

THE FOUNDER'S TOOLKIT

Frameworks & canvases to build something that lasts.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Problem Statement Canvas
- Lean Startup Checklist
- Pitch Structure Framework
- Business Model Canvas
- Go-to-Market Playbook
- Team & Hiring Framework

FRAMEWORKS

30+

PAGES

10+

CANVASES

3

LANGUAGES

*"Don't start with the solution.
Start with the problem."*

— Alberto Levy

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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Every framework in this toolkit is built around one principle: **clarity before action**. Use these canvases to force yourself to think before you build, pitch before you invest, and validate before you scale.

PRINT IT

These canvases are designed to be printed and filled by hand. A sticky note, a marker, and 30 focused minutes will do more for your startup than any slide deck.

"Don't start with the solution. Start with the problem. Most startups fail because they build something nobody wants — not because they built it badly."

— Alberto Levy

FRAMEWORK 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT CANVAS

Define the problem before you touch the solution

01

Most founders can describe their solution in 30 seconds but struggle to describe the problem in 3 minutes. This canvas forces the clarity that separates fundable ideas from wishful thinking.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Fill each box before discussing solutions
- 2 Be brutally specific — "people" is not a customer
- 3 Validate each row with at least 3 real conversations
- 4 If you can't fill a box, you're not ready to build

PROBLEM STATEMENT CANVAS — Fill in every cell before moving forward

	DESCRIPTION	EVIDENCE / PROOF
CUSTOMERS		
PROBLEM		
CONTEXT		
ALTERNATIVES		
SHORTCOMINGS		
IMPACT		
KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER		

Who has this problem most often?

Be specific — job title, industry, situation

What is the root cause?

Not the symptom — the underlying reason

When does it occur?

Context is everything — triggers matter

What do they do today?

Current alternatives define your competition

Why do alternatives fail?

Your differentiation lives here

What's the measurable impact?

In time, money, or risk — with units

FRAMEWORK 2

LEAN STARTUP CHECKLIST

Before you build — 40 questions to validate your idea

02

Run through this checklist before writing a single line of code or spending a dollar on marketing. Each unchecked box is a risk you're carrying. Founders who do this work upfront move faster — not slower — because they stop building the wrong things.

PHASE 1 — PROBLEM VALIDATION

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can name 3+ specific people with this probl | <input type="checkbox"/> I have talked to 10+ potential customers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can describe the problem in one sentence | <input type="checkbox"/> Customers actively search for solutions today |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The problem occurs at least weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> Customers have tried to solve it and failed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The problem causes measurable pain (time/mone | <input type="checkbox"/> The market is large enough to build a busines |

PHASE 2 — SOLUTION VALIDATION

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My solution directly addresses the root cause | <input type="checkbox"/> I can describe it in one sentence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It is 10x better than the current alternative | <input type="checkbox"/> I have built a prototype or mockup |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone has used it (even crudely) | <input type="checkbox"/> I know what the MVP includes — and excludes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have identified the riskiest assumption | <input type="checkbox"/> I have tested that assumption cheaply |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A customer has seen it and given honest feedb | <input type="checkbox"/> I know what "done" looks like for v1 |

PHASE 3 — BUSINESS VALIDATION

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I know exactly who my first 10 customers are | <input type="checkbox"/> I know how to reach them without ads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone has paid me — or committed to pay | <input type="checkbox"/> I can explain my pricing model in 10 seconds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My unit economics are positive (or I know whe | <input type="checkbox"/> I know my primary acquisition channel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I know my retention mechanism | <input type="checkbox"/> I understand why customers would churn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I know what "viral" looks like for this produ | <input type="checkbox"/> I have mapped the competitive landscape |

PHASE 4 — TEAM & EXECUTION

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can build v1 with my current team | <input type="checkbox"/> The team covers product, tech, and sales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We have agreed on equity and roles in writing | <input type="checkbox"/> We have a decision-making process |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We have 6 months of runway | <input type="checkbox"/> We know what we will do in months 1, 2, and 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We have defined what success looks like at 90 | <input type="checkbox"/> We have a board or advisor who challenges us |
| <input type="checkbox"/> We have talked about what happens if we fail | <input type="checkbox"/> We are doing this for the right reasons |

FRAMEWORK 3

PITCH STRUCTURE FRAMEWORK

The narrative arc of a pitch that gets funded

03

A pitch is not a presentation. It is a story with a protagonist (the customer), a villain (the problem), and a hero (your solution). This framework builds the narrative arc that moves investors from curious to convinced.

- 1 THE HOOK**
One sentence. Make them lean forward.
- 2 THE PROBLEM**
Make them feel the pain. Use a story or a shocking stat.
- 3 THE MARKET**
How big, how urgent, how underserved.
- 4 YOUR SOLUTION**
Simple. Visual. Different from everything else.
- 5 HOW IT WORKS**
Product walkthrough — 3 steps maximum.
- 6 TRACTION**
The proof that this is real. Numbers beat words.
- 7 BUSINESS MODEL**
How you make money. Who pays. How much.
- 8 GO-TO-MARKET**
Your first 100 customers. Your channel. Your engine.
- 9 THE TEAM**
Why you? Why now? Why this team?
- 10 THE ASK**
How much. For what. What happens next.

YOUR PITCH WORKSHEET — Fill before you present

HOOK (1 sentence)	
PROBLEM (the villain)	
MARKET SIZE (\$)	
SOLUTION (1 sentence)	

KEY TRACTION METRIC	
REVENUE MODEL	
ASK (\$) + USE OF FUNDS	

FRAMEWORK 4

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

Nine building blocks. One page. Your whole business.

04

The Business Model Canvas forces you to think about all nine dimensions of your business simultaneously. When one block changes, the others must adapt. Use this as a living document — not a one-time exercise.

KEY PARTNERS <i>Who helps you deliver?</i>	KEY ACTIVITIES <i>What do you do every day?</i>	VALUE PROPOSITION <i>Why do customers choose you?</i>
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS <i>How do you acquire and retain?</i>	CUSTOMER SEGMENTS <i>Who are your customers?</i>	KEY RESOURCES <i>What do you need to operate?</i>
CHANNELS <i>How do you reach customers?</i>	COST STRUCTURE <i>What does it cost to operate?</i>	REVENUE STREAMS <i>How do you make money?</i>

Remember: The BMC is a hypothesis map, not a business plan. Every box is an assumption. Test the riskiest ones first.

FRAMEWORK 5

GO-TO-MARKET PLAYBOOK*Your first 90 days of customer acquisition*

05

Most startups fail not because the product is bad, but because nobody knows it exists. Your go-to-market strategy is not a marketing plan — it's a systematic answer to: **how do I find my first 100 paying customers?**

90-DAY GTM CANVAS — Plan your acquisition week by week

	CHANNEL / TACTIC	TARGET (WHO)	GOAL (METRIC)
WEEK 1-2			
WEEK 3-4			
MONTH 2			
MONTH 3			
BEYOND			

CHANNEL EVALUATION MATRIX

Rate each channel 1–5 for your specific business

	REACH	COST	SPEED	FIT (1-5)
Cold Outreach				
Content Marketing				
LinkedIn				
Partnerships				
Community				
Referrals				
Paid Ads				
Events / Conferen				

FRAMEWORK 6

TEAM & HIRING FRAMEWORK

Building the team that builds the company

06

The biggest mistake early-stage founders make is hiring too fast — or for the wrong role. Use this framework to audit your current team, identify your biggest gaps, and make your first five hires with intention.

TEAM CAPABILITY AUDIT

TEAM CAPABILITY AUDIT — Be honest. Every gap is a risk.

	WHO OWNS IT	SKILL LEVEL (1-5)	PRIORITY	HIRE / OUTSOURCE?
Product vision				
Technical build				
Sales & closing				
Marketing & growth				
Operations & finance				
Customer success				
Fundraising				
Domain expertise				

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR FIRST 5 HIRES

BUILDER, not a manager	They create things, not oversee things. You have no one to manage yet.
COMFORTABLE with ambiguity	The job description will change. The strategy will change.
OBSESSED with the problem	Not excited about your solution — obsessed with the customer problem.
OWNS their work completely	No "that's not my job." In a startup, everything is everyone's job.
RAISES the bar	Every hire should make the team better. If you're not sure, don't hire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alberto Levy

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Alberto Levy is an Innovation Evangelist recognized by Harvard Business Review and the World Economic Forum. With 30+ years of experience across 30+ countries, he has worked with 300+ clients — from Fortune 500 companies to first-time founders — as a speaker, professor, author, and strategic advisor.

He is the author of **Start Here: A Practical Guide to Entrepreneurship for First-Time Founders**, an MBA professor at IE Business School and Porto Business School, and the creator of the Start Here Podcast.

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