's free, super-fast, and you get immediate feedback from real potential customers.

Even if nobody visits your site and clicks through, you'll still learn from the comments on your posts. Some comments will tell you about current solutions to the problem, which can be seen as competitors to your idea. Some comments will complain about the problem you outlined, or the solution you present (your product) and that's direct feedback from potential users on your business idea. You may even get critiques on your landing page and ideas on how to improve it.

Step 10: Learn, and iterate

Now you have visitors to your site and feedback on your idea, and you're learning about your customers and the industry. You may even get the emails of future paying customers. You've tested your startup idea on the market.

This entire process shouldn't take you more than a few hours, but sometimes the posts you make online won't grow. If nobody sees the posts, you still haven't gotten actual feedback yet. Therefore, you may have to try again a couple of days later with different posts that the communities you've chosen may prefer.

This process can, and should, be iteratively repeated as well. If you get feedback the first time on problems with your landing page, you can make edits, and then post again in a few days. If people didn't like your product, you can try again in the same communities with a new idea. Pivoting, or learning from feedback, is an extremely common and helpful practice for new ventures - and almost every new entrepreneur pivots a few times before they find something that works.

If you had additional time and didn't want to rush this process, aside from continuing to test iteratively, you can also put more effort into making your product look real on your landing page. For instance, you could photoshop images of your product, showcase 3D models, or edit videos of your product that can convince

site visitors better than your current landing page does.

The more real your product looks on the website, the more accurate feedback you're going to get when you advertise it online. DropBox, for instance, edited a fake video of their tool working on a computer to make website visitors believe it was real.

So whether you want to supplement your customer discovery interviews, or you want quick feedback and data on what the market thinks, consider using the landing page method for your personal project or in your class.