

Finding and Closing Your First 10 Customers



Founder-led sales is essential for new tech businesses—not only from a resources perspective, but because a founder is the best person to speak to the product and its benefits and establish product/market fit. If the founder can't get prospective customers (and later recruits, investors, partners, etc) interested enough to buy the product, the business will likely fail (and hopefully, for your sake, fast).

The good news is that you don't actually have to like sales or even be good at selling in the very beginning. Your first 10-20 customers will be technology enthusiasts (TEs) who have a high tolerance for risk and will buy your new, buggy product even when it lacks a defined business case or a proven track record.

Your First Customer: The Tech Enthusiast (TE)

TEs are the people who love technology for technology's sake. The people you would imagine camping outside of an Apple store a week before the launch just so they can be first in line to buy the latest iPhone on release day. They don't care that you don't have any case studies or customer testimonials. In fact, they might even be motivated by a lack of conventional social proof. This is because technology occupies a central interest in their life or business. Depending on your target audience, it might even be their job to identify new cutting-edge technology for their employer.

TEs typically make up a tiny percent (~2.5%) of the total market for your product but they're indispensable when it comes to figuring out if you have any kind of product-market fit. They'll give you unsolicited feedback and insight into your product – something you'll have to invest significant dollars in as your product matures and your customer mix changes.

At MineralSoft, the vertical SaaS company that I co-founded, we were fortunate to attract three TEs among our first 10 clients that also happened to work for marquee companies in our niche market. Two of them ended up staying on as long-term customers, and all were invaluable for product feedback and driving early sales. As a founder, being able to share with other prospective customers (off the record) that these guys were testing our product got us through the door, which in the very beginning is probably >75% of the challenge.

Finding your first 10 customers

All sales in the beginning are scrappy, especially as you search for the tech enthusiasts that are going to be your first customers. Ask everyone you talk to in your industry who they know in your market that is an early adopter of technology. When you have your MVP ready, if you've asked around enough, you'll have a list of people to start calling.

At that point you should openly post on relevant social media channels that you are soliciting early adopters. Search LinkedIn for people at larger target companies that are clearly focused on technology adoption. Each time you close a customer, ask them who else they know that is like them and loves learning about new tech. TEs in a given industry know who the other TEs are.

The good news is that tech enthusiasts are generally really good at spotting new technologies. Make it easy for them to find you, and they probably will.

Selling to your first 10 customers

Fundamental rules of sales apply to your first ten sales (and every sale thereafter). Truths like “no pain, no sale” apply, even when selling to TEs. But there are a few additional considerations when it comes to your first few sales:

1) Don't "fake it 'til you make it."

Remember, TEs thrive on being first. So be honest with them and tell them that your product is brand new and isn't fully baked. But do get them excited about how and why you're disrupting your market. (Note: I believe you should never fake it 'til you make it in sales—but definitely not at this stage.)

2) Don't try to maximize revenue.

Ideally price your product or service so that it's a discretionary purchase that the TE can make on their own. Also, don't give the product away for free. They have to have some skin in the game.

3) Do make it easy for them to buy.

This is especially true in B2B sales. Don't make them sign some onerous or long-term contract that has to be reviewed by legal, or worse, procurement.

4) Do expect them to churn.

TEs thrive on being early but they often have a very high bar when it comes to long-term adoption.

5) Set a social contract

Set a social contract that you expect them to provide product feedback and hold them accountable to that promise.

6) Ask them for names of other TEs in your industry.

But don't pressure them into making an introduction.

Looking for guidance on your next step? Still not sure what your next step is? [Talk to one of our partners today.](#)

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