OUT+COME | FIELD GUIDE

The Founder's First Ten Customers

A practical guide to finding, talking to and winning the customers that teach you what repeats

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WHY IT MATTERS

The first ten are about learning, not scaling

The first ten customers are different from the next hundred. You are not trying to build a machine. You are trying to find out who buys, why they buy, and what they say when they do. Ten customers who look alike teach you far more than fifty who do not.

That means you should be in the conversations yourself. Not because selling is glamorous, but because nobody else can learn this as fast as the person who built the thing.

> **WHAT THIS GUIDE IS NOT**
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> It is not a growth hack or a script. It is a process for getting honest evidence about who wants what you have, and for noticing the difference between interest and demand.

1. Define customer number ten

Be narrow. One type of company, one role, one situation. The narrower you are, the easier your first list is to build, and the clearer your message becomes.

A useful test: can you name fifty companies that fit? Can you say, in a sentence, why each would care right now? If not, narrow further.

> **A SENTENCE TO COMPLETE**
>
> We help [type of company] when [situation] because [problem]. If you cannot finish this sentence with specifics, you are not ready to write to anyone.

2. Build a list of fifty, by hand

You do not need tools or a purchased list. You need fifty real names, with a reason each might care, and a sensible way in.

- Start with your own network, and the networks of the people who know you best. Warm routes first.
- Look at customers of the alternatives your buyers use today.
- Look at communities, events and groups where your buyers talk about the problem.
- Look for visible changes that suggest a need: a new role, a new product, a new market, a recent announcement.
- Ask people who already like you who they would introduce you to.

Keep it simple: company, why they fit, what has changed, who to speak to, how you will reach them, and status. A spreadsheet is fine.

3. Two kinds of conversation

Early on, you need both, and it helps to know which one you are having.

	Customer interview	Sales conversation
Purpose	Learn about the problem and how it is solved today	Find out whether they want to buy, and agree a next step
You talk	Little. You ask and listen	More, but still less than they do
Good questions	Tell me about the last time this happened. What did you do? What did it cost?	What would need to be true for you to start next month? Who else needs to be involved?
Watch out for	Asking for opinions about hypothetical futures	Pitching before you understand the problem

Be honest about which you are having. Asking for a learning conversation is respectful and often easier to get. If it turns into a sales conversation naturally, good.

4. Politeness is not demand

Most people are kind. They will say your idea is interesting, and that they would definitely consider it. That tells you very little. What matters is what they are willing to do.

Level	What they did	What it tells you
1	Gave a compliment	Almost nothing
2	Gave time, such as a second meeting	Some interest
3	Gave access, such as an introduction to a colleague	Real interest
4	Gave reputation, such as an introduction to a peer	Strong belief
5	Gave money, such as a paid pilot or a deposit	Demand

After each conversation, write down the highest level reached. Look for ways to ask for something that costs them a little: a follow-up with the team, a trial, a commitment of time. The answer is information.

5. Run it as a weekly sprint

1. Reach out to a small, steady number of people each week from your list of fifty.
2. Hold the conversations. Take notes straight afterwards, not later.
3. At the end of the week, record what you heard, what surprised you, and the highest level of commitment reached.
4. After every ten conversations, hold a pattern review. What repeated? What changed in how you describe the problem?

5. Change one thing at a time, and write down what you changed.

6. When ten conversations produce no sales

It happens, and it is useful. Work through the likely causes in order, and change only one at a time.

Question	What to try
Is it the segment? Are these the wrong people?	Look at who engaged most, and narrow towards them.
Is it the problem? Is it painful enough to act on?	Ask what it costs them. If they cannot say, the problem may be minor.
Is it the message? Do they understand what you do?	Ask a few people to explain it back to you in their own words.
Is it the offer? Is the first step too big, or unclear?	Offer a smaller, concrete first step.
Is it the price or the risk?	Ask what would make it feel safe to start.
Is it the timing?	Ask what would make this a priority, and when.

Ask the people who said no, kindly, why. Most will tell you, and it is often the most valuable conversation of the month.

7. Spot the pattern, avoid the one-customer trap

Patterns are the same trigger, the same objection, the same buyer role, the same words. When you hear them three or four times, you have learned something real.

The trap is building around one loud customer. A useful test before you build or customise anything for one buyer: would three others pay for it? If you do not know, ask them before you build.

A 30-day plan

Week	Focus
1	Define customer ten. Write the sentence. Build your list of fifty.
2	Start learning conversations with the warmest ten. Record the commitment level of each.
3	Continue. Run your first pattern review. Adjust one thing about the message.
4	Move to sales conversations with the best-fit people. Ask for a real next step each time.

Checklist

- I can finish the sentence: we help [who] when [situation] because [problem].
- I have a list of fifty with a reason for each.
- I know whether each conversation is a learning or a sales conversation.
- I record the commitment level after every conversation.
- I hold a pattern review after every ten.
- I change one thing at a time.
- I ask the people who say no, why.

NEXT STEP

A second pair of eyes?

These guides share general ideas. If you would like help applying them to your own team, market and numbers, we would be glad to talk.

Book a pit stop: outpluscome.com

This guide is general information and not legal, employment or professional advice. Examples are illustrative.