

Step by Step

Startup Marketing 101

———— & The Actuality Of Growth Hacking



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& The Actuality Of Growth Hacking

By Ashraf Kamal

Disclaimer

Information in this kit is based on industry standards and my own personal experience, that I have learned and used through building marketing and growth engines for more than half dozen startups so far. Insights are just to show you the right path of success in your startup journey. While the success depends on your hard work and doing right thing at right time.

Openthrive and team do not take responsibility of your success through this handbook. You are, who will make things happen.

Thanks for downloading the kit. If you have any question or query please shoot me an email right away.

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Overview

Starting a startup has become more or less fashion instead of passion. Anyway, a lot of people start with a great idea, but most of them are struggling to see any movement in the needle of the growth. As an open startup marketer, I meet at least one new founder every week to discuss the startup marketing strategies. When I ask, what is your growth strategy to take your startup to the next level, they have

When I ask, what is your growth strategy to take your startup to the next level, they have the very common answer: “we are doing everything that can grow our startups from social media marketing to SEO and content marketing to blogging etc, but unable to see the proper result.”

In short, they claim that they are working on a great idea, but they are unable to break the ice.

If you are one of them, who is trying everything but unable to find growth, this post is just for you. Today in this post I will share “What is the common nature of growing startups? How should you market your startup with a solid startup marketing foundation?”

Let's start with:

Why Does A Startup Success?

Let's talk about the secret behind the success and growth of a startup. Since 2014 I have worked for many startups, but only a couple of those are successful today. Here is a very simple formula why a startup grows.

A startup grows if:

- It has a great product (not a great idea) and the right mindset to deliver it to the right audience at the right time.

- It is lead by great minds who can see (Honestly) where is the friction in growth and fix it immediately.
- A smart team culture where everyone religiously believes that the growth is not a job of marketing team only.
- Sufficient fund to run it smoothly until it will generate the positive cash flow.

If any startup is fulfilling this simple checklist, will thrive and become successful anyhow.

Why Does A Startup Fail?

Although every unsuccessful startup fails due to their own internal problems, but there are some common patterns of mistakes for all. Here is a quick list of reasons why does a startup fail:

A Startups Fails Because of:

1. Starting With Best Practices:

Almost every startup starts their marketing with best practices that they think will work just as it worked for their competitors and other startups. At the end of the day, they can't see the result. Finally, they start blaming each other and give up.

2. Trying Everything:

To follow best practices, they try and put their whole energy into doing everything that successful startups are doing. At last, they find nothing is working and give up.

3. There is Huge Gaps B/W Product and Idea

Smart entrepreneurs come with a great idea and start a business, but due to technical feasibility, resources and their skill set, they cannot build the product properly. They expect growth and business on whatever they have, whether it's useful for the market or not.

4. Team Does Not Have A Common Goal

This is the most common and destructive reason behind all unsuccessful startups. Generally, they work in a team but due to lack of combination between departments, all departments work for their own goals instead of a single common goal.

5. They Think Growth is Marketer's Job Only

Startup founders and CEOs are the best minds behind any startup, but very often they fail to understand growth is not just marketing activity. Growth means, improvement in every aspect of startup.

They don't believe improving the product, adding or subtracting features to meet the standards are a part of marketing and growth hacking.

6. They Think Startup Means Catching Fire

The speed of growth and success depends on lots of things- first, on a great product, then marketing, customer support and success etc. Moreover, some products require more than expected time to get traction and needs tons of improvement to compete with well-established rivals. As soon as they find, growth is slow they lose patience and give up just before the product was about to take its space in

As soon as they find growth is extremely slow they lose patience and give up just before the product was about to take its space in the market.

But here is the catch,

You can start with a solid growth foundation and avoid all these destructive mistakes. OK, let's get started now:

Build The Product “Great”:

It does not matter if your idea is unique or not, if your product is smart enough to solve the problems successfully, it will grow and will break every record for sure. Start with a strategy to make your existing product great and complete.

In fact, the product is everything for a startup, a complete and great product is first the most important thing to do before thinking about anything else. Do you know what is a great product?

What is A Great Product?

- It's solving one problem
- Product is complete
- Meet modern and industry standards
- Have a fabulous customer support
- Most active customer success system

OK, think twice – is your product meeting all these conditions? If yes, go ahead and start the magic happen and take it to the next level.

How to Market and Grow Your Startup?

Once your product is ready then find first few customers, you should get them from personal contact or just through straight recommendations.

Experiment everything, from features to benefits, customer support and customer success management to keep them in the loop.

Now, if each and every customer is satisfied, and your team is ready to serve the final and complete product, then go ahead and start the marketing magic, take it to the next level.

Start With Solid Marketing Foundation Plan

Startup marketing is just like matchmaking between product and market. You know your product well, now understanding the market.

Step 0: Ignite The Process With Product Market Fit:

Product marketing fit is the initial point of a strong marketing foundation. It helps you understand and find the right audience to target. Your startup is not for everyone if you think and target everyone you are wasting both your time and money. So, find and segment right targeting audience to win the real customers.

Here is the smart way to start with product market fit to build a strong startup marketing action plan.

Step 1: Do Product Market Fit For Marketing

Define your product as a solution to specific problems that people are facing in your niche. Identify how your product is going to help them. Why your product is going to be the first choice, and how it will compete with the existing solution.

List down all problems and solution along with what people are getting from existing solutions.

Conduct a quick survey, interview existing users and prospects and pen down what they like and want in your product. Use these to design your marketing message later.

Tools That Could Help:

- [Survey.io](#)
- [Hubspot CRM](#)

Step 2: Measure and Analyse

Use Analytics Google Analytics to measure what are happening on your website. Although Google analytics is great to know most of the things, but consider using Mixpanel and Kissmetrics to dig deeper.

Once you have your own data, you can use this to understand how your prospects are interacting with your product. Go ahead get some industry standard data (that you can find from leading open source and niche websites) to know more about the market.

Once you have certain real data from:

- Survey/interviews.
- Your analytics account and Industry insights

Use them it select your targeting market in step 3.

Tools That Could Help

- [Google Analytics](#)

- [Kissmetrics](#)
- [Mixpanel](#)
- [Wikipedia](#)
- [Internetlivestats](#)

Step 3: Choose Your Market

Your product is not for everyone, if you are targeting everyone out there, you are wasting both your time and money. Start with precise marketing audience who can be your real paying customers on go.

Here is the way, how can you find and select your targeting market.

Find out who are your ideal customers are where they are: Demographic, Male/Female, child etc.

Market Size: What is the potential crowd of the audience, what you will get if 5% or 10% of people will become your customer in next few years.

Market Wealth: Do people have money to buy your product?

Competition and Competitors: Is Market saturated with existing solutions and already fast-growing companies.

Value propositions: What's the value proposition of your product etc.

Always keep in your mind your product is not for everyone and only a small portion of the population is interested in your product. So, keep your audience size precise and targetable.

For sure, as you know the potential customers, go ahead and start with user/buyer personas.

Tools of The Trade:

[Alexa](#).

Step 4: Create User Persona

The buyer persona is the best way to understand and target your ideal customer. It helps you build a solid marketing message based on their interaction level. Practically it represents a virtual identity that guides your marketing team to remain on the right path to achieve the end goal.

There are numbers of ways and formats to build a perfect user persona. *Here is a very simple way exclusively for startups.*

How Do You Create User Persona?

User persona can be created through a quick research, survey and FAQs of your existing users. You can ask any contact in your existing database or outside. Also, you can use some industry insights and data to build it quickly.

- Conduct a quick survey. (You Already Done! In Step 1)
- Interview your existing users (Already Done! In Step 1)
- Consider FAQs
- Ask your sales team what user are trying to find in your product
- Use outside insights and data from competitors and similar industry.

Done with Buyer Persona? Let's find out how exactly they are finding you on the web.

Step 5: Start Fresh With Keyword research

It's misconception that keyword is the patent of SEO and SEM. People use Keyword throughout the internet to find the solution of the problem. Do you think, hashtag you use on twitter is followed by keyword?

Keywords list help you decide the niche and core topics for your blog, social media and all other marketing channels.

Use Keyword Planner to find out core keywords, that people would use on Google to find your product. If you are a little bit more serious, try and use SEMrush for more precise data.

Once you have a list of core keywords, you would like to expand it with related and long tail keywords. For example, for Openthrive "startup marketing" is core keyword, now "startup blogging", "Growth Hacking Best Practice" are related keywords and long tail keywords respectively.

So far you could figure out what are the problems, who is facing it and how they find the solution. Now it's time to build a strong marketing engine to drive the growth smoothly.

Helpful Tools

- [Keyword planner](#)
- [SEMrush](#)

Step 6: Set a Goal of Success

Every startup founders have their own goal so their success is completely different from each other. What is your success, before you go ahead to

pull the trigger of marketing and growth, define the success and goal of your startup?

Maybe 100 signups per month with 100% growth would be your smart goal. It depends completely on the type of startup. For an app only startup, it can be 1000 active downloads with 200% growth per month. Similarly, for a SaaS it would be \$50000 MMR and so on.

Mark down your success and timeline, draft it and send to everyone in your team so that they will prepare them to achieve it fast.

It doesn't matter how you define your success, the hack of growth is, you should stick with whatever you have defined. Just set a realistic and achievable goal that your team potentially can achieve.

Step 7: Set The Core KPIs

Once you have a definite goal, set certain metrics to measure the overall performance and growth. Generally, an analytics tool has tons of data, so pick few including your own Key Performance Indicators.

Suppose if you have a goal of 1000 signup per month, then you would measure, the conversion rate from traffic to the customer. So, the key takeaway is setting a highly valuable metrics based on actions taken throughout the customer acquisition funnel.

Here are 10 Marketing KPIs You Should Be Tracking:

- Sales Revenue
- Website Unique Traffic
- Traffic-to-Lead Conversion Rate
- Cost Per Lead
- Lead-to-Customer Ratio
- Customer Value

- Paying Customers Conversion Rate
- Marketing ROI
- Top Performing Channel(s)
- Device Specific Traffic, Leads, and Conversion Rates

Using these metrics you will have a real-time data to keep your entire team in right direction to grow the startup every day.

Step 8: Set The Marketing Budget

So far, all you have done with a strong startup marketing plan, now you need resources to build and run the growth engine. Figure Out, how much can you afford to spend on your startup marketing?

As soon as you have decided the marketing budget, carefully divide that budget across all the marketing channels of your startup.

For example, if you find blogging can help you grow fast, you would like to spend 50% budget on blogging, rest on other activities. Similarly, if you want to increase social media leads, you would like to shift budget for creating great social contents.

The key idea is, set a budget and divide for all your marketing channels and activities, based on their potentials.

Building The Startup Marketing Engine

So far you have a strong startup marketing foundation plan ready to implement. Now, it's time to build the marketing infrastructure and system of growth.

If you want to achieve the target fast, you will need an advanced marketing system. Starting with best practices doesn't work for everyone, so do a quick research to build a frictionless marketing system.

Why This Matters?

In early days of your startup journey, you have very limited access to both resources and money. But you need to market and grow your startup anyhow. Using a suitable startup marketing system you can save both time and money, that you can use for other purposes.

Here is the simple process to build a strong startup marketing system.

Step 1: Figure Out What Do You need?

As we have discussed a powerful marketing system play a crucial role in the growth of your startup, here in the next steps let's go ahead to figure out "what do you need and how you can build your own startup marketing powerhouse?"

Let's find out what do you need in your marketing system and why?

- Pre-traffic System
- Traffic Generating System
- Post Traffic System
- Report and Analytics

Based on these basic requirements and if you don't build your own custom parent website, you will need a set of these building blocks before, during and even after the process.

Step 2: Select The Essential Building Blocks

Pre-Traffic: System and tools required before hunting the website traffic.

System and Tools	Recommendations
Website	Custom or WordPress
Blog	WordPress or HubSpot

Traffic Generation: Essential System and Tools Required to Generate Traffic

System and Tools	Recommendations
SEO and Keyword Tool	Keyword Planner and SEMrush
Content	Smart Content Writer
Social Media tool	Buffer
Images and Visual Contents	Canva

Post Traffic: System and tools required to convert traffic in lead.

System and Tools	Recommendations
Landing page	Custom, Instapage or HubSpot
Opt-in Forms	Optinmonster or Sumome
Email Marketing	Drip or HubSpot
Sales and CRM integration	HubSpot

Analytics and Report: System required to measure the performance.

System and Tools	Recommendations
General Analytics	Google Analytics
Advance metrics	Kissmetrics, MixPanel

Now aggregate and build the system one by one, integrate the whole system as a single growth machine. Next select the suitable channel and switch it on.

Step 3: Start The Marketing Machine (Growth Seeding)

Once your marketing machine is ready, it's time to select and start it with the most suitable channels to drive traffic, generate leads and hence customers.

Using user persona and marketing data, select your startup marketing channels. Select the following channels and start seeding the growth.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO): Initially requires a lot of effort and time, but after some time it would be the biggest and acquisition channel.

Social Media Marketing: Start with a creative and engaging social media marketing approach. It has also a great potential.

Start a Blog: Start a fresh and highly targeted niche blog. Use core keywords a the topic of your blog, publish quality content regularly. Blogging has also a great potential to drive a highly engaged traffic that can be your customers soon.

Email and Marketing Automation: Collect emails from the day first, drive more returning traffic, nurture them to win as your paying customer.

Outreach Influencers: In each and every niche, there are some people who drive the community and who have access of thousands of people. Go, find such people in your niche, ask them to let their audience know about your product.

Guest Blogging: Guest blogging is a great way to access the existing community. Start slowly to write guest posts on other blog to let an existing community know about you and your startup.

Adwords PPC Ads: ROI focused PPC campaigning is a great way to find your early customers while your marketing system is taking time to start showing its result.

Facebook Ads: Use suitable facebook ads to drive more results.

The idea behind growth seeding is during first 4-8 weeks find out which channels is going to drive more result.

Step 4: Measure The Performance and Become Aggressive

Let's have a quick overview what you have done so far. You have answers of the following questions:

- Why have you stated a startup? - Because it's your passion.
- Why your startup can't fail? - Because you fulfill all conditions require to success.
- Do you have a solid marketing plan? - Yes, you have a solid startup marketing plan, right?
- Have you build your own startup marketing engine? - Yes of course.
- Have you started the marketing machine? Yes, you have started with growth seeding.

Additionally, as you have stated the marketing, in next few weeks you will have some short of data to observe which channels have potential to drive the growth.

Keep seeding the marketing engine for at least 8 weeks, after 8 weeks it's time to figure out the growth hacking opportunities.

So, measure the performance of each and individual marketing channels that was a part of growth seeding.

Select top 3 best performing marketing channels and tag these as growth channels.

In the next step, keep seeding non growth channels for another 8 weeks and start with aggressive approach to market the startup with selected growth channels.

After next 8 weeks, assign the growth seeding channels again and take top 3 best performers.

Now, you have 6 growth channels to work with aggressively.

What's Aggressive Marketing?

In first growth seedling stage, you test which marketing channels has maximum potential to take your startup to the next level. After this step you have a short list of marketing channels focus instead of wasting time on all.

What's The Deal With Growth Channel?

Suppose you have selected blogging as first growth channel for aggressive marketing, then:

- Take your blog and blogging seriously.
- Write more useful content now.
- Increase the frequency from 2 per week to 4-6 every week, remember without losing the quality.
- Start collecting emails.
- Build a community for your blog.

- Measure the performance and do everything again.
- Seamlessly integrate your blog with your lead collecting system to collect the business leads.

Similarly, take all other growth channels seriously.

Don't stop experiments on remaining marketing channels to find out the next set of potential rich growth channels. Set a frequency to analyse all marketing channels every 8 weeks until you get 3-4 maximum growth channels from a list of all possible marketing channels.

For me it takes maximum 180 days to find a growth potential rich marketing channels. Please do share with me, how much time you are taking.

Keep your eye ball on each and every moving components that directly and indirectly impact the marketing engine of your startup. Fix any small or big issue immediately to achieve the goal really fast.

Actuality of Startup Growth Hacking and How to Get it Done?

Personally, I could never understand why Sean Ellis coined this term, what was his intention behind this? God knows better! But the fact is growth hacking and growth hacker is nothing, seriously its vacuum space and just a term to kill your startup.

Here is why?

Nowadays, term growth hacking and growth hacker trigger a thought of overnight success. In my personal opinion, both a growth hacker and entrepreneur taking it seriously are an [A]hole of startup ecosystem.

Growth hackers play this die to add more bucks in their salary, while founders fool themselves to use it as overnight success tool. Fake growth

hackers get significant success in raising some CTC, almost all founders get nothing as overnight success, except opening the door to give up even they deserve a huge success.

Moreover, influencers write about this because it more and more people searching this term on Google.

That is the actuality of growth hacking. Seriously!

However, I respect Sean's idea I guess he never thought people will implement his nice idea in such a pathetic way.

Then, What is Growth Hacking?

After reading all his essays and other articles related to growth hacking, I figured out he wanted to fuel up the lazy marketing approach with modern technology to get things done really. And cost effective of course.

People forget growth hacking is an advanced approach of aggressive marketing using the most suitable and growth oriented channel.

If you take a look over top growth hacking examples, you will find these companies have used their own unique approach to leverage few selected marketing channels. The only one common thing for them was: They have really a great product that people want to use!

So here is the deal, how can you do growth hacking for your startup too?

How to Growth Hack Your Startup?

A good marketer who can understand product and market perfectly and can connect both smoothly little viral, deserve the tagline of Growth Hacker. First thing first, growth hacking is not an overnight success mantra. So, how to do this?

As I have explained in previous section, experiment and experiment again to select the most suitable marketing and growth channels that have potential to take your startup to the next level in short time.

Then keep improving your product, build a great customer support and success team to satisfy existing users who can bring few more users.

Remember, any growth hacking success story is not an overnight success, they took years to build a great product first. Then similarly took a long time to find the (Growth) hacks that took them here.

So, be honest, repeat everything again, set a frequency to analyse and prefer the better marketing channel. Once you find the shortest path, take it over as soon as possible. For sure you will see the exponential movement in growth soon.

Conclusion:

First of all, thank you very much as you are still reading this crazy long post. I am glad as I could get your attention.

By the Way- Building a startup is just like planting a tree in desert, as to plant a tree in desert you to work hard, manage water, do something for sudden rise in temperature and so on.

Similarly, in case of startup you have limited access of resources but you want to grow it. So, start with a solid marketing foundation, build a strong marketing system, find the growth oriented marketing channels, repeat everything again to see the success graph moving exponentially up.

P.S,

If you need any help to kick start the marketing of your startup and business, we are here to help you.



We Help Startups Grow Their Business

Beyond Old School Marketing, We Build Solid Marketing and Growth Channels that Hunt Customers to Delight.

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