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Founders' Guide

Defining your Go-to-Market strategy

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Introduction

There's a world of difference between starting a business and enabling it to scale.

While the former demands an eye for a problem and building a solution, scaling is more about process, consistency, and rigour, making it easier to win new customers, grow existing ones, and build your team.

This is particularly the case around Go-to-Market (GTM) – the stages through which software companies get products into customers' hands.

It begins with a clear understanding of the target customer, or ICP, and a well-articulated value proposition. It ends with marketing and sales which convince those target customers to buy - and keep them coming back for more.

In many niche software businesses, people may have a gut feel for what their ICP or value proposition is. But it is rarely written down consistently or understood across the organisation.

One word of warning. Many people confuse GTM with sales, thinking they can improve performance overnight by appointing a "heavy hitter". This rarely works in practice: sales works best when the elements of a GTM strategy are in place.

This chapter discusses the first pieces of the GTM puzzle: ICP and value proposition. Separate chapters examine sales, marketing, product and pricing strategies.
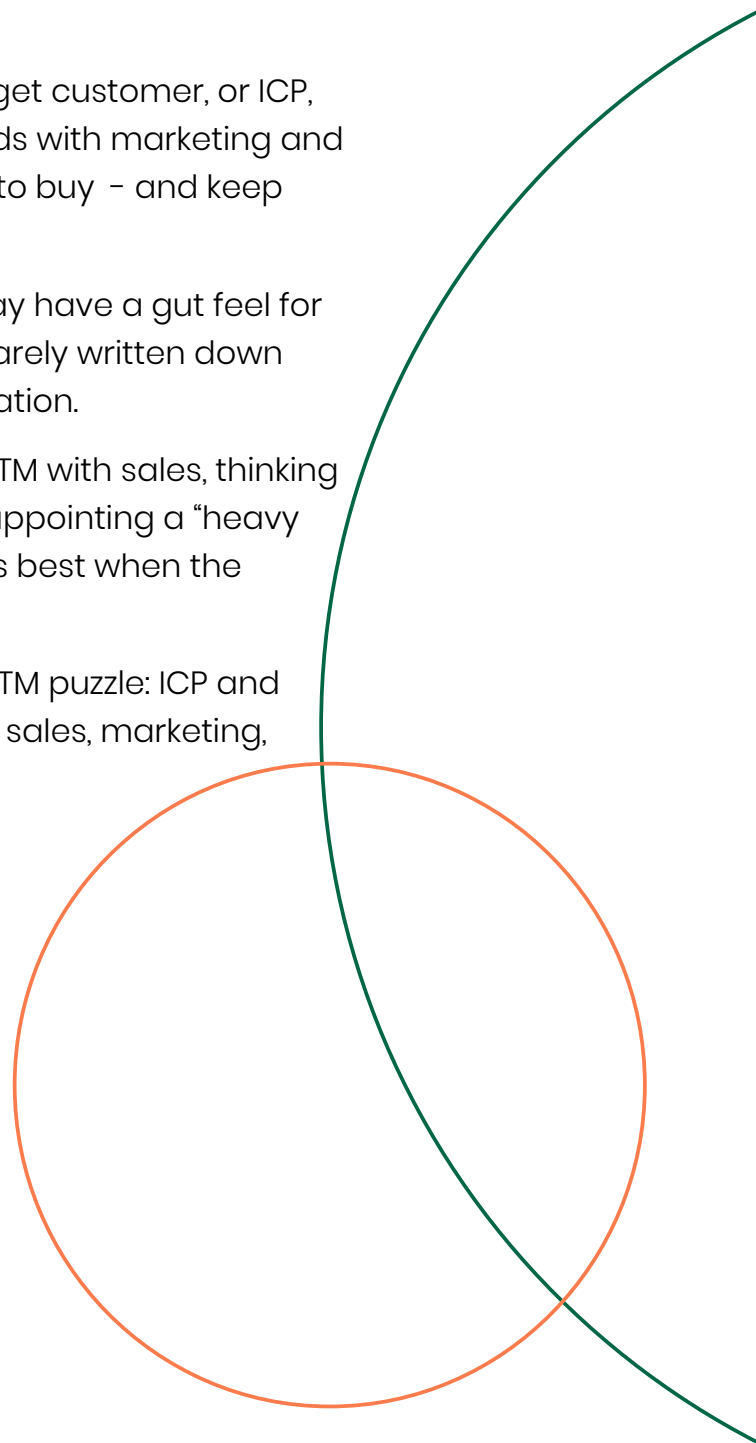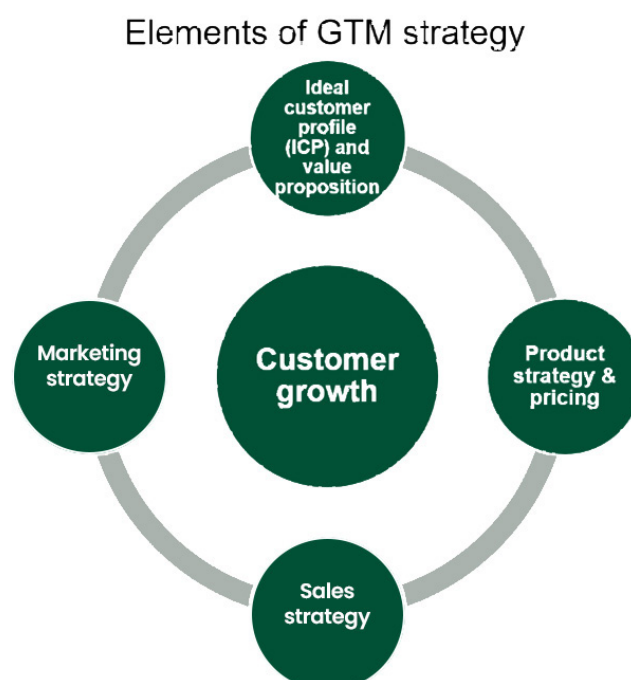
Why you need a structured GTM approach:

"Even the best software businesses struggle without a clear GTM strategy. The companies that scale successfully are those that deeply understand their ideal customers and align their messaging, marketing, and sales efforts accordingly. This is even more critical for niche software businesses, where clarity of value and precision in execution determine success."

- Sion Lewis, Advisory Board Member, Upliift

What is GTM strategy?

GTM is a comprehensive plan that outlines how a company will launch, sell, and scale its product in the market. It includes who you are targeting (ideal customer profile, or ICP), what you are offering (product strategy), how you will reach them (marketing), and how you will convert them into customers (sales).

Elements of GTM strategy

Customer growth

- Ideal customer profile (ICP) and value proposition
- Product strategy & pricing
- Sales strategy
- Marketing strategy

Why Go-to-Market matters: turning customer pain into growth

For niche software businesses, your GTM strategy isn't just another marketing buzzword—it's how you clearly demonstrate value in a crowded, competitive market. Customers often have tight budgets and specific needs; they're typically cautious about investing in new solutions unless they see clear, measurable business value.

Breaking through to busy customers requires laser-sharp clarity about what you do, consistency in how you communicate, and exceptional execution. Attention spans are short, so your messaging must quickly and clearly convey why your product uniquely solves their specific problems.

Everything begins with deeply understanding—and genuinely caring about—your customers' challenges. Successful software companies, whether large brands or specialised niche providers, always put customer pain points at the heart of their strategy. Demonstrating a clear understanding of who your customers are and their challenges, then offering credible, targeted solutions earns trust and opens the door to meaningful conversations.

ICP lays the foundation for an authentic, persuasive, and customer-centric value proposition. A well-defined value proposition helps you quickly communicate your solution's distinct benefits, demonstrate how you solve customers' specific problems, and differentiate clearly from competitors. Without this, even the best products can struggle to gain traction.

You should define your **ideal customer profile (ICP)** first, and their pain points, then craft your **value proposition**.

Defining your ICP and value proposition

Step 1: Define your ideal customer profile

Step 2: Identify their primary pain points and desired outcomes

Step 3: Develop a value proposition directly addressing those needs

Step 1 here

What is an ICP

Your ICP – ideal customer profile – describes the buyers you're looking to reach. Many people confuse the idea of a total addressable market (TAM) with that of ICPs. In fact, they are quite different:

- **TAM** simply expresses in numbers the economic opportunity the business is targeting.

- **ICPs** describe in words the target buyer for your products, the challenges they face, and the solutions they're looking for.

The best ICPs recognise how their solution addresses key customer challenges. Consider these examples:

1. Salesforce: sales leaders in smaller companies

It initially targeted smaller businesses that needed a simple, fast way to manage sales pipelines, offering an alternative to complex and expensive solutions like Siebel (the market leader at the time).

2. Xero: small business owners and entrepreneurs

It positioned its accounting software as "magical" and "beautiful" for small business owners who saw financials as tedious. In the process it became synonymous with streamlined accounting and financial management.

ICPs evolve as the business grows: as you expand into new markets, and your solution set develops, you can solve problems for a wider range of customers.

For this reason, aim to review and update your ICPs at least twice a year.

Develop your own ICP

First, write down your answers to the questions below. Use as much space as you need to. The main thing is to capture all the detail. Don't worry about being succinct (yet)!

If you sell to a variety of markets or internationally, you are likely to need separate ICPs for each one.

Who is the target buyer?	What are they challenges they face?	What's the ideal solution for their needs?
Describe their role and the organisation they work for – don't just write a job title	Don't just dwell on technical points. Think about their frustrations with the job, the risks they may be taking, etc	Think more broadly than your software. Brainstorm how their lives could be improved, then consider the role your software could play

Then take a fresh sheet of paper and begin refining it.

Remove any repetitions, or anything that doesn't feel right. Shape it in collaboration with your team. This builds a sense of shared ownership and agreement.

You want to get to three short bullet points of no more than 15 words each in length for each customer profile.

The power of words: value proposition

Most software businesses implicitly know what they do, who their customers are and why it matters to them. But scratch at the surface and inconsistencies soon emerge. Make sure you collaborate with your leadership team – or most-trusted employees to develop it. Their buy-in will be important for ensuring it is used consistently.

Speaking to your customers is also a must. This ensures your value proposition is rooted in your customers' challenges, while encouraging a sense of collective ownership among your team

A good value proposition:

- *passes the **"elevator test"** – you can explain it to a total stranger, so that they understand it, in two minutes or less*

- *conveys what makes your business **unique***

- *is **rooted** in your customers and the challenges they face – both in their business (such as costs and inefficiencies) and on an emotional level (e.g. frustration with the status quo)*

- *is strong and inspiring enough for everyone in your company to get behind. It becomes **the reason** your employees come into work*

- *stands the test of time. The best ones stay **true** for years.*

Developing your value proposition

If you're starting from scratch with your value proposition, here are five key questions to ask yourselves to help you guide your thinking:

Who is our Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)?
Clearly define who your product serves best.

What alternatives are currently available to our ICP?
Understand the existing solutions or approaches your potential customers might consider.

What does our company do and why does that matter?
List the issues your customers struggle with regularly.

How exactly does our solution address these pain points?
Explain clearly how your product or service solves these challenges.

How does our product create more value for our ICP customers than the alternatives?
Highlight the unique benefits or differentiators your product offers.

Invite your product, marketing, and sales leads to do the same. Review the different versions together and consolidate them to a single set of answers.

Then refine that into one or two sentences.

GTM drives long-term growth

"Scaling a software business isn't just about selling, it's about building a market. Companies with the most enduring success are those that treat GTM as a long-term investment, not a quick-fix sales tactic. For niche software founders, the key is to define your ideal customers early, articulate a compelling value proposition, and execute with discipline. Everything else follows from that foundation."

- Fred Hessabi, Advisory Board Member, Upliift

Reach more customers and grow faster

As a founder, it's challenging to find time away from daily operational demands to focus effectively on your GTM strategy. Immediate issues frequently take priority, making strategic planning difficult.

This is where external expertise can help. At Upliift, advising niche software businesses on their GTM strategy is often our first priority after acquisition. Because we've successfully scaled software companies before, we understand exactly what needs to be done, how to do it effectively, and how to implement strategies that drive rapid, sustainable growth.

Ready to elevate your GTM strategy and accelerate your growth? Let's discuss how Upliift's targeted approach can help your niche software business reach its full potential. **Get in touch today**.

About Upliift

Upliift is Europe's leading permanent equity investor focusing on niche European software businesses. We're software industry experts who work with founders to create better deals for better companies. We make long-term investments that unlock growth potential and enable founders to fully or partially exit, while preserving their business' brand and culture.

For more information, visit www.upliift.com