

# SaaS Go-to-Market: The Market Entry Decision Book



AI concept illustration. Editorial content and working models: Patrick Wings.

A go-to-market plan is a chain of testable decisions: whom your offer serves, which problem triggers a purchase and how your team reaches a paid deployment. This working guide moves from incomplete customer signals to a bounded market test. Along the way, you create a decision record shared by sales, product and marketing. Every reference to the example company NordPilot is explicitly fictional. Its amounts, quantities and time periods are calculation assumptions, not market benchmarks, recommended budgets or claims of achieved results.

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Implementation support: [request a strategy call](#)

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

For founders, executives and marketing leaders at B2B SaaS, IT and technology companies preparing a launch, segment change or DACH market entry.

### Your practical outputs

- A justified entry segment with exclusions and documented uncertainties.
- Tested positioning with a buying trigger, supporting evidence and an appropriate initial offer.
- A sales model with capacity calculations, scenarios and a bounded test budget.
- A 90-day working plan with owners, decision gates and explicit stop conditions.

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# 1. Define the decision before the activity plan

Start with a decision your team genuinely needs to make: Can the existing product serve a particular customer group without redesigning every implementation? Write down the review date, the people available and the maximum loss the test can absorb. A launch date is insufficient because it defines neither a learning question nor an economic boundary.

NordPilot, our entirely fictional maintenance software company, is considering entry into DACH. Two people can support the test alongside their existing responsibilities. They need to learn whether maintenance managers would buy a standardized starting engagement. The decision is therefore not “enter Germany” but “test a repeatable starting offer for a narrowly defined operating profile.” Every later activity must contribute to that question. An extra social channel without a useful learning purpose stays outside the initial plan.

# 2. Separate market size, reachable segment and first customers

A large total market does not show that your current team can reach it. Begin with three segment options that differ in their problem, buying process or implementation needs. Evaluate observable criteria. A segment with substantial willingness to pay may still be unsuitable when security reviews or missing integrations exceed your available time.

NordPilot compares small service businesses, medium-sized production facilities and major corporations. Its provisional choice is production sites with a dedicated maintenance team and existing digital machine lists. This is a working hypothesis, not an established market gap. Companies without accessible data or named process ownership are excluded. Require a plausible route to a conversation: Who could introduce you, and what concrete observation would contradict the segment choice? Make that falsifying evidence as visible as the reasons to proceed.

| Option                   | Advantage in the fictional case | Critical limitation                         | Decision                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Small service businesses | Shorter coordination path       | Workflows differ from the existing product  | Defer for now               |
| Production facilities    | Matching maintenance workflow   | Data quality still needs checking           | Prepare a bounded test      |
| Large corporations       | More potential applications     | Procurement and integration exceed capacity | Exclude from the first test |

### 3. Investigate the last actual buying trigger

Ask about the most recent concrete incident rather than general interest in your idea. What happened? What consequences followed? What changed afterward? Who approved spending? Request anonymized examples of existing lists, handovers or approvals. The incumbent alternative is often a mixture of spreadsheets, habits and manual coordination rather than a competing software product.

In the fictional NordPilot case, the team plans six problem interviews. That number defines workload, not statistical validation. A comment such as “That sounds interesting” is recorded as an uncommitted reaction. An account of an unplanned downtime meeting followed by a budget review is stronger evidence of a buying trigger. Counterexamples matter equally: If a facility rarely experiences the problem or deliberately accepts it, do not rewrite the conversation afterward as proof of enthusiastic demand.

### 4. Map the buying group rather than one persona

A persona helps explain language and daily work, but it does not replace a purchasing decision. Map users, the functional owner, the economic decision-maker and potential blockers. One individual may cover several roles. Record the risk each role wants to avoid and the document or demonstration needed for approval. A compelling demo cannot solve the absence of anyone willing to own implementation risk.

For NordPilot, the fictional maintenance lead, site manager and IT representative must agree. Maintenance wants fewer ambiguous handovers. The site manager wants bounded effort. IT needs an understandable account of data access and system boundaries. These become three separate evidence tasks. The team initially avoids broad architecture promises and offers a documented data check. An unavailable required integration is recorded openly as a product gap rather than disguised as a communication issue.

| Role              | Decision question                     | Evidence needed                                      |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Maintenance lead  | Does this fit shift operations?       | A maintenance scenario using sample data             |
| Site manager      | How is implementation effort bounded? | Named pilot scope and internal owner                 |
| IT representative | Which data leaves which system?       | Reviewed data flow without unsupported assurances    |
| Procurement       | What exactly are we ordering?         | Clear deliverables, duration and acceptance criteria |

## 5. Position against the alternative customers actually use

Positioning connects an audience, a situation, an alternative, a meaningful difference and supporting evidence. “The innovative platform for efficient processes” describes nothing a buyer can verify. Write one initial sentence and add an explicit boundary below it. A deliberate limitation reduces unsuitable enquiries and gives sales a statement it can defend.

NordPilot’s fictional draft reads: “For maintenance teams whose handovers become fragmented across spreadsheets, NordPilot brings open tasks and responsibilities into one place.” Initial evidence is a reproducible product walkthrough using synthetic data, not an invented customer success. The boundary reads: “This does not replace your full ERP system or automatically import from every machine controller.” Test whether interviewees can restate the problem, audience and difference in their own words. Comprehension is the acceptance criterion here; enthusiasm by itself is too vague to guide the next investment.

## 6. Design an entry offer with meaningful acceptance

The first paid step should reduce a relevant uncertainty without exposing the customer to the full risk of a large implementation. Define scope, prerequisites, deliverables, responsibilities and a joint review point. A free pilot is not automatically easier: Without internal commitment, data, time and a decision-maker for continuation are often missing.

NordPilot explores one bounded maintenance area with an accountable team. Sample data and a named internal contact are required before starting. Acceptance asks whether the agreed tasks and owners can be represented and which manual steps remain. Wider deployment requires a separate decision. The actual price must reflect effort, the value argument and customer feedback; this guide therefore provides no supposedly standard pilot price. Explicitly record which adjustments belong to the test and which would be assessed separately as paid development work. That distinction protects both the buyer and your delivery capacity.

## 7. Calculate the commercial model before channel spend

Translate revenue assumptions into customers you can support and actual delivery effort. Separate new contracts, implementation, ongoing service and cancellation risk. A low advertising contact cost means little if every new customer needs weeks of non-standard work. A substantial annual price also does not justify acquisition spending while retention and contribution remain unknown.

For NordPilot, assume entirely fictional annual revenue of €12,000 per contract, an 80 percent gross margin before acquisition and €3,000 of implementation expense. The calculation gives

€9,600 before implementation and €6,600 afterward, still excluding acquisition and other overhead. This is not an approved CAC allowance. The table exposes assumptions with material decision consequences. Model a conservative version with lower contract revenue and a version with heavier implementation before authorizing expenditure. Keep the accounting boundaries explicit so different teams do not present incompatible calculations as the same margin.

| Fictional assumption          | Calculation                          | Implication for the test                           |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Annual revenue €12,000        | $12,000 \times 0.80 = €9,600$        | Contribution before implementation and acquisition |
| Implementation expense €3,000 | $9,600 - 3,000 = €6,600$             | Overhead is still excluded                         |
| Conservative revenue €9,000   | $9,000 \times 0.80 - 3,000 = €4,200$ | Lower pricing reduces room for acquisition         |
| Heavier implementation €5,000 | $9,600 - 5,000 = €4,600$             | Standardization materially affects economics       |

## 8. Choose a channel for the unresolved learning question

Different channels perform different jobs. Search can reveal existing demand but needs a recognizable problem. Personal outreach permits follow-up questions but consumes specialist time. Industry partnerships may provide trust while requiring clear mutual value. Alongside reach, assess time to a verifiable response and the team's ability to handle resulting conversations.

In the fictional case, NordPilot begins with targeted introductions through existing contacts and a clear solution page. A search-language log runs alongside this work to capture how buyers describe their maintenance process. Broad paid reach waits until the first message is understood. This does not make organic work free. Record research, conversations and follow-up hours alongside media costs. A new channel earns a test slot only when its learning question, accountable owner and capacity limit have been written down. Otherwise it becomes an additional reporting obligation rather than useful market evidence.

## 9. Set evidence standards and stop conditions before launch

Define progress before the first conversation. A contact is not an opportunity, and an opportunity is not a contract. Use verifiable states: a relevant problem described, an accountable person involved, a specific next step agreed and a technical prerequisite checked. Record a reason for every rejection rather than deleting inconvenient responses from the report.

NordPilot adopts an illustrative internal decision rule: Following the planned interviews, the team must explain several independently described problem situations and at least one firmly scheduled data check before investing further in the pilot process. This is a cautious management choice, not a scientific validation standard. If only uncommitted interest appears, revisit the trigger or segment first. A missing product capability does not automatically call for a new advertising message. The appropriate response might instead be a product decision or a deliberate end to the test.

## **10. Run a decision workshop that surfaces real conflicts**

Reserve half a working day with leadership, sales, product and marketing. Send interview notes and commercial assumptions in advance. Start with twenty minutes of silent review so the loudest person does not immediately control the framing. Use an hour for segment and trigger, forty minutes for the offer and its boundaries, and forty minutes for economics. Keep the remaining time for capacity, objections and explicit decisions.

During NordPilot's fictional workshop, the product representative challenges a promised integration. The team does not conceal the disagreement with softer wording. It limits the offer to a data transfer that is actually available. Every decision receives an owner and review date. Unresolved matters may remain open, but they must be labelled assumptions. The output is an authorized test page with evidence and limits, rather than a presentation that places incompatible expectations on the same slides.

## **11. Turn the decision into a 90-day working rhythm**

The first fortnight covers evidence collection, interview scheduling and review of the entry offer. The following weeks involve conversations, message revisions and data-check preparation. A later phase concentrates on agreed tests and the implementation effort they reveal. Your procurement process determines actual duration; ninety days is a planning frame here, not a promised sales cycle.

NordPilot holds a short weekly review: Which assumption was tested, what was observed and what decision follows? Marketing owns an understandable account of the problem, sales owns documented next steps and product owns feasibility. Do not postpone inconvenient evidence until a monthly report. If conversations fail to materialize, investigate access and approach first. If promising conversations consistently fail on data prerequisites, change the pilot process rather than simply buying more contacts. Keep changes in a dated decision log so the final review can reconstruct what was tested.

## 12. Decide whether to continue, narrow or stop

Do not finish by counting leads alone. Check whether the same customer group recognizes a similar buying trigger, accepts a comparable starting offer and can be implemented at manageable effort. A single bespoke contract can be commercially attractive without proving a repeatable market. Record exceptions and individually promised services alongside wins.

Three outcomes are legitimate for fictional NordPilot. Continue means the important prerequisites have support and additional capacity can be justified. Narrow means choosing a smaller operating profile or tighter use case. Stop means refusing to cover unresolved uncertainty with further expenditure. Write down the strongest contrary evidence for whichever decision you choose. Your GTM document becomes valuable when it supports a better allocation of resources, including a decision not to pursue an initially attractive market. Archive the learning and remaining questions so a later team does not unknowingly repeat the same experiment.

### Your GTM decision worksheet

Replace the task instructions with your own entries. The first row contains an explicitly fictional example. Add an internal link for each item of evidence and mark unresolved assumptions before the workshop.

[Open the editable worksheet in Excel / Google Sheets](#)

| Work item              | Entry or task                                                               | Owner      | Acceptance criterion                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision question      | Fictional NordPilot: test a standardized entry for production sites         | Leadership | Review after test; do not claim full market validation |
| Segment and exclusions | Enter operating profile, required data and deliberately excluded businesses | Sales      | Document access separately from product fit            |
| Last buying trigger    | Add a dated incident and anonymized source evidence                         | Research   | Separate observation from interpretation               |
| Buying group           | Name users, decision-makers and blockers with their evidence needs          | Sales      | Confirm at least one internal accountable owner        |
| Positioning            | Write audience, alternative, difference and boundary as a complete sentence | Marketing  | Run a comprehension test using buyer restatement       |

| Work item          | Entry or task                                                         | Owner      | Acceptance criterion                            |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Entry offer        | Specify scope, data prerequisites and acceptance in writing           | Product    | Explicitly exclude unavailable capabilities     |
| Economics          | Calculate revenue, margin, implementation and acquisition separately  | Finance    | Recalculate a transparent conservative scenario |
| Channel experiment | Record learning question, owner, capacity limit and spending boundary | Marketing  | Make the next step independently verifiable     |
| Decision gate      | Record continue, narrow or stop alongside contrary evidence           | Leadership | Attach an owner and date to the decision        |

## Application questions

### How much research is needed before the first market test?

Enough to describe the segment, buying trigger and major implementation risks concretely. There is no universal interview count here. Check whether independent conversations describe the same situation and whether counterexamples were retained. If the purchasing path remains unclear, additional reach is not yet the most useful investment.

### Should I build marketing or sales first?

Assign work to the unresolved uncertainty. When customer language and the problem are unclear, marketing and sales need shared buyer conversations. When enough suitable enquiries already arrive but no firm next steps follow, prioritize the sales process. An organization chart does not resolve the operational constraint.

### Does an initial pilot prove product-market fit?

No. A pilot may show that one customer will invest time or money in a bounded trial. Repeatable value, economic implementation and continued use remain separate questions. Document bespoke changes so an individual project is not silently interpreted as a scalable model.

### What if every test produces custom requests?

Group requests by the underlying problem. A recurring narrow pattern may support choosing a smaller target segment. If requirements remain entirely different, revisit the segment and product boundaries. Cost bespoke development separately before treating those contracts as evidence of repeatable customer acquisition.