



Things To Know Before Beginning Paid Media

A Guide for Early Stage Work Tech Companies To Lay the Groundwork for Long-term Success





Introduction: The Founder's Journey

Most Work Tech companies follow a similar journey. There's a founder (or founders) who comes up with a brilliant idea that can change the world of work. You can practically feel their passion pouring out. The brilliant new company gets a name and the magic begins. While the product or service is being developed, you start sharing the idea with those closest to you. You buy a website domain and things really start coming together. Eventually, you even make that first real this-person-didn't-grow-up-with-you-and-work-out-of-your-garage hire. Fast forward a bit, and you have a fully operational product that you are ready to sell.





Everything Starts With Relationships

Typically, you start with relationships. Relationships of the founders. Relationships of the initial hires. If you're lucky, you even get some closed deals. From there, you've tasted success and you're ready to expand by hiring some sales folks, use their existing relationships, and if you are really lucky, create a solid word of mouth engine to keep the engine turning. Congratulations, you're officially growing and you've made it past the stage where most startups fail.

If this sounds like you, keep reading.





You Reach the Limits of Your Network

Everything is going great! This pace feels sustainable, and you've got a good rhythm in place — until your relationship well starts to run dry. At the end of the day, this can only take you so far. It's an excellent foundation, but at some point you've got to give the ol' sales team a little shove with some fresh leads. It's time to scale.

The name of the game becomes how to continue to grow. **You have some options:**



Reach out to investors and try to secure funding (**buckle up!**)



Decide not to grow and keep your business the sustainable size it is (**totally OK**)



Be like the lucky few and grow on the profits that you've generated alone (**doable — but you need to be smart about it**)



So, where would you spend this money?

How do you continue to grow?

You think it's time for paid media.
But how do you get started?

THAT'S A BIG QUESTION.

But before you get into the nitty-gritty of budgets, channels, and KPIs, take a moment for a reality check.
Keep these five key rules in mind before you get rolling.

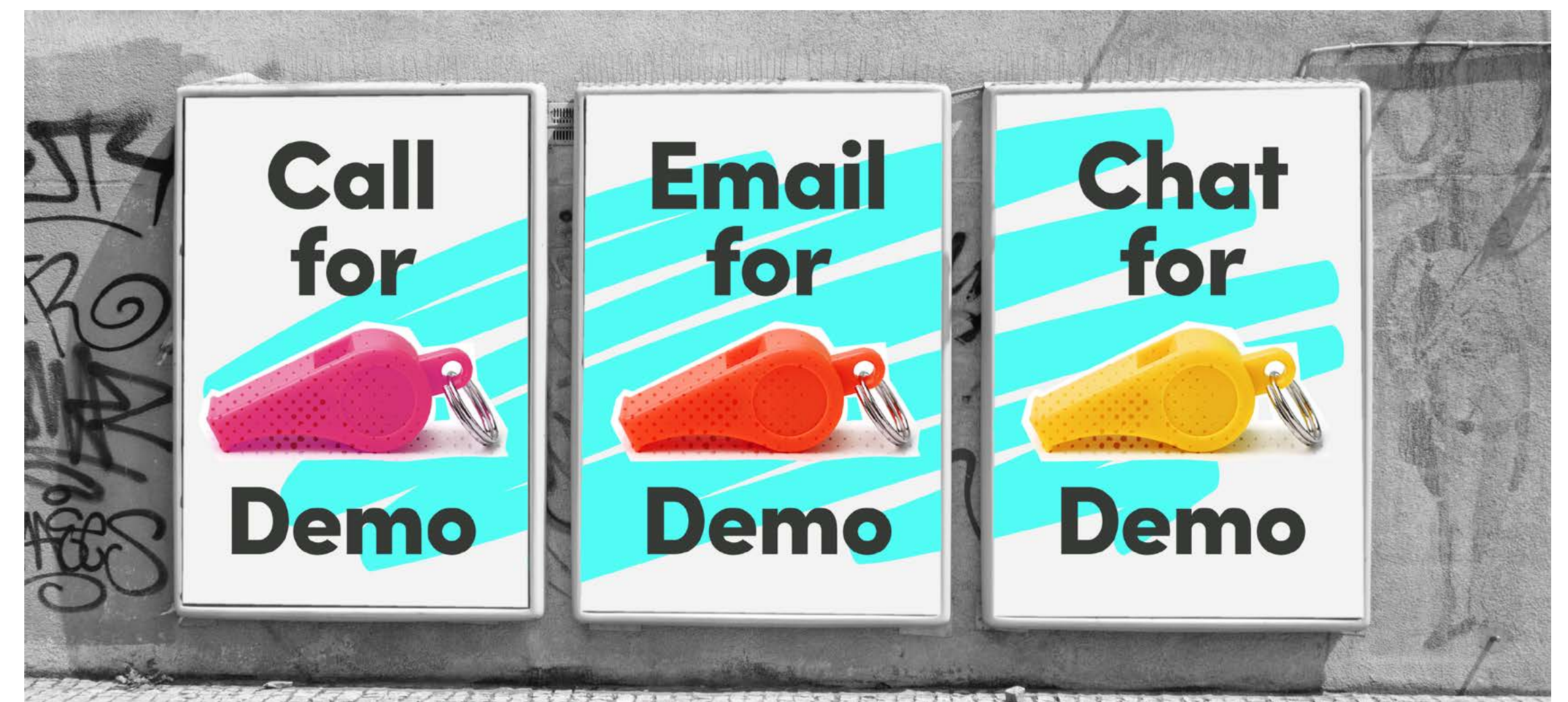




1. Shift Your Mindset

Know this from the beginning: There are things that paid media can and can't do. For startups, the top issue/concern/failure/*[insert negative connotation-type word here]* that we see is around expectations for **contacts generated** — specifically those new contacts generated from paid media initiatives. If your focus has been on the relationship sale where there is a level of familiarity and trust already associated with brand-based, person-to-person connection, this may be challenging for you. With paid media, a conversion is only the start of a sales conversation, not an indication that the prospect is ready to make a purchase.

When you analyze the first few contacts or leads you've generated from your new paid media efforts, you may feel like they just aren't as warm and fuzzy. They have no relationship with you or your brand. They were enticed by some sort of offer that you put out into the world through advertising. [#marketing](#)





Here’s where the shift in mindset comes into play. If you reach out to your prospect and expect them to be ready for a demo or a serious sales conversation, you’re going to be sorely disappointed. Marketing-generated leads need time to be nurtured by sales and marketing, like this proposed marketing email campaign cadence:

SEND 1	SEND 2	SEND 3	SEND 4	SEND 5
<p>Introductory email — focuses on the overall value proposition and functional association of your product. Introduce who you are, what you do, and the pain points you solve.</p>	<p>Offer a top-of-funnel thought leadership asset or other educational materials for download. Focus on the pain and thought leadership — not your product.</p>	<p>Have an industry-specific reference to a blog or short paper — or if it doesn’t exist, write a short email talking about an industry-specific event that sells the problem you solve. Focus on the problem more than the solution.</p>	<p>Offer a link to an article or news story that’s relevant to your offering. It should be some sort of content that relates to the prospect’s POV — not your product.</p>	<p>Share more specifics about your product features and how these can benefit an organization and the first experiences of its employees.</p>



This is all about giving away value to gain trust and respect. When you have a pre-existing relationship, you already have that trust. With digital media, trust must be earned over time. If you can't shift your way of thinking, handling, and acting toward these different lead types, then paid media will ultimately feel like a failure for a long time.

KEY TAKEAWAY: PROVIDING VALUE IS THE NAME OF THE GAME FOR PAID MEDIA. YOU CAN'T JUST BEAT PROSPECTS OVER THE HEAD WITH HARD-SELL MESSAGES AND HIGH-INVOLVEMENT OFFERS LIKE DEMOS. **YOU NEED TO ADDRESS THIS IDEA HEAD-ON PRIOR TO STARTING ANY CAMPAIGNS.** IF YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR LEAD JOURNEY MAPPED AND SOME SORT OF NURTURE SET UP — MAKE THAT YOUR FIRST PRIORITY.



2. Set Realistic Expectations

Your first campaign ~~may kind of suck~~ will not be your most successful campaign. That's OK — it's expected. Results from a startup with zero brand awareness will not be the same as a similar campaign delivered by a legacy power brand. We've seen this play out for years across every category inside Work Tech (and outside). High-awareness brands produce better demand generation results than low-awareness ones.



Think about it this way: Have you ever been to Costco? I love trying new things and I love food. Costco is known for its free samples, and I'll totally hit up the samples on a Sunday shopping trip. If I try something really good, I usually remember the brand or product, but I don't buy it. If it's something bad or mediocre, I just move on. But if it's amazing — truly amazing — I buy it then and there. Those amazing finds are few and far between though. Costco doesn't give away free samples expecting every experience to result in a sale of that product. Move some units? Yes. Sell out immediately? No. So even though I didn't buy the squishy chicken and rice meal, here I am telling you about it.

#marketing



CONVERSIONS TAKE TIME TO BECOME TRULY COST EFFICIENT. IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR COST PER CONVERSION TO DROP **20% TO 40%** AFTER YOUR FIRST YEAR IN MARKET.

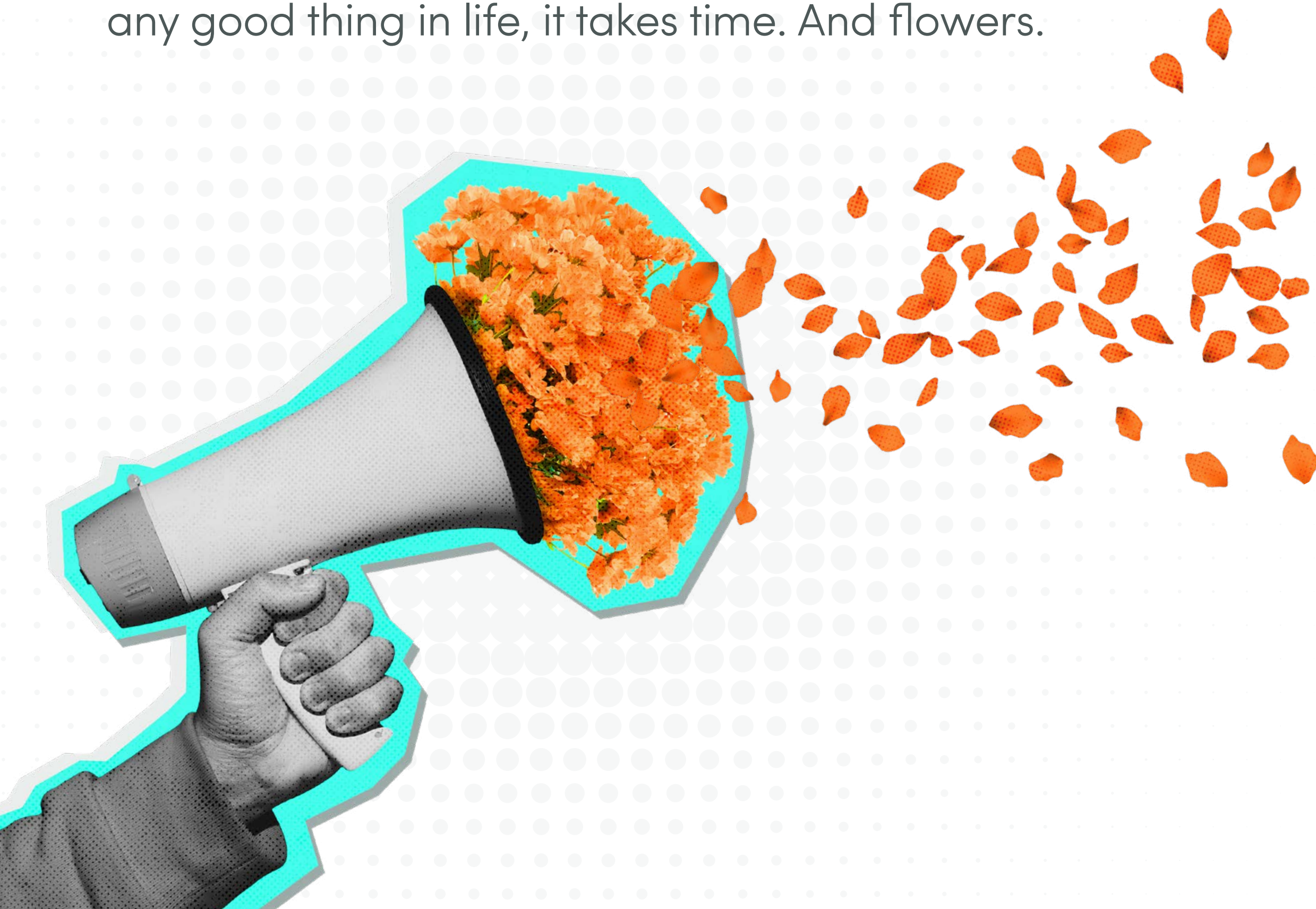
You need to think this way about your marketing as well. Your goal may be to sell some squishy chicken and rice, but your thought leadership assets — white papers, e-books, videos, infographics, analyst research reports — are the free samples. They create value that brings people back so they can eventually make a purchase (or tell someone they know who should). If you expect every lead to turn into a sale or demo then turn into a real sales opportunity, you are setting yourself up for disappointment.

KEY TAKEAWAY: REMEMBER THE COSTCO RULE: YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE AWAY SOME VALUE TO GET THE SALE. CALIBRATE YOUR OFFERS APPROPRIATELY, AND BE REAL ABOUT THE SPEED AT WHICH A PROSPECT IS GOING TO BITE. START WITH LOWER-INVOLVEMENT OFFERS EARLIER IN THE GAME, AND WORK YOUR WAY UP TO HIGHER-INVOLVEMENT OFFERS (LIKE WEBINARS AND, YES, DEMOS) AS YOU EARN THAT TRUST. THE HIGHER THE VALUE, THE MORE AGGRESSIVE YOU CAN SET YOUR GOALS.



3. Don't Go With the Hard Sell

If you're entering the market with low brand awareness and trying to promote a sales conversation, you're going to hear nothing but crickets. By providing little value upfront, you'll get little in return. Yes, you want a sales conversation, but like any good thing in life, it takes time. And flowers.



In research from earlier this year, two-thirds of B2B buyers say they are now “self-serving” more information before contacting vendors. Furthermore, 25% of B2B buyers say they want to be able to get all the necessary information about a product or service online before contacting a salesperson. However, only 9% of B2B marketers say their firm offers all information online.

To win in this environment, you do need to share your perspectives, ideas, insights, research — whatever you have to bring to the market, share it with your new audience. Bring them along the journey and make them want to know more. Educate them about their pains, their aspirations, and your take on the world. You know, thought leadership.



WHAT KIND OF ASSETS ARE RIGHT FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EARLY STAGE AWARENESS? THINK BLOG POSTS, LINKEDIN POSTS, CHECKLISTS, SHORT VIDEOS, SHORT E-BOOKS, LONGER WHITE PAPERS, INDUSTRY ANALYST REPORTS, AND WEBINARS.

Think about the asset you're reading right now. We didn't need to write this down and give it away, but we are. We know that not every person reading this will work with us, but we can hope it is interesting. And when the time is right, maybe you'll think of **The Starr Conspiracy as a company with some sound advice that could get you where you need to be.**

KEY TAKEAWAY: DON'T COME ON TOO STRONG TO START. GIVE AWAY VALUE. YES, YOU CAN STILL OFFER A DEMO. JUST DON'T EXPECT CONTACTS WHO JUST LEARNED ABOUT YOU TO TAKE YOU UP ON IT — THOSE RARE OCCURRENCES ARE UNICORNS. TRY THAT LATER DOWN THE FUNNEL.

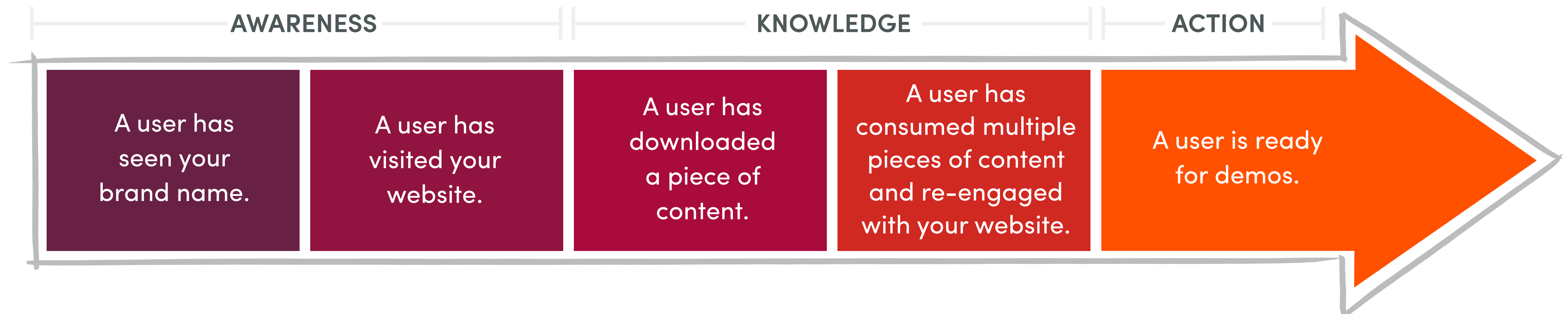




4. Match Your Offer With User Intent

This is something so obvious but so often overlooked. Let's say you want to have a mix of offers in the market around a common theme (hint: best practice). You should match the value or ask of the offer with the intent or the placement of the promotion.

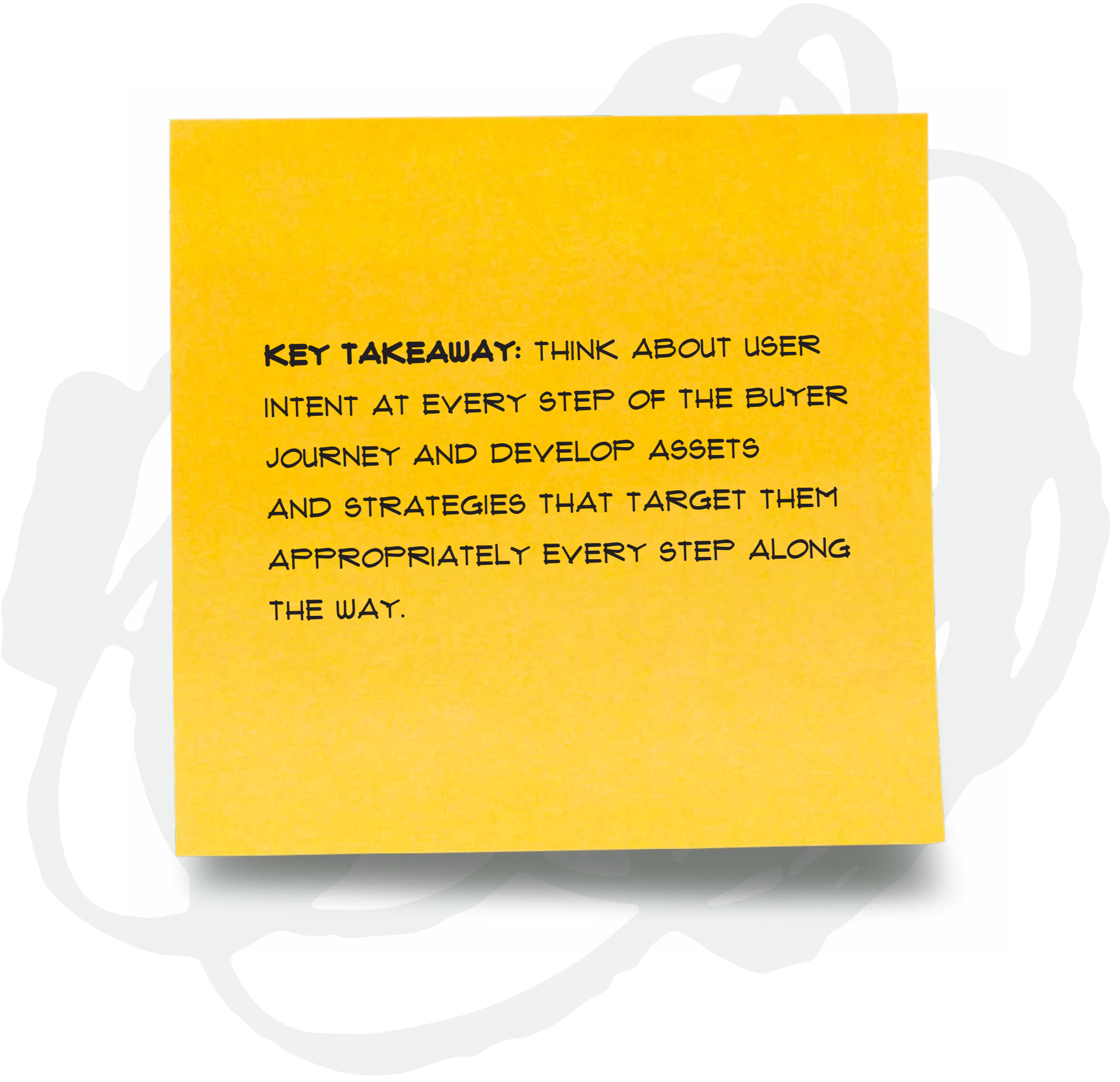
For example, we often see companies promote only demos or expect every lead to be demo-ready. Most demo campaigns provide little upfront value (as we discussed earlier) and are asking a lot (high involvement and investment of time and attention). With little brand awareness, can you get away with offering little value? Nope. High-involvement, low-upfront-value offers like demo requests should be matched with users who have a higher intent in taking an action.





Let's use Google Search ads as an example. If someone is searching for "top well-being software companies" and you are a well-being software company, then you can offer them a low-upfront-value offer since they are intent on learning about the top companies in the particular space you find yourself in. A demo may make sense in this instance. Having little awareness here is not as big of an obstacle.

Let's flip this example to a banner ad on the 10-day forecast on weather.com. The people who may see your ad there are just trying to figure out if their kid's soccer game is getting rained out; they aren't likely to convert on a demo offer for your software. Your campaign strategy needs to consider where prospects will see your ads and how they will interact with them. This doesn't mean that a brand impression while they are checking the weather doesn't matter. Brand impressions add up. **At the end of the day, your prospects are people, not companies.** If you can't imagine a scenario where you would engage, then most likely, they won't either.



KEY TAKEAWAY: THINK ABOUT USER INTENT AT EVERY STEP OF THE BUYER JOURNEY AND DEVELOP ASSETS AND STRATEGIES THAT TARGET THEM APPROPRIATELY EVERY STEP ALONG THE WAY.



5. Play the Long Game

Turning on digital media won't deliver the goods overnight. If you think you're going to try it for a few months and decide if it works or not, just save your money and don't do it. When you get into paid media, you're going to be building the infrastructure in Year 1 that you will cash in on down the line.

There's no one-size-fits-all strategy here. However, there are two guiding principles that you should adhere to generally:

1. **Strive for consistency early on.** As more users become aware of your brand and offers, the more awareness and trust this will produce. Consistency is key.
2. **Start as you mean to continue** — with flexibility. With anything new, you'll want to test a lot and pivot quickly. You need to see where your successes are and shift money to those areas so you don't burn budget unnecessarily. Flexibility is key, in both the channels you choose and the contracts you attach yourself to. Start with channels that have both — think Google and LinkedIn.





Here's an example: Let's say you want to get in front of an HR audience and you're starting paid media for the first time. We know there is a subset of HR employees who do part of their job on LinkedIn — so let's advertise there. Provide some valuable thought leadership and test the response. You may find you have an ad that isn't performing well. Try tweaking the copy and put it back on the market. The channel and process are inherently flexible. It allows you to be consistent with your messaging while testing to see where you're getting the best results. We have seen campaign performance dramatically improve with small wording changes.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS MATTER. IN WORK TECH, 70% OF THE BUYER'S JOURNEY IS OVER BY THE TIME THEY ENGAGE WITH SALES.

Maybe LinkedIn is too costly to run for you right now, so you try focusing on sponsoring newsletters, emails, or banners in various HR publications where your HR audience is. Not a bad idea, but once you run your one-off placement, if it flops — it flops. There's no room for flexibility and incremental testing in real time.

KEY TAKEAWAY: YOU NEED TO DEVELOP A PLACEMENT STRATEGY THAT ENABLES YOU TO BE FLEXIBLE EARLY ON TO ENSURE YOU CAN CREATE CONSISTENCY TO GENERATE IMPROVED RESULTS OVER TIME.

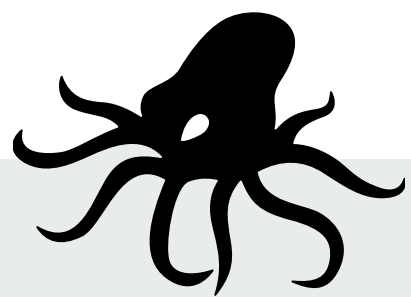


Conclusion

These five rules for starting paid media may seem obvious or overly simple, but the real magic is in bringing them all together. It all starts with your strategy. Follow these five rules during the strategy, planning, and execution process, and you'll find yourself set up for success.

If you thought this was helpful or want to learn more specifics about what you and your company can be doing differently, we are happy to help. Reach out at any time [here](#). Or find us at thestarrconspiracy.com. You don't have to go it alone.

GOOD LUCK!



About The Starr Conspiracy

You're busy creating the future of work. You don't have time to teach an agency what you do. At The Starr Conspiracy, your work is our business. Brand or demand. Traction or scale. We accelerate results. If you are creating innovative workplace solutions, there's no better B2B marketing agency to bring your brand to life.

The Starr Conspiracy is co-located in Fort Worth, Texas and San Francisco. Learn more at thestarrconspiracy.com.

