

/ SAAS / PRE-BUILD

SaaS Idea Validation Checklist

Eight stages for testing a SaaS idea before you write a line of code. Each stage can kill the idea, and that's the point.

// eight stages. only build after stage 8.

01 Gut Check

~1-2 hours

- Write the idea in one sentence: "I'm building X for Y so they can Z"
- Write the problem in one sentence without mentioning your solution
- Name 3 specific people who have this problem (actual humans, not "small businesses")
- Would you personally pay for this? If no, why do you think others will?
- Is this a vitamin (nice to have) or a painkiller (urgent)?

KILL_IF → can't name 3 real people with the problem, or it's clearly a vitamin.

02 Problem Validation via AI Research

~3-5 days

- Scrape 100+ complaints from Reddit, G2, Capterra, Trustpilot, X about the problem or competitors
- Cluster complaints by frequency. What comes up 10+ times?
- Extract exact phrases users use (save these for copy later)
- Identify current workarounds (spreadsheets, manual work, duct-taped tools)
- Find the trigger event. What makes someone search for a solution?
- Document who is *not* complaining (segments where the problem doesn't exist)

KILL_IF → <20 genuine complaints found, or no clear workarounds (means people don't care enough to try solving it).

03 Market & Demand Signals

~2-3 days

- Google Trends: is the problem trending up, flat, or down over 5 years?
- Keyword research: search volume for problem-related terms (Ahrefs / SEMrush free tools)
- Are competitors growing? Check LinkedIn hiring, Crunchbase funding, SimilarWeb traffic
- Has VC money flowed into this category in the last 2 years?
- Are there adjacent regulatory, platform, or tech shifts making the problem bigger?
- TAM estimate: realistic businesses \times realistic price \times realistic capture %

KILL_IF → flat/declining trends, no search volume, dying category, or TAM under \$10M realistic capture.

04 Competitive Teardown

~2-3 days

- List all direct competitors (10+ if possible)
- List indirect competitors and substitutes (including "do nothing" and spreadsheets)
- Map pricing models and price points
- Read their negative reviews. What do users hate?
- Identify the underserved segment (too small, too technical, wrong geography, wrong price tier)
- Find your specific positioning angle in one sentence

KILL_IF → no clear positioning gap, or the gap exists because it's economically unviable.

05 Solution & Economics Sanity Check

~2-3 days

- Sketch the MVP: the smallest version that delivers the core value
- Estimate time to build MVP honestly (then double it)
- Estimate infra cost per user at 100, 1k, 10k users
- Pick a pricing model and price point based on competitor data
- Estimate CAC based on competitor ad costs and category benchmarks
- Model: at what customer count are you profitable? Realistic in 12-18 months?
- Red team it: prompt AI for 20 reasons this fails, then address the top 5

KILL_IF → unit economics require 2× industry-benchmark performance to work, or payback period >18 months SMB / >24 months enterprise.

06 Pre-Build Market Test

~1-2 weeks · \$300-500

- Build a landing page with clear value prop, pricing, and a real CTA
- CTA signal strength: paid pre-order > deposit > book a call > email waitlist
- Write 3-5 ad variants using language pulled from Stage 2
- Run targeted ads (Meta, Google, LinkedIn, Reddit) driving 500-1000 visitors
- Track: click-through rate, landing page conversion, CTA conversion
- Post in 2-3 relevant communities (carefully, no spam)

SUCCESS_BENCHMARKS

- Landing → CTA: >3% promising · >7% strong
- Paid pre-orders or deposits: even 5-10 is a real signal
- Email-only waitlists: discount heavily, mostly noise

KILL_IF → <1% conversion after 1000 targeted visitors, zero paid commitments.

07 Qualitative Contact

optional

- 10–15 conversations with people who signed up or fit the ICP
- Ask about the problem, not the solution
- Ask what they currently do, what they've paid for, and what made them stop

08 Build Decision

go / no-go

// only proceed to building if all of the following return true:

- Stages 1–5 all passed kill criteria
- Stage 6 showed real conversion signal (not just vanity emails)
- You can articulate in one paragraph: who it's for, what problem, why now, why you, why this won't get crushed by a competitor
- You have budget/runway for 6 months of building + 6 months of distribution

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$ meta_rule --print
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At every stage, be more excited about **kill criteria** than success criteria. Killing a bad idea in week 2 is a massive win. Building the wrong thing for 6 months is the actual worst outcome, not "not shipping."