How to build a pitch deck

Contents

There is no definitive pitch deck that can serve all purposes. If you can verbally present your pitch deck, then your deck is likely to require less text and information than might be necessary if you are submitting it as part of a funding application. In the case of the latter, err on the side of caution: ensure that you have clearly explained all key points and avoid vague or ambiguous statements.

Pitch deck basic tips

Structure your pitch deck effectively

While specific guidelines vary depending on audience and what you are seeking to achieve, a concise and impactful pitch deck typically includes:

- **Problem Statement**: Clearly define the problem your business aims to solve.

- **Solution**: Present your innovative solution and how it addresses the problem.

- **Market Opportunity**: Highlight the target market and potential demand.

- **Value Proposition**: Explain what sets your solution apart from competitors.

- **Team**: Introduce key team members and their relevant expertise.

- **Next Steps**: Outline your immediate plans and milestones.

Design with clarity and professionalism

- **Simplicity**: Use clear visuals and avoid clutter to ensure your message is easily understood.

- **Consistency**: Maintain uniform fonts, colours, and formatting throughout the deck. The same applies when referring to currencies.

- **Visual Aids**: Incorporate charts, infographics, and images to illustrate key points.

Seek feedback and refine

- **Peer Review**: Share your pitch deck with mentors, peers, or advisors to gather constructive feedback.

- **Iterate**: Be prepared to make multiple revisions to enhance clarity and impact.

Utilise available resources

- **Support and Resources**: The Masood Entrepreneurship Centre offers support and resources to assist applicants. Programmes, such as, *Get Started* and *Ideas Lab* are relevant for generating ideas. *Venture Builder* is a more intensive programme for those committed to starting a business, and provides ideal support and training for those interested in applying to a competition, such as, *Venture Further*, or seeking to pitch for investment.

- **Workshops and Events**: Participate in related workshops or events to gain insights and improve your pitch. The Masood Entrepreneurship Centre's *Ready, Set, Pitch!* is an ideal event to pitch to a panel of judges and a live audience.

- **AI-based tools and websites:** There is an abundance of software available that can help you to create a professional pitch deck. Likewise, there are numerous online resources and videos to help you develop your pitch deck. For example, Base Templates "How to build great Pitch Deck Slides" accessible at: https://www.basetemplates.com/pitch-deck-slides

Make a compelling case: innovative business idea that solves a real problem

Convincing a competition judge, grant funder, accelerator or investor that you have an innovative business idea that solves a real problem requires a combination of storytelling, data, and proof of execution. Here's a structured approach to making your case compelling:

Clearly define the problem

Make the problem real and urgent:

- Who is affected by this problem? (Consumers, society-at-large, businesses, industries?)

- How big is the pain point? (Data, statistics, real-world examples)

- What is the cost of inaction? (Wasted money, inefficiencies, lost opportunities)

Example Statement:
"Small businesses lose £3 trillion annually due to late payments. 70% of invoices are paid late, causing cash flow issues. Our AI-driven invoicing system ensures payments are made on time, solving a major financial bottleneck"

Show that existing solutions are flawed

Highlight inefficiencies, high costs, or frustrations that exist today. Explain why the status quo is broken:

- Are existing solutions outdated, slow, expensive, or ineffective?

- What are customers complaining about? (Don't assume – engage with users and potential customers!)

- Have previous solutions failed to solve this problem? Share customer quotes or case studies that prove the pain.

Analyse the competitive landscape. Examine competitors to provide insights into market positioning and potential gaps to be exploited. By understanding their strengths and weaknesses, business focus can be refined to differentiate products or services.

Example Statement:
"Traditional invoicing tools only track payments but don't proactively prevent delays. Our system uses predictive analytics and automated follow-ups to increase on-time payments by 85%"

Demonstrate what makes your idea innovative

Show clearly how you are doing it differently:

- New technology? (AI, blockchain, automation, etc.)

- New business model? (Subscription instead of one-time purchase, direct-to-consumer instead of retail, etc.)

- Unique execution? (Faster, cheaper, smarter than competitors)

Innovation isn't just about being new – it's about being better. Demonstrate your unique edge:

- Breakthrough technology (patents, proprietary algorithms, R&D).

- 10x improvement over existing solutions (faster, cheaper, smarter).

- First-mover advantage or network effects that make it defensible.

Example Statement:
"Unlike competitors, our invoicing tool doesn't just send reminders – it uses AI to predict late payments before they happen, automatically adjusting invoice terms to ensure faster payouts"

Validate the market and customer need

Prove that people want your solution by engaging with potential customers:

- Conduct customer discovery interviews, focus groups and surveys to test demand. Have real users confirmed interest?

- Attend industry conferences, networking events, and startup accelerators.

- Pre-orders, sign-ups, or letters of intent (LOIs): Are people ready to pay?

- Early traction metrics: Downloads, engagement, social proof

Example Statement:
"We surveyed 500 business owners – 92% said they would pay for a tool that reduces late payments. We have 1,300 waitlist sign-ups before even launching"

Show proof of concept and execution ability

Funders/investors need to see that you can build it and that your idea is not just theoretical:

- Have you developed an MVP (minimum viable product)?

- Have you signed pilot customers or early adopters?

- Are you already generating revenue or do you have non-paying customers?

- Do you have a product or development roadmap?

Example Statement:
"We built an MVP in 3 months and onboarded 50 businesses, reducing their late payments by an average of 40%"

Highlight scalability and market potential

Prove that this can be big:

- What is the Total Addressable Market (TAM)?

- How will you acquire customers at scale? Are there economies of scale in customer acquisition?

- What are your expansion plans (new markets, industries, or geographies)?

- Do you plan to add (and upsell) additional features, services or products? e.g. a land and expand strategy

Example Statement:
"The global invoicing automation market is worth £20B and growing at 15% annually. Our scalable SaaS model allows us to expand from small businesses to enterprises, unlocking a £5B revenue opportunity"

Impact beyond profit

Highlight social, environmental or economic benefits:

- Does your business improve lives, sustainability, or access to essential services?

- Are you aligned with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles?

- Will your product create jobs, economic growth, or industry transformation?

Example Statement:
"Our solar-powered cold storage units help small-scale farmers in Africa reduce post-harvest losses by 80%, improving food security and increasing rural incomes"

Present a vision that inspires

Make funders/investors excited about the future:

- What will your business look like in 5-10 years?

- How will it change the industry?

- Why is now the perfect time for this innovation?

Example Statement:

"Our vision is a world where no business struggles with late payments. In five years, our platform will be the standard for automated cash flow management, used by millions of businesses worldwide"

Summary: Innovation = Problem Fit + Differentiation + Demand + Scalability

To convince funders/investors that your idea is truly innovative, show that:

- The problem is big, painful, and urgent

- Existing solutions do not fully solve it

- Your solution is unique, better, and defensible

- There is real demand and traction

- You have a plan to scale and disrupt the market

Pre-revenue traction

For an early-stage startup, demonstrating and justifying traction is crucial to gaining funder or investor confidence, attracting customers, and proving market viability. Hence, traction is something that panels and judges are interested in when assessing competition entries or applications for grant funding. Since traditional metrics like revenue and profit may be limited (all businesses begin with zero revenue and profit), here is how you can effectively explain and justify traction:

Define what traction means for your stage of business development

Traction does not always mean revenue – it could be user engagement, partnerships, pilot programmes, testing or product development milestones. Choose traction indicators that best demonstrate momentum. Traction should demonstrate the progress that has been achieved since your startup/team was founded.

Anybody can have an idea for a business, but entrepreneurs take action to turn an idea into reality. They test and challenge their idea, pivoting and adjusting where necessary. Therefore, by demonstrating traction, you are evidencing your team's action orientation, work ethic, commitment to your startup and ability to adapt as necessary.

Use metrics that matter

Funders and investors look for signals that your startup is on the right track. Examples include:

- Customer interest: Website traffic, sign-ups, waitlist numbers, engagement rates

- MVP launches: Number of testers, beta user feedback

- Tech milestones: Patent filings, product iterations

- Early sales: Pre-orders, letters of intent (LOIs), pilot customers

- Retention and engagement: Active users, session duration, repeat usage

- Market demand: Surveys, testimonials, social proof (e.g. viral social media content)

- Growth rates: % increase in customers, sign-ups, sales or any other relevant metric over time

- Partnerships: Signed MOUs and agreements, collaborations with key industry players (remember to clarify if agreements and formal partnerships are in place)

- Fundraising traction: Grants, accelerator acceptances, angel investments

This is not an endless list of metrics that signify traction. The relevance of metrics is often related to the industry or sector that you are seeking to disrupt.

Examples of sector specific traction metrics

Healthcare

- Clinical trials and regulatory progress – IRB approvals, Phase 1 trial completion.

- Letters of Intent (LOIs) from hospitals and clinics – Healthcare providers expressing interest in adopting the product.

- University or government research grants – NHS or Innovate UK funding for development.

- Partnerships with medical institutions – Collaborations with hospitals, universities, or pharma companies.

- Pilot studies with early data – Small-scale usage in hospitals showing positive results.

- FDA, CE mark, or other regulatory milestones – Submission progress or approval pipeline.

- Pre-orders from medical distributors – Commitments from suppliers before full-scale production.

Example Statement:
"Our diagnostic tool for early-stage lung cancer detection has completed a pilot study in two hospitals, reducing misdiagnosis rates by 35%. We have secured LOIs from three major health networks and a £100K NHS grant to fund our next phase of testing"

Agriculture and agri-tech sector

- Field trials and proof of concept – Testing agricultural technology on farms with data on efficiency gains.

- Partnerships with farmers, co-ops or agribusinesses – Pilot agreements with large-scale farms or agri-tech distributors.

- Pre-orders from agricultural suppliers – Commitments from buyers before official launch.

- Government or sustainability grants – Funding from programmes like DEFRA or World Bank for AgriTech.

- Pilot studies with increased yields or cost savings – Data proving effectiveness (e.g. "25% reduction in pesticide use").
- Endorsements from agricultural organisations – Support from industry groups validating the innovation.
- Technology licensing agreements – Large agribusinesses agreeing to license your technology.

Example Statement:
"Our revolutionary irrigation system reduces water waste by 40% and has been successfully piloted on 10 farms. We have secured a £25K sustainability grant and pre-orders covering 1,000 acres from agricultural cooperatives"

Consumer sector

- Waitlists and signups – Thousands of potential customers registered before launch.
- Social media growth and engagement – A strong following on TikTok, Instagram, or LinkedIn.
- Influencer or celebrity endorsements – High-profile figures promoting the product.
- Viral marketing success – Significant shares, comments, or organic traction.
- Retail or ecommerce partnerships – Commitments from large retailers or marketplaces.
- Product prototype testing and reviews – Positive customer feedback in beta testing.

Example Statement:
"Our sustainable skincare brand has a 3,000-person waitlist, 50K TikTok followers, and early influencer endorsements. We've secured pre-orders worth £40K through a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign and are in talks with two major retail chains"

Provide context and benchmarking

Numbers alone do not tell the full story. Compare your traction metrics to industry standards or key competitors:

- Example: *"In just three months, we've acquired 5,000 users – twice the early adoption rate of [competitor]."*

Showcase customer validation

Nothing proves demand better than real-world validation:

- Testimonials and case studies – Show how users are benefiting from your product (including prototype/MVP).
- Letters of Intent (LOIs) or MOUs – If B2B, secure written commitments from potential customers.
- Waitlist growth – A long, engaged waitlist signals strong demand.

Demonstrate a repeatable growth strategy

Funders and investors want to see that traction is not just a one-time spike but part of a scalable growth strategy. Explain:

- How you acquired early users (e.g. referrals, content marketing, ads)

- How you plan to scale (e.g. partnerships, paid ads, viral loops)

- What's working best and where you're doubling down

Present data visually

Graphs, infographics, and charts make traction more compelling. Example:

- A hockey-stick growth graph of sign-ups or active users

- A pipeline funnel showing conversion rates

- A comparison chart vs. competitors

Example Statement:

"In the last 3 months, we've grown from 500 to 5,000 active users, with a 30% month-over-month growth rate. Our beta users are spending an average of 12 minutes per session, and 40% have referred at least one new user. We've also secured letters of intent from two enterprise clients, including [Company X], validating the demand for our B2B solution. These early signals confirm strong product-market fit and a scalable acquisition strategy"

Develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Prototype or Proof-of-Concept:

- If it's a physical product, create a working prototype.

- If it's a software/AI model, test with sample data.

- If it's consulting, offer a pilot service to industry partners.

Summary: Pre-revenue traction = Demand + Execution proof

Funders and investors do not need revenue to believe in your startup, but they need evidence of market validation. Pre-revenue traction should:

- Show market demand (waitlists, partnerships, pre-orders).

- Prove product effectiveness (pilots, test results, studies).

- Demonstrate execution ability (grants, funding, endorsements, pace of progress and momentum).

Financial projections, commercialisation and use of funds

If your startup is pre-MVP, demonstrating revenue and financial projections to a funder or investor requires a mix of market research, realistic assumptions, and comparable

benchmarks. Since you do not yet have revenue, you need to prove that your business model is sound, scalable, and based on credible data. Here's how to do it effectively:

Use data-driven bottom-up and top-down forecasting

Use competitor pricing and revenue models to benchmark realistic numbers.

Bottom-up approach (realistic and conservative):

- Start with your ideal customer profile (who will buy and how much they will pay).
- Estimate early adoption rates based on surveys, waitlist sign-ups, or industry benchmarks.
- Scale revenue projections based on acquisition strategies and market penetration rates.

Example Statement:
"If we onboard 500 paying customers in Year 1, with an average revenue per user (ARPU) of £50/month, we'll generate £300K in ARR. By Year 3, with a 20% MoM growth rate, we aim for 10,000 customers, reaching £6M ARR"

Top-down approach (market size and potential):

- Start with the Total Addressable Market (TAM) (e.g., the global market size for fintech SaaS).
- Narrow it down to Serviceable Addressable Market (SAM) (the portion you can realistically target).
- Estimate your Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM) (the share you can capture in 3-5 years).

Example Statement:
"The global pet tech market is worth £10B. Our target niche (pet subscription boxes) represents £1.2B. Capturing just 0.5% of this market means a £6M revenue opportunity by Year 3"

Define a commercialisation pathway

Three main routes:

1. Startup route – Build a company around your innovation.
2. Licensing model – License your technology to an existing company.
3. Consulting and services – Use your expertise to offer specialized solutions.

Choose a business model:

- Product-based? (Hardware, software, biotech, etc.)
- Service-based? (Consulting, research analysis, etc.)
- Platform-based? (Marketplaces, data platforms, SaaS, etc.)

Map out key revenue streams

Break down exactly how you'll make money. Possible revenue models include:

- SaaS Subscription – Monthly or yearly pricing tiers.

- Transaction Fees – E.g., fintech charging 2% per transaction.

- Marketplace Commissions – Taking a % of sales on your platform.

- One-Time Purchases – Hardware, software licenses, etc.

- Freemium-to-Paid Conversions – Offering a free version, then upselling.

Example Statement:
"We will operate on a SaaS model, charging businesses £99/month. If we acquire 1,000 customers in Year 2, we'll reach £1.2M ARR with a 5% churn rate"

Go-to-market strategy

Refine your go-to-market strategy:

- Start with niche markets where your solution has high impact.

- Focus on early adopters who are most eager for innovation.

- Build strategic partnerships to accelerate commercialisation.

Innovation is useless if no one knows about it. Funders and investors want to see:

- Who are the early adopters?

- How will you acquire customers? (SEO, partnerships, viral growth, B2B sales, etc.)

- Why now? What's driving adoption?

Example statement:
"With the rise of remote work, companies need better virtual collaboration tools. Our viral referral programme has already driven 1,200 sign-ups in 2 months"

Showcase a realistic execution roadmap

Break it down into achievable milestones:

- Phase 1 (0-6 months): MVP development, pilot customers, iterate based on feedback.

- Phase 2 (6-12 months): Launch product, expand marketing, secure first revenue.

- Phase 3 (12-24 months): Scale operations, optimise retention, expand to new markets.

Example Statement:
"In the first 6 months, we'll finalise our MVP and onboard 10 pilot customers. By the 12-month mark, we'll hit £40K in recurring revenue and expand to new verticals"

Detail cost structure and burn rate

Funders and investors want to see a sustainable financial plan. Estimate Key Costs (Customer Acquisition & Operations):

- Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) – How much does it cost to acquire a customer?

- Operational costs – Development, hosting, salaries, marketing.

- Burn rate and runway – How long can you operate before needing more funding?

Example Statement:
"With a CAC of £40 and a lifetime value (LTV) of £600 per customer, our LTV:CAC ratio is 15:1, ensuring profitability in Year 2"

Provide a funding and growth timeline

Show how funding will drive business development and revenue growth. How will you use the funds?

- MVP Development – Building out the first product.

- Customer Acquisition – Marketing & sales efforts.

- Team Expansion – Hiring key roles for execution.

Example Statement:
"A £15K investment will allow us to launch the MVP, acquire 100 users, and generate our first £20K in revenue within 18 months"

Summary: Strong Projections = Market Data + Customer Validation + Scalable Model

To convince funders and investors when pre-MVP or early-stage startup, you need to show:

- Market demand backed by data and customer research
- Pre-sales, waitlists, or LOIs proving real interest
- A clear, scalable revenue model with pricing strategies
- Realistic financial forecasts based on competitor benchmarks
- A plan for funding allocation and business growth

The team

Funders and investors often say, *"We invest in people, not just ideas".* Having the right team is one of the strongest signals that a startup can execute its vision. Here's how to demonstrate to investors that your team is the right one to win in your market:

Show a Balanced, Complementary Team

Core roles, although not all essential at the very outset, include:

- Visionary (CEO) – Drives strategy, fundraising, and leadership.

- Technical Expert (CTO/CPO) – Leads product development, R&D, and innovation.

- Operations & Sales (COO/CRO/CMO) – Ensures execution, growth, and revenue generation.

If gaps exist, acknowledge them and outline how you plan to fill them (e.g. recruiting a CTO as cofounder post MVP, hiring a CFO post-funding, etc.).

Highlight relevant experience and track record

- Domain/scientific expertise – Deep knowledge of the industry or technology.

- Startup experience – Previous entrepreneurial experience, exits, or scale-up roles.

- Corporate/industry experience – Connections with key players in the space.

- Technical strength – Proven ability to build and scale a product.

Prove execution ability

Funders and investors want doers, not just dreamers. Demonstrate what the team has already achieved:

- Built an MVP in record time

- Signed early customers or partnerships

- Secured small grants

- Generated early traction

Demonstrate decision-making and problem-solving skills:

- Highlight how your team navigated early challenges.

- Show adaptability – how have you pivoted based on market feedback?

Example Statement:
"When our first product launch flopped, we didn't give up. We interviewed 100 customers, identified the problem, and rebuilt the platform in six weeks. The new version landed us our first paying customers"

Showcase team chemistry and commitment

- Strong co-founder relationships (especially in high-pressure situations).

- Complementary skill sets rather than overlapping expertise.

- Drive and commitment – side projects don't inspire confidence.

Example Statement:
"Our founding team has worked together for 7 months, successfully launching an MVP. We have complementary skills – Nathan leads tech, while Sarah drives business strategy"

Prove you have already invested in the business

Funders and investors respect founders who put skin in the game – time, money, or both. Ways to Prove Commitment:

- Have you bootstrapped or self-funded development?

- Did you quit your job or decline other opportunities to pursue this?

- Have you sacrificed personal comfort to build this?

Example Statement:
"We've invested our own savings and worked unpaid for the last 12 months because we believe in this vision. We're not waiting for funding to move forward – we've already onboarded 10 pilot customers and built a working MVP"

Leverage advisors and strategic hires

If your team lacks experience in certain areas, strong advisors and key hires can fill the gap.

What to highlight:

- High-profile advisors or board members with industry credibility.
- Early key hires who bring specialised expertise (e.g., a growth expert or regulatory specialist).

Example Statement:
"We've brought on [Advisor Name], former VP at [Industry Leader], to guide our go-to-market strategy. We're also hiring a Head of Sales with experience scaling B2B SaaS revenue"

Tell a compelling story

Funders and investors connect with narratives, not just credentials. Explain:

- Why this team? What unique qualities make you the best to solve this problem?
- Founder's "Why" – Personal connection to the problem builds trust.
- Passion and grit – Prove your commitment through actions, not just words.

Summary: The Right Team = Execution + Adaptability + Passion

Funders and investors back teams that:

- Have the skills and experience to execute
- Move fast and show traction
- Are deeply committed and adaptable
- Fill gaps with strategic advisors or hires