

# Your how - to - make your - startup - fly recipe



# Hi founder!

If you picked up this booklet, you probably have developed a promising product and you are excited about it. That's amazing. Maybe you've sold your first few, ten or hundred pieces to friends, family and people around you that are interested. These are good signs, but now you're facing the challenge of gaining your first 100, 1000 or 10,000 customers.

Don't you know where to start? Do you feel like there is no real coherency or direction in your decisions around your product? Are you doubting what is the best way to communicate your amazing product and idea? This can be overwhelming, believe me, I've been there. But hold on, I found the recipe.

I was lost too with my startup Maki. That is why I dedicated my graduation to it. I dove into existing theories and models, untangled and reorganized them, and created a recipe with 6 ingredients to bake your 'cake' and make your startup fly.

It all starts with creating the perfect 'batter' that will bake your perfect cake. The recipe contains all the ingredients to do this. Follow all the steps of the recipe and go for it!

Not all cakes are the same. To bake your perfect cake, you'll have to do some experiments: make some test bakes. This recipe and booklet will show you how.

## So, how to do it?

- 1 Open the recipe sheet inside this booklet and read all about the ingredients for your perfect 'cake'.
- 2 For each ingredient, follow the steps to experiment: your test bakes.
- 3 Use this booklet for additional tips, tricks and learnings for each experiment.

## About the recipe

You'll see right away that there is a distinction between strategy and tactics in this sheet. The strategy is the clear and strong foundation for all other business elements - why you do what you do and for whom you do it. Such foundation helps you to build consistency that will make customers trust you. Without, you risk doing things and running around like a headless chicken... That's not what we want, right?

Just like for any cake, you can follow the recipe from top to bottom to ensure the best results. The recipe sheet will guide your way.

## About the booklet

This booklet will give you loads of tips, for instance on how to interview your customers, how you develop a visual style, how you can best approach social media testing and how you can optimize social media advertisements to get the most out of your money. And much more.

Now... grab your recipe and go for it!

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# A. Deep dive interviews

Your potential customers are the **basis of your startup**. You want to create value for them and capture value in return (in the form of making sales). Therefore it is very important to **understand them deeply**. You probably have some idea who they are and what defines them, but **letting go of your interpretation of them and really diving into their experiences is crucial for creating a valuable product, brand and overall business**.

To do this, you can simply interview some of your first clients. Real fun to do: you will find a world of insights and inspiration, for sure! Even when you are sure you understand them well already, like (stubborn) me. But how do you do this most effectively?

First of all: the goal of these interviews is to find out their **motivations and desires which your product can tap into**. The best way to do this is to find out which 'jobs' your product or service does for them. In literature this is called a 'job to be done', because it is more than just a simple need. We will call them 'jobs' from now.

For example, curtains can fulfill a 'job' like 'making my room dark', or 'helping me sleep better', or 'have a productive day', or even 'feel good about myself in general'. So, people have 'jobs' on different levels and the goal of these interviews is to find the deepest, most interesting jobs for your business.

## Tips

- Try to really not steer the conversation but let the interviewees take the lead.
- Try really to detangle their situation. What they tell you at first is probably not insightful enough. Ask more specific questions to get answers that stretch beyond their 'standard' answer.
- It may seem off-topic, but hobbies and interests tell you a lot about the person, what he or she values and so why he or she chose your brand in the first place.
- My biggest learning: you may be tempted to agree with your interviewees and show this for instance by nodding, to make them feel comfortable and to create a friendly conversation, but that's not a good way to interview. Try, even when you yourself (think you) agree with them, to act surprised:
  - 'Oh really? Why do you find that?' Then you separate yourself from the conversation, you steer less. You'll find better insights.
- Record the full conversations. Really do it! In the moment you filter out stuff subconsciously, but sometimes these are the most insightful elements. Therefore it's useful to be able to listen to the interview again.
- Right after every interview, I recommend you to make an overview of the most useful quotes. Please watch out! Although it might be tempting, postpone your interpretation. Try to not tie the dots already between interviewees.
- I'd say around 5-10 interviews do the job.

- You might in the interviews discover multiple ‘jobs to be done’ per interviewee. The order of importance for them is very interesting. You can discover this by asking questions around it, or just straight up ask them: ‘Okay so I heard that you do this because of .. and ... Which of these is more important to you?’

# B. Interpreting interview answers

Interpreting what the interviewees told you seems easy, but in my experience really it is not. It is a delicate task. Here are some tips to prevent you from making the mistakes I made.

## Tips

- From the interviews you probably have made a list of the most insightful quotes. Create short titles for them so you can see at a glance what they are about. NB: Do not tie the dots between quotes yet.
- After this, you can scan them easily to see which have a similar tone or subject.
- Now try to cluster them. You might end up with different versions of clusters, this is okay. You can later decide which version works best.
- Now brainstorm for every cluster what 'job to be done' might be behind the quotes.
- When you're done with this, you may find connections between them or topic overlaps. You may for example order them from most 'superficial' (for the curtains example, darken my room), to 'deepest' (for the curtains example, feel good about myself). Don't be scared to tear found clusters apart or rearrange them.
- In the end, you should feel like you've got a crisp, detangled overview of the underlying 'jobs' and motivations of the interviewees.



# C. Positioning traction test

Your segmentation interviews gave you insights in your customers' 'jobs'. Of course you can just choose one that feels good for your positioning, but it is extremely valuable to learn which of these jobs spark your target customers most. You can measure this by measuring traction (how much people engage with your brand as an indication of success potential) and conversions (the number of sales). The next two experiments show you which of these jobs is the best basis for your business.

Given that many target groups are on social media nowadays, chances are that you will want to reach out to your potential customers in this way. That's why social media tests are insightful tools to find out which 'job' works best for your positioning.

## Tips for preparing the ads

- The goal of this test is to find which 'job' attracts the most people. This may be different from the 'job' that came forward most prominently from the interviews. To test these motivations in the right way, try to focus on these ads by communicating the 'jobs' rather than your product (that's for later).
- The wording of the ads is the tricky part. You need to exaggerate your wording for each of the ads, to make the effect more extreme than might feel right. The different versions need to differ from each other maximally.

An example of the 10-minute grocery delivery company Gorillas: they didn't address the need "I want whatever I feel like having right away" but "I want A BEER, NOW!!". It's exaggerated, almost a childish immature core need.

- To do this, you might need a **creative brainstorm**. How do you interpret the job to be done? Have you experienced this yourself? What does it entail? How did you feel when you experienced that? What worked surprisingly well for me, was to pretend I was a stubborn little girl: how would she express her feelings?

## Tips for making the positioning test ads

- Use **videos**, this results in more engagement than photos. You can simply use a stock video.
- Use the **same video** for all the ads if possible, just with different texts, otherwise you may be testing the effects of the visuals because people liked the different video's more/less, rather than your wording, which was the scope of this test.
- Use as little text as possible. Really **condense** it.
- Put the most important line in the video, so it's **clear in a split second** what your audience needs to see. You can put a second line (where you introduce your startup) in the description.

## Tips for running the ads

- Run them through Facebook Advertising, also for Instagram. In my experience running ads through Instagram allows for less optimization and gives incorrect analyses.
- Put in around 20-25 euros per day per ad. Run them no longer than 2-3 days as the ad will get worse when you run it longer and this is enough for strong results.
- Target on age, location and maybe interests if you discovered those during the interviews. I targeted Rotterdam +30km, Amsterdam +30km, Den Haag +30km and Utrecht +30km. The smaller you go, the less chance you'll get bot engagement.
- Do not put on automatic adjustments, because then FB will skew your results and push your ads towards people who are similar to the ones who click the link. You want the ad to be pushed proportionally.
- Don't worry about people seeing multiple of the ads, on this scale that probably won't happen, or at least not often.
- Next to the ad, I'd recommend linking a webpage where people can leave their email address (through a button in the ad). You'll need their mails for the next experiment. Plus, it's just an extra 'proof of interest'. Tips for this webpage:
  - This can be your normal website or an ad-specific page.
  - If you want to track this form (which people who signed up saw which ad), run the different ads 1 by 1. So after 2-3 days you run the next.

# D. Positioning conversion test

After receiving data of the previous experiment, you know which 'job' creates the most traction. But basing your positioning on this is risky, because it might be different from which 'job' drives most conversions (sales). The goal of this experiment is to find that out. Together the data provide a strong basis to choose one positioning.

To do this, you basically just send an email campaign with your offer to all the people who signed up their email through the ads in the last test.

## Tips

- Use a tracker service to track who has read your emails. I used Emailoctopus but you can also use Mailchimp for example.
- Send a test version to some friends to test if the tracker works and if it goes to their primary inbox.
- Use a private domain email to send from, because a gmail domain might be filtered to the spam inbox. In my case, I sent it from roos@maki.nl.

- If it's sent to the spam inbox, try to verify the domain of the conversion-button (in my case maki.nl) through emailoctopus. For this I had to change the DNS records through the domain host (in my case mijndomein.nl). In my case, this took a couple of days to verify, but eventually it was verified and the mail didn't go to spam anymore.
- But it did go to the promotions tab, which was an improvement but not optimal. What solved this for me was to create a personal greeting: using their name. Now it went to the primary inbox (finally!).
- So after you're done with these two tests, you've successfully collected data on what 'job' can work best for your positioning - in other words, which sparks your customers most.

# E. Core message

You have chosen a position for your startup in the market, great, this is a strong foundation. But now it's time to find the wording that fits this positioning: your core message. The core message should be no more than 1-2 sentences and really spark you and your customers. It connects the positioning to your product/service.

To find these lines, you can just brainstorm freely, but I chose to incorporate some other of the found 'jobs' in my brainstorm and found this very effective. All 'jobs' together are an amazing source of inspiration and by using those, you know for sure that your core message will connect your startup to the people you are targeting.

For example, for my sewing startup Maki the improved positioning was: 'We want people to experience creative freedom by engaging with Maki and using our products.'

And its new core message:  
*'Making makes you feel creative and free. Being able to make anything you want is a powerful feeling to have. You can do it, for sure. Maki will just be on your side in the process of getting there.'*

# F. Branding competitor analysis

Now it's time to create the look and feel that expresses all that your startup is and that will be appealing and convincing for your customers. Before creating your visual brand style, take a look at how competitors are expressing themselves in order to stand out from them. How I approached this:

I made a table with

1. What competitors offer (how this differs from what you do)
2. Their messaging (are they saying they are sustainable, community based, etc.)
3. Their personality traits/ emotional attributes (how will one feel when encountering their brand) and
4. A screenshot of some of their visual elements.

# G. Branding positioning axes

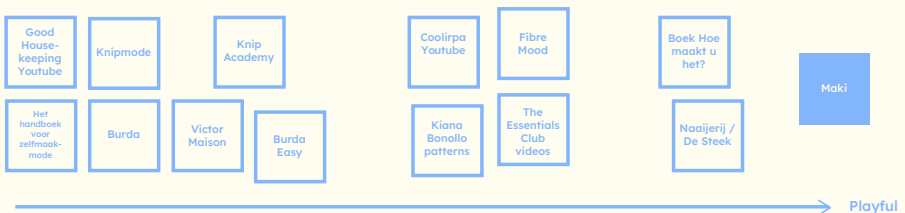
Your brand style should always be an expression of your positioning statement. You can get there in multiple ways, using different personality traits. You can create axes that plot these personality traits to see how these can help you to create your visual style that stands out from competition.

Choose some attributes that you think would express your positioning in a way that fits your brand.

For example, Maki's positioning of creative freedom could be expressed using e.g. the traits cool, accessible, funky, open.

Think of the opposite and create a scale/axis. Plot the competition on these axes to see with which attribute you can best differentiate yourself from them.

It then looks something like:







# H. Creating visual brand styles

You now have set both your positioning statement and multiple potential personality traits. Now start making a few visual brand styles based on the different personality traits to see which one attracts most people.

## Tips for creating visual styles

- Per personality trait, you can search for inspiration on the internet, for example Pinterest. Choose colors, fonts and pictures that express the personality.
- Create a 'style card' that in one view shows the style in 'action'. In Maki's case, one of the style cards looked like:

The image shows a digital interface for the brand 'Maki'. At the top, the brand name 'Maki' is displayed in a blue, sans-serif font. Below the name are three small images: a white tote bag with colorful floral patterns, a person wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned dress, and a person in a pink top making a hand gesture. The main section has a light green background with a large blue and white headline: 'Het nieuwe maken.' To the left of this headline is a short paragraph in Dutch: 'Met onze ultieme naaipatronen kan jij alles maken wat je maar wil, zelf.' Below this is another paragraph: 'Wij doen gewoon met je mee, dan sta je er niet alleen voor.' A white button with the text 'ja dit wil ik!' is positioned below the paragraphs. To the right of the text is a product card for a 'Slip dress' in a light green color, shown on a hanger. The product card has a red border and a small red '20%' discount tag in the top right corner. The interface is decorated with colorful, wavy patterns in the corners.

## Tips for getting feedback

- I personally asked people through an Instagram Story if they could fill out a survey where I showed the 3 styles with after each the question what they thought of it. In the end I asked which one they preferred.
- You might feel vulnerable asking people to think with you but people are VERY eager to give their opinions and think with you. So I'd recommend just doing it. It's interesting to see what people really think of your startup anonymously. Don't forget: today's communication is all about interacting with your community!

# I. Content creation test

Chances are that you have done some promotion already in the form of advertising or social media posts. There is nothing wrong with an intuitive start, but if you want to truly reach your target market in an effective way, it works well to test beforehand to ensure the best results of your efforts and investments. Especially because there are endless possibilities and social media are evolving rapidly. You can easily fall in the pitfall of spending ad money without getting traction and conversions in return. So how do you make the most of this?

For this purpose, social media testing (again) is an extremely insightful tool to use, but it is a delicate job.

I tried multiple options and I learned the following (targeting Gen Z and Y with the main channels Instagram and TikTok):

- Maybe the biggest learning for me was that in the early-startup phase, people feel more empathy and inspiration when you are transparent about just being started. You don't have to pretend that you're an established company already. Be personal, authentic, show your face, ask for input, etc. Don't be shy! This is way more impactful for them than sharing for example 'inspiration pictures' or facts.

- If your target group is on Instagram and Tiktok, short videos are the best way to communicate. A weak video can even be more powerful than your best picture.
- Make your content very very entertaining. Avoid anything that looks like a clean slick advertisement. Realism is everything nowadays. Be remarkable, interesting or even funny!
- Use storytelling as a tool. For example: show a problem and frustrations, then a solution.
- If you decide to use TikTok, make your videos in TikTok and you can then upload them to other social media. Watch out: once you share your TikTok, you cannot change anything anymore later.

For inspiration, you can view one of my first TikTok attempts: <https://www.tiktok.com/@makisewing/>

# J. Channels test

Channels are evolving extremely fast, so staying up to date is a must. As a medium-experienced twenty-something myself, I learned the following things about modern social media in relation to promoting your startup:

- Instagram is still the most used platform and useful for creating a brand image. Yet, its algorithm only shows your photos to people who already follow you, except for Reels and Ads.
- This in contrast to TikTok, which algorithm is actually amazing for reaching new people. It pushes your posts to everyone who might be interested, also to people who do not follow you yet.
- Also TikTok's algorithm is amazing for trying out content. Because people view many videos in a short period of time, TikTok can quickly show you the popularity of a video (if people stay to watch or tap next quickly). This shows you whether a specific content form works well for example using it as an ad. Because it is pushed to so many different people, you don't have to worry to bore people with playing around with storytelling for example. Even when your target group isn't (primarily) on TikTok, I'd recommend you to use it for content testing purposes. You can even do it under a different (made up) brand name.

An example: I shared a few TikToks out of curiosity and when I opened my phone the next day, two of them had 10K views and 10+ comments, and the two others only had around 400 views. These are amazing insights. I used the popular one as an Instagram Ad and got 160 new followers. This video had proven to be effective in telling our story.

- **Instagram Reels** are a great opportunity as this is the only form of Instagram posts that are shown to other people than your followers. In this way, I still get new followers from one nice Reel I posted weeks ago. Like TikToks, make them entertaining, this will increase popularity.
- Within Instagram, posts and stories are good for keeping your followers **interested and loyal**.
- Instagram Stories are a great tool to **interact with your followers and ask for feedback** directly. People love to think with you if you're open about what you don't know yet. Involve your community so it becomes a dialogue instead of a monologue.

# J. Instagram Ads

Instagram Ads are, in my experience, the most effective tool to create traction. When you know a post or TikTok ran well, I recommend you to use it in Instagram Ads to push it to new people.

An example: I ran one Instagram Ad showing one of my TikToks (that ran best on that there) for two days and it got me 160+ followers!

Again, use tips for running ads from part C.



**I hope this booklet inspired you.  
Thanks for reading.**

In case you have any questions or  
thoughts about this recipe, please  
don't hesitate to get in contact  
with me.

Bye,  
Roos

# Congratulations!



Your best ingredients are now all in one bowl and stirred into the perfect batter. All you need to do now is to bake your cake and make your startup fly. Go for it!