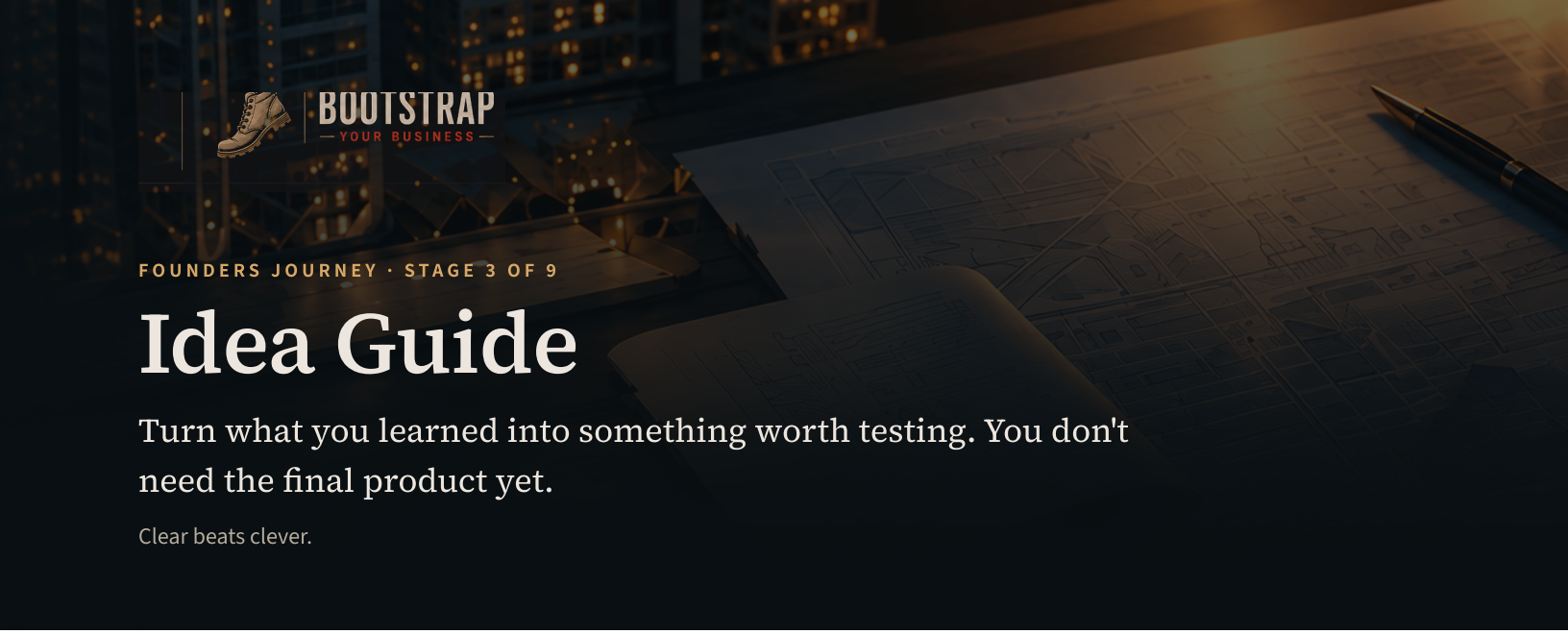


BOOTSTRAP
— YOUR BUSINESS —

FOUNDERS JOURNEY · STAGE 3 OF 9

Idea Guide

Turn what you learned into something worth testing. You don't need the final product yet.

Clear beats clever.

Idea is where you use what Discovery taught you to shape a possible solution. The goal isn't to invent as many ideas as possible or commit to a full product. It's to choose one way of solving the problem that answers real evidence and is clear enough to test.

WHAT MATTERS NOW	YOUR FIRST STEP	WHAT COMES NEXT
What you learned about the problem and customer, possible ways to solve it, and the guesses behind each.	Shape one clear idea that's small enough to look at closely and test.	Validation: testing whether the idea creates enough real value to be worth more of your time.

WHAT YOU'LL HAVE BY THE END

- A clear problem and customer, based on what you learned in Discovery.
- One way to solve it that answers what you heard, not a guess.
- A short list of the most important guesses that still need testing.
- A simple version of the idea you can test without a big commitment.

01 Start with the problem

Use the evidence you have to decide what a useful solution should change.

A strong idea starts with a problem, not a list of features. Discovery may have shown you a repeated problem, a costly workaround, or a frustrating process. Now ask: what's the smallest useful change that would make this better? Start there before deciding what the product looks like.

KEEP THESE FOUR THINGS CONNECTED

Who	The person or situation that has the problem.
Problem	The difficulty, cost, delay, risk, or frustration you saw.
Useful change	What should become easier, faster, safer, clearer, or cheaper.
Approach	The simplest way to make that change happen.

> **The core idea**
> The solution should answer the evidence. Don't solve more than the evidence supports.

02 Shape an idea you can test

Turn one promising direction into a clear idea, without overbuilding it.

You don't need a revolutionary concept. You need an idea that makes sense in the customer's world and is specific enough for someone to react to, try, or compare. A familiar solution done better can beat a new one nobody needs.

QUESTIONS THAT HELP SHAPE THE IDEA

- Which part of the problem matters most, based on what you heard?
- What result would make things meaningfully better for the customer?
- What are people doing now that your idea would replace or improve?
- What's the smallest version that could create the useful change?
- What would have to be true for this to really help?
- What are you assuming that you still don't know?

SIGNS IT'S READY TO TEST

- It answers a problem with real evidence behind it.
- You can say who it's for and what it changes.
- It's small enough to test without building a whole business.
- You can name the guesses that could make it fail.
- You can picture a real test that would teach you something.

SIGNS TO SLOW DOWN

- It's exciting mostly because of the technology or novelty.
- You can't explain the problem without describing your solution.
- Nobody can try the useful part until you build a lot.
- You're adding features because you're unsure what people need.
- It ignores that customers already have a fix they're happy with.

Bigger isn't better

A bigger product means more guesses, more cost, and more ways to be wrong. Start with the smallest version that can show whether the change matters.

03 Choose your first step

Get the idea ready for Validation without turning it into a full build.

Your first step should make the idea more concrete, or bring an important guess into the open. You're not finishing the solution. You're making the next test useful.

GOOD FIRST STEPS CAN BE

- Writing the idea in one clear sentence.
- Comparing two possible approaches against what you learned.
- Sketching the smallest version that could create the useful change.
- Listing the guesses that must be true for it to work.
- Picking the one guess Validation should test first.

SIGNS YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS

- You can describe the problem and customer without your solution.
- You can say what useful change the idea should create.
- You have one direction that clearly connects to what you learned.
- You know which parts are still guesses, not facts.
- You can describe a smaller version that's practical to test.

DO IT FOR LESS

Start free. Pay only at the wall.

An idea costs nothing until you build it. Keep it in words and sketches as long as you can.

- Write the idea in a free document. One clear sentence beats a polished pitch deck.
- Sketch it on paper, or with a free plan of a tool like Canva, instead of hiring a designer.
- Picture delivering the first version by hand, with tools you already have.
- Hold off on buying a domain, logo, software, or inventory. None of it proves the idea yet.

If the only way to show the idea is to build something, look for a free plan of a simple tool first. Pay only when that free plan keeps stopping you, and then move up one plan.

DO IT WITH AI

Let AI do the heavy lifting

Copy these into any free AI tool, like ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini. Fill in the brackets first.

Brainstorm from cheapest to most work

Here's what I learned about [the problem] *from* [who has it]*:* [your notes]*. Suggest three simple ways to solve it, from the cheapest to the most work. For each, list the biggest guess it depends on.*

Shrink it

My idea is [your idea]*. Help me cut it down to the smallest version that still creates this useful change:* [the change]*. Tell me what I could deliver by hand at first.*

Write my one sentence

Help me write one plain sentence in this shape: For [who] *dealing with* [problem]*, try* [approach] *that helps them* [useful change]*. Give me three versions and point out anything vague.*

Check the answer: AI will happily make an idea sound bigger and better. Keep only what connects to what real people told you.

NOT YET

What can wait

- Building every feature you can imagine.
- Choosing final prices or packages.
- Creating the final brand, logo, or website.
- Buying inventory, equipment, software, or ads.
- Hiring or automating before the idea has earned it.
- Treating a well-designed idea as proof that customers will value it.

COMING UP

Validation

Idea gives you something worth testing. Validation asks whether it creates enough real value for the customer to justify moving forward. You don't move forward because the idea sounds good. You move forward when testing gives you a reason to put in more time, money, or effort.

Idea isn't about getting everything right. It's about choosing something clear enough and small enough to test.