BUILDING WITH AI? A FOUNDER FIELD GUIDE.

BUILD FAST. DON'T BUILD BLIND.

15 problems.
Better questions.
A clearer next move.

FIRST EDITION · SOCIAL READING EDITION

A LETTER TO THE BUILDER

Keep the possibility. Keep your judgement.

AI makes it possible to turn an idea into something real sooner. That is worth being excited about.

But a fast first build can hide different problems: fragile software, rising costs, exposed data, exhaustion or a market that has not committed.

These problems need different answers. More prompting cannot create demand. More buyer interviews cannot fix exposed records.

THE PRINCIPLE

Make the next piece of evidence as important as the next feature.

THE LANDSCAPE

Name the risk. Then choose the fix.

01 **Financial**

What is the total cost, spending limit and cost per useful outcome?

02 **Technical**

Can a customer complete the job reliably?

03 **Security**

Are permissions, recovery and ownership clear?

04 **Personal**

Is the pace sustainable, and is the founder’s role realistic?

05 **Commercial**

Is there evidence of buyer pain, commitment and access?

06 **Resource**

What time and opportunities are you giving up?

THE DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS

Three kinds of confidence.

01 **In yourself**

Can I learn, decide and lead? Build a repeatable decision process and ask for help where needed.

02 **In the product**

Does it safely and reliably do the job? Use observed customer journeys, tests and recovery checks.

03 **In the market**

Will reachable buyers value and pay for it? Look for pain, commitment and workable economics.

KEEP THEM SEPARATE

Progress in one does not prove the other two.

SPEED AND RESPONSIBILITY

The first version is not the finish line.

Faster generation moves work into checking output, preserving context, protecting data and serving the customer.

The research cited in this guide describes both productivity benefits and verification or delivery challenges. It does not establish a universal failure rate for AI-built businesses. [1, 2, 4]

Match the controls to the commitment.

A private throwaway prototype and an app handling customer records or payments should not share the same release standard.

KEEP THIS QUESTION

What must this next commitment prove?

THE FINANCIAL REALITY

Count progress. Not just prompts.

Include subscriptions, extra credits, repair work, hosting, APIs and founder time. The tool's price is not the project's full cost. [3]

Tools + extra credits	**£300**
Contractor support	**£400**
Hosting + APIs	**£60**
Cash spent	**£760**
Founder time: 30h × £30	**£900**
Including time	**£1,660**

Illustrative month, not an industry average. Founder time is an opportunity-cost assumption, not cash paid.

KEEP THIS QUESTION

What became true because of this spend?

PRODUCT CONFIDENCE

“Done” is a claim. Check the outcome.

“Login works”

A second account can sign in. A signed-out visitor cannot reach private data.

“Saved”

The record survives refresh and belongs to the right account.

“Payment complete”

The payment is recorded once and unlocks the correct access.

“The fix is done”

The original failure is gone and the working journey still passes.

For sensitive work, use appropriate technical review. A plausible interface is not verification. [1, 4, 5]

SECURITY

Real customer data. Real responsibility.

Access

Can one user read or change another user’s records?

Authority

What can an agent or administrator delete or overwrite?

Secrets

Are credentials and sensitive logs protected?

Recovery

Can you restore known-good code and data?

Ownership

Who receives an alert and can act?

These questions are a starting point, not a security certification or legal opinion. Seek review proportionate to the exposure. [6, 7]

THE HUMAN COST

A difficult build is not a verdict on you.

An unreliable app does not prove the idea is worthless. Missing customers do not automatically mean you need ten more features.

Set finite work cycles, clear release criteria and a point for specialist help. Make the hidden effort of checking and correcting part of the plan. [8]

A FOUNDER QUESTION

What will we stop doing this week?

THE BUSINESS UNDER THE PRODUCT

Buildable ≠ buyable.

01 **Problem**
Who experiences it, and how urgently?

02 **Buyer**
Who chooses, uses and pays?

03 **Offer**
Why this promise, at this price?

04 **Route**
How will buyers discover and trust it?

05 **Economics**
Can you afford to win and serve them?

Praise, signups and demo attendance can signal interest. They do not, by themselves, establish payment or sustainable economics. Preserve contradictory evidence. [9, 10]

FIELD NOTE 01 / 15 · TECHNICAL

Every fix breaks something else.

THE SITUATION

A change to onboarding breaks a previously functioning login or dashboard.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

You may lack a verified baseline or safe change boundary. A model can produce more changes faster than you can check them.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Reproduce the failure; return to a known-good state; make one bounded fix; rerun the customer journey.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What worked before, and how will we prove it still works?

FIELD NOTE 02 / 15 · CONFIDENCE

The AI says it is done, but I cannot trust that claim.

THE SITUATION

A polished success message conceals a failed save, wrong entitlement or stale result.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Completion language is not verification. The system may be reporting its intention rather than customer-visible state.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Define pass/fail in observable terms; test with real roles and persistent records.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What can a second person observe independently?

FIELD NOTE 03 / 15 · FINANCIAL

Credits keep going, but progress is hard to see.

THE SITUATION

A month of plans and repair attempts produces lots of prompts, little durable delivery.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

The project is tracking activity instead of accepted outcomes.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Set a cost and time envelope; count verified milestones; stop repeated attempts without new diagnosis.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What changed in the product or the evidence because of this spend?

FIELD NOTE 04 / 15 · RESOURCE

The agent forgets our earlier decisions.

THE SITUATION

A later session ignores a crucial requirement or reintroduces a rejected approach.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Important context lives in scattered conversations rather than a source of truth.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Keep the product brief, architecture map, decision log and acceptance tests beside the code.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Which written decision must survive the next session?

FIELD NOTE 05 / 15 · TECHNICAL

I own software that I do not understand.

THE SITUATION

The founder fears touching a working area because dependencies are invisible.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Rapid implementation has exceeded the founder's maintainability and handover capacity.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Get a scoped architecture assessment; document high-risk flows; simplify and assign ownership.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Can another competent person explain and safely change this?

FIELD NOTE 06 / 15 · COMMERCIAL

The app is built. Customers are absent.

THE SITUATION

The launch gets likes or compliments but few qualified conversations or payments.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Reach, problem urgency, buyer fit or offer strength may be unproven; this is not automatically a feature problem.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Choose one buyer; seek behavioural evidence; test a priced commitment and one repeatable reach channel.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Who has the pain, can we reach them, and what have they committed?

FIELD NOTE 07 / 15 · TECHNICAL

The demo cannot survive real users.

THE SITUATION

The founder sees success on their own account, while new users encounter broken setup and exceptions.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Integration, recovery, edge cases or operating responsibilities are not complete.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Prove one end-to-end customer path; test interruptions, multiple roles, and recovery.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Can an unfamiliar user achieve the promised result twice?

FIELD NOTE 08 / 15 · SECURITY

I worry the app exposes customer information.

THE SITUATION

Accounts appear isolated but a URL or direct request may expose someone else's records.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

UI privacy is not authorization. The consequences can be serious even for a small business.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Test separate identities and records; minimise permissions; secure secrets; seek appropriate security review.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Which private record can a different user read or alter?

FIELD NOTE 09 / 15 · COMMERCIAL

I can build any idea, so I cannot choose one.

THE SITUATION

The team starts a new app whenever the previous one meets resistance.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Technical possibility has become a replacement for commercial prioritisation.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Choose the riskiest market assumption; test urgency and alternatives before expanding scope.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What evidence would make this idea worth the next 30 days?

FIELD NOTE 10 / 15 · PERSONAL

I am always almost finished and constantly exhausted.

THE SITUATION

The founder spends nights managing corrections but cannot describe the next release.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

The work has no stopping rule, and mental effort is hidden from the plan.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Use finite work cycles, explicit release criteria, breaks, and targeted specialist help.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What will we stop doing this week?

FIELD NOTE 11 / 15 · COMMERCIAL

People register, but do not become customers.

THE SITUATION

Signups grow, but new users never reach a useful outcome or a payment decision.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

The value moment and conversion path may be unclear or too difficult.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Observe first-use sessions; simplify time to value; measure activation and payment separately.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Where exactly do qualified users stop making progress?

FIELD NOTE 12 / 15 · RESOURCE

My platform is now a dependency I cannot escape.

THE SITUATION

An account restriction or provider outage blocks a live customer workflow.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Domain, code, data, identity and hosting may have different owners and portability rules.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Document dependencies, keep export and backup rights, test recovery before a crisis.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Can we continue or migrate if this provider becomes unavailable?

FIELD NOTE 13 / 15 · COMMERCIAL

Someone else can make the same app tomorrow.

THE SITUATION

The founder has features but no clear reason for a buyer to choose this provider.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Easy replication increases pressure on buyer insight, trust, access and service.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Learn the customer workflow; articulate differentiation beyond features; test switching reasons.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

Why this provider, for this buyer, now?

FIELD NOTE 14 / 15 · FINANCIAL

The app costs more to serve than it earns.

THE SITUATION

Metered AI or third-party calls grow with usage, while pricing stays flat.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Unit economics were assumed from low-volume tests.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Measure the cost of completed customer work, model heavy users, and price accordingly.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What is gross margin per successful customer outcome?

FIELD NOTE 15 / 15 · LEADERSHIP

The team delivers more code than it can govern.

THE SITUATION

Executives see rising output alongside review queues, incidents and uncertain value.

WHAT IT MAY MEAN

Review, operations and business accountability have not scaled with generation speed.

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Make small releases; name responsible owners; measure incidents and customer outcomes, not code volume.

BEFORE THE NEXT BUILD

What production result justifies the new release?

THE DECISION ROOM

25 minutes. One next decision.

0–5 MIN / What did we learn?

Record verified outcomes, not activity.

5–10 MIN / What is most uncertain?

Choose one: market, cash, security, product or team.

10–15 MIN / What earns the next commitment?

Name one measurable piece of evidence.

15–20 MIN / What is out of bounds?

Agree what you will not build, spend or promise.

20–25 MIN / What happens next?

Build, narrow, test again, pause or stop.

Give commercial evidence and release/security readiness named owners. Solo founders still hold two distinct responsibilities.

A PRACTICAL RESET

A week of decisions. Not just screens.

01 / Truth
Write down facts and unknowns.

02 / Cash
Cap the next experiment in time and money.

03 / Safety
Check access and recovery. Escalate serious findings.

04 / Buyer
Choose one buyer and map the evidence gaps.

05 / Offer
Test a paid-outcome hypothesis and a concrete next action.

06 / Product
Demonstrate one complete customer journey.

07 / Decision
Build, narrow, test again, pause or stop.

If you suspect live exposure, contain and investigate it first. A busy week is not validation by itself.

WORKSHEET / SAVE THIS PAGE

Before the next £500. Or the next 50 hours.

An unknown is more useful than invented certainty.

Our buyer and their painful situation

What we have observed, rather than inferred

What remains an assumption

The smallest test that could change our decision

Our maximum cash and time commitment

Our next move if it passes / fails / stays unclear

Use with your co-founder or on your own.

WORKSHEET / PASS · FAIL · UNKNOWN

Ready for customers? Check both sides.

PRODUCT + SAFETY

Core task works for a new user.
Changes preserve working journeys.
Accounts cannot access each other’s data.
Secrets and sensitive logs are protected.
Retries do not create incorrect records.
Backup and recovery are tested.

COMMERCIAL

Buyer and urgent problem are specific.
A meaningful buyer commitment is recorded.
The route to buyers can be tested.
Serving them has a plausible economic model.

Record an owner and proof for each check. A failed safety test may block launch. An unproven commercial assumption may call for a smaller pilot. Unknown is not proof.

KEEP THE JOY. ADD THE EVIDENCE.

Make the next decision clearer.

Build fast. Keep your judgement. Let the next piece of evidence matter as much as the next feature.

GTM Right's free Stage 1 checks public evidence of whether a problem is real, visible and urgent. It provides an evidence grade, sources and limits, assumptions and a next useful test. [11]

It does not establish buyer budget, willingness to pay or full commercial viability. The Full Canvas guides further work and testing across Stages 2–6; buyer interviews may be part of that work. [12]

Start your free evidence check →

gtmright.com/start

Which problem would you discuss with another founder?

RESEARCH NOTES

Useful guidance. Honest boundaries.

Not a failure-rate study.

This guide draws on surveys, research, reporting, provider documentation and selected community discussions. These cover different populations.

Stories are not prevalence.

Founder scenes are illustrative composites, not named interviews. Forum accounts do not establish how common an issue is.

A framework, not a guarantee.

The practical tools are recommendations, not independently evaluated interventions. Commercial evidence is not a substitute for security, engineering or legal review.

Source links are included so you can explore the evidence and its context. The cited sources have not been independently verified for this guide.

SOURCES AND READING / 1 OF 3

Follow the evidence.

01 / Stack Overflow / 2026 Developer Survey

AI mistakes and time lost. Self-reported, multi-select responses; not app failure rates.

Open source ↗

02 / DORA / AI, speed and verification

Research discussion of productivity and delivery stability.

Open source ↗

03 / Builder discussion / Credits and regressions

Selected self-reported experience; not representative prevalence.

Open source ↗

04 / Columbia DAPLab / FlowCheck

Research on silent failures and misleading interfaces.

Open source ↗

05 / Founder account / Production readiness

Paid users alongside security and operating concerns.

Open source ↗

SOURCES AND READING / 2 OF 3

Follow the evidence.

06 / WIRED / Accessible AI-built applications

Reporting includes limits on verification of displayed records.

Open source ↗

07 / OWASP / Top 10:2025

Web application security risk categories.

Open source ↗

08 / IBM / Cognitive costs of vibe coding

Research discussion of checking and correction burdens.

Open source ↗

09 / Founder discussion / Finding customers

Selected community opinion, not a population study.

Open source ↗

10 / Founder account / Niche traction

A self-reported path to buyers and channel learning.

Open source ↗

SOURCES AND READING / 3 OF 3

Follow the evidence.

11 / GTM Right / Stage 1

Vendor-authored description of scope and limits.

Open source ↗

12 / GTM Right / Commercial Readiness Pack

Vendor-authored description of the later-stage process.

Open source ↗

13 / CloudBees / Enterprise leader survey

Vendor-sponsored, self-reported enterprise survey.

Open source ↗

14 / Stack Overflow / AI survey data

Validation behaviour and knowledge context.

Open source ↗

15 / Founder discussion / Paying users

Self-reported early commercial and operating experience.

Open source ↗

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