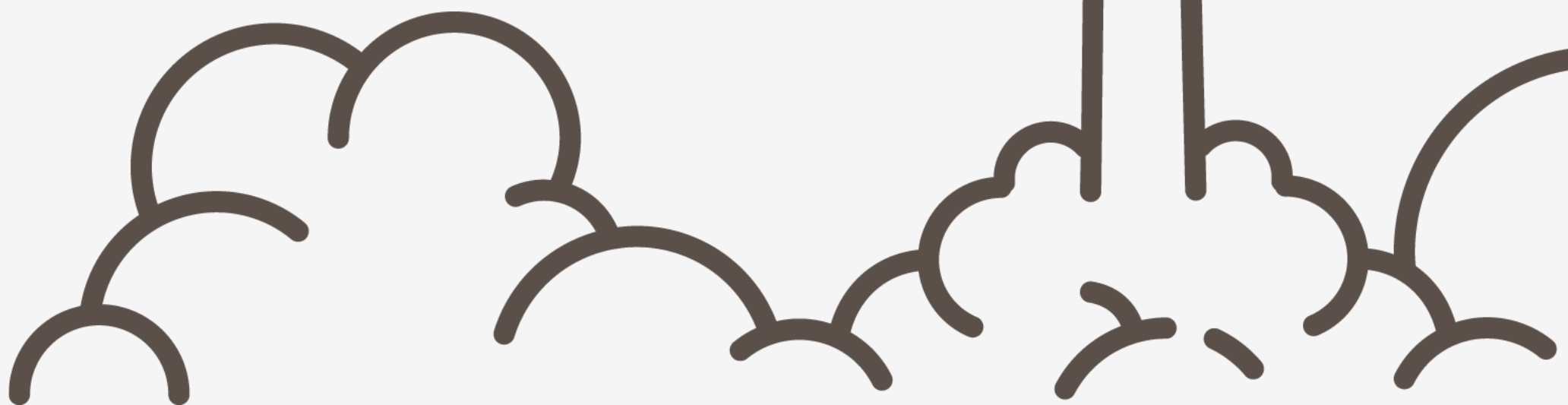
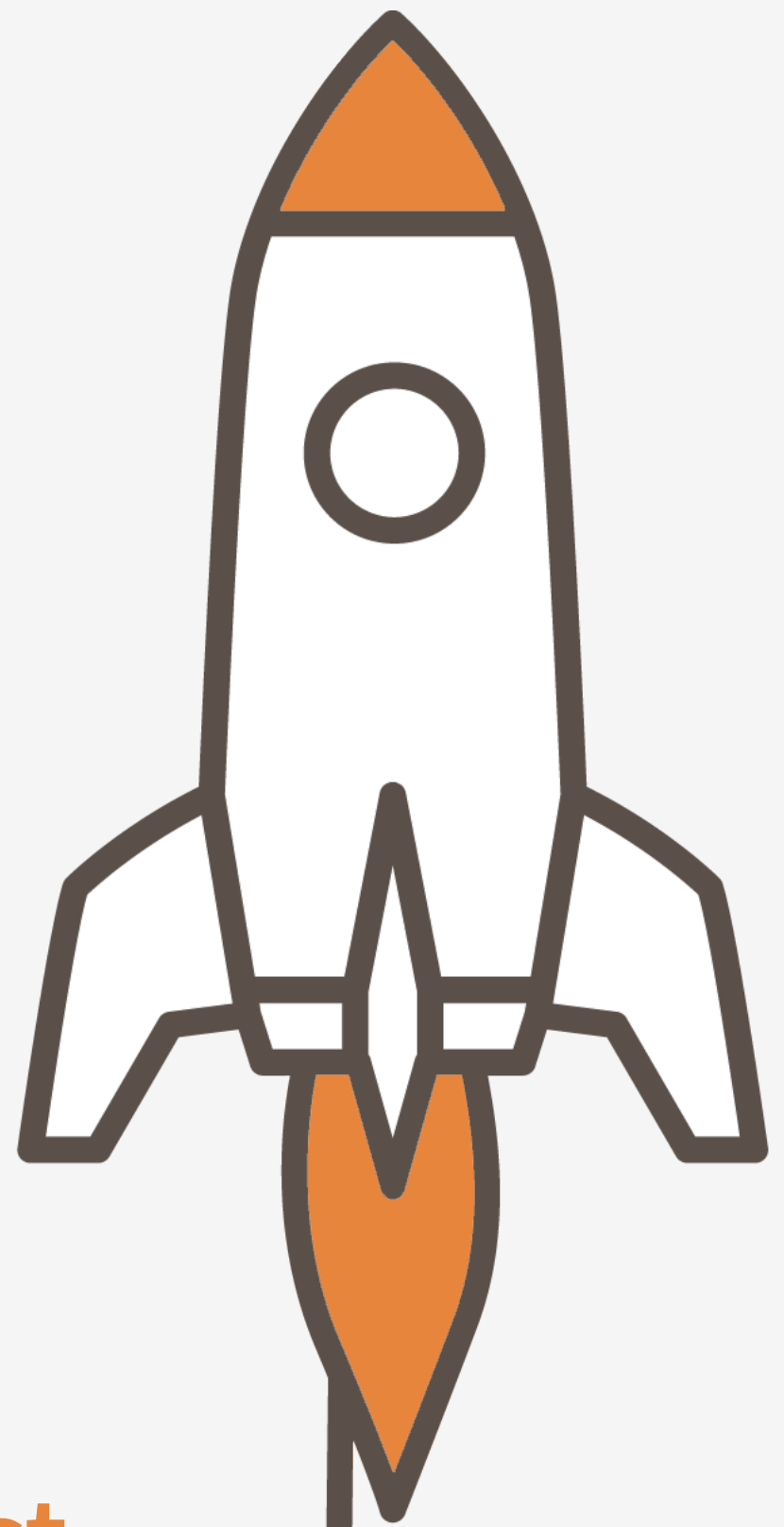




STARTUPS
FOR THE REST OF US

Eight Things You Must Know When Starting Your First SaaS

by Rob Walling



Introduction

This guide isn't going to cover specific tech stacks or definite growth hacks.

Instead, I want to talk about the fundamentals that every startup founder should know when starting their first SaaS.

In my 20 years of starting, growing, and acquiring literally dozens of websites and software companies, I've made a lot of mistakes. I've also learned what works and what doesn't from thousands of founders during this time.

If you're working on your first SaaS or about to start, this guide is for you.

I wish I'd heard this advice when I first started out.

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#1 Study a little, ship a lot

When you start your journey, your skills are probably going to be narrow and specific to your previous work.

You'll likely have little experience when it comes to building products.

For example, if you're a developer, you might know how to write code to build a user interface, but how do you make sure it's intuitive for people to use? Also, do you know how to write compelling copy, position a product, create successful marketing integrations, do sales calls, and hire an email support rep?

Obviously, you can't learn everything all at once. Instead, start by studying a little. Read books on startups, listen to podcasts, watch startup talks on YouTube like our MicroConf talks. However, don't spend all your time in the study phase.

It's easy to get overwhelmed and stall. Hearing 20 stories about how people validate a product is not helpful.

Instead, move quickly into shipping. Try to validate your own product ideas. Write code and put it out there. Create more opportunities for yourself by building in public and sharing what you are learning. Once you start shipping and shipping a lot, you'll realize the skills you need and can start adding new tools to your tool belt, one at a time.

It took me four to five months to get good at Facebook ads. It took me several months to learn SEO back in the day. It took me about three years to build enough of a tool belt that I could consistently and repeatedly grow software products through different channels.

In order to build out your tool belt, give yourself time. Study a little, ship a lot and then be patient and trust the process.

#2 Take the stairs

For my first SaaS, I didn't build an email service provider and compete with MailChimp, AWeber and Infusionsoft.

Instead, I built small revenue generating software products while slowly building my tool belt.

In my post [The Stairstep Method to Bootstrapping](#), I talk about the importance of starting small.



The Stairstep Approach ties right in with that concept of building the tool belt.

With stair stepping, you pick a small product, whether it's a one-time sale product or a small SaaS utility. It generates a little bit of money each month and allows you to learn and to build that tool belt out in a situation where the stakes aren't so high. You get small wins along the way and you start creating your own luck. I encourage you to read [my full article on this approach](#).

As a bonus: *If you have a spouse or significant other who relies on you, by starting small you can build the confidence in them that you're capable of replacing your full-time income with a business you build.*

#3 Find a mentor, maybe two

I use the word “mentor” here unconventionally because you may never directly connect with those you consider your mentors.

Perhaps they are creating content that resonates with your goals or they’ve built products that you admire. Here are a few questions to consider when choosing your mentors:

- ✓ **Have they done what I want to do before?** Then did they do it again? There are people who have had one-time successes, and it could have been luck. It’s hard to tell until someone has repeated their successes.
- ✓ **Does that person have a reasonable personal life?** Do they treat people well? Do they have a happy family? If someone has a wrecked personal life, then they may have had to do some things you are unwilling to do to get successful.
- ✓ **Do you want to be like them,** and are you willing to do what they had to do to be successful?

Who you choose as a mentor is a deeply personal choice. Everyone has their own preferences and values. Choose based on the kind of person that resonates the most with you and has built the kinds of things that you want to build.

#4 Hope for luck, but don’t count on it

If you put in the hard work and you develop the skills over time, you get lucky.

As I’ve built my business, I’ve had some incredibly lucky moments. For example, an influencer with 500k followers who shared my app which led to a cascade of good fortune, including an article, a partnership deal, and more.

It all felt like dumb luck.

But it wasn't.

It was a result of all those years I spent putting in time building my tool belt and skills. Those flash points of lucky moments would have never happened had I not put the work in.

There's an old quote I love that speaks directly to this:

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.

— Thomas Jefferson

#5 Join a community (or build one)

A big mistake I made when starting out was that I thought I could do everything on my own.

You want to surround yourself with people who can give you feedback and show you the ropes of the industry. There are a few really great online communities that you can join or you can join an in-person community.

Explore your options and find what works best for you but most importantly know that you shouldn't go at this alone.

Here's a list of just a few of the great communities you can join today, depending on your particular interest:

- ✓ MicroConf Connect (microconf.com/connect)
- ✓ Indie Hackers (indiehackers.com)
- ✓ Dynamite Circle (tropicalmba.com)
- ✓ Rhodium (rhodiumweekend.com)
- ✓ E-commerce Fuel (ecommercefuel.com)

#6 Join a mastermind

A mastermind group lets you have direct 1:1 conversations with folks that are either in your same shoes or are a little further on the path.

I recommend joining or forming a mastermind group of about 2-4 people who meet via Zoom or Skype once or twice a month to keep each other accountable and give each other advice.

You can find people to connect with for your mastermind group within online communities at conferences like MicroConf or in-person events/meetups. We also provide a **mastermind matchmaking service** to help you connect.

If you can't find an existing mastermind group to join, we've also written a comprehensive guide on **forming your own mastermind group**.

#7 Lean towards B2B

B2C companies are like candy. They sound so appealing and fun.

They're also typically the first thing we all come up with because it's what we're exposed to on a daily basis.

However, consumers tend to be very price-sensitive and have a much higher churn. You'll also need to have a lot of people coming through the door -- a huge sales funnel and it's really hard to build a reliable and repeatable sales process.

I'm not saying you shouldn't build a B2C business. However, I think you'll likely have a much higher chance of succeeding by focusing on B2B from the beginning.

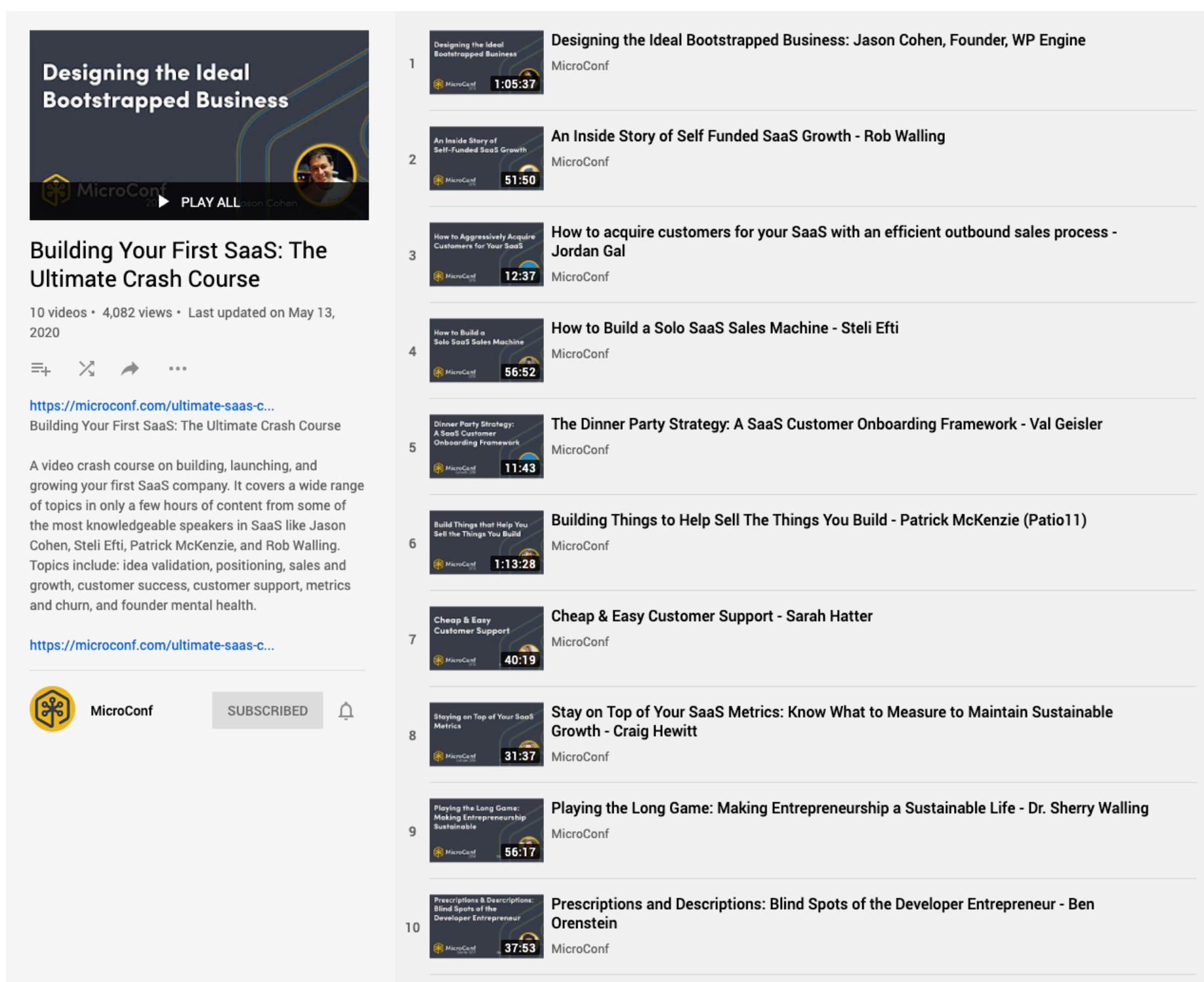
#8 Watch these 10 talks

Remember the first tip? Study a little, ship a lot?

My last tip is to spend a little bit of time (even less time if you watch at 2x using a browser extension) learning from the best of the best from our MicroConf talks.

I hand-picked these talks out of the 190 talks on our new YouTube channel and I'm really proud of the playlist and the content in it. I think it represents some of the best talks out there on building ambitious SaaS products in a balanced and sane way.

[Watch] Building Your First SaaS: The Ultimate Crash Course



Designing the Ideal Bootstrapped Business

10 videos • 4,082 views • Last updated on May 13, 2020

<https://microconf.com/ultimate-saas-c...>

Building Your First SaaS: The Ultimate Crash Course

A video crash course on building, launching, and growing your first SaaS company. It covers a wide range of topics in only a few hours of content from some of the most knowledgeable speakers in SaaS like Jason Cohen, Steli Efti, Patrick McKenzie, and Rob Walling. Topics include: idea validation, positioning, sales and growth, customer success, customer support, metrics and churn, and founder mental health.

<https://microconf.com/ultimate-saas-c...>

MicroConf SUBSCRIBED

- 1 **Designing the Ideal Bootstrapped Business: Jason Cohen, Founder, WP Engine**
MicroConf 1:05:37
- 2 **An Inside Story of Self-Funded SaaS Growth - Rob Walling**
MicroConf 51:50
- 3 **How to aggressively Acquire Customers for Your SaaS - Jordan Gal**
MicroConf 12:37
- 4 **How to Build a Solo SaaS Sales Machine - Steli Efti**
MicroConf 56:52
- 5 **Dinner Party Strategy: A SaaS Customer Onboarding Framework - Val Geisler**
MicroConf 11:43
- 6 **Building Things to Help Sell The Things You Build - Patrick McKenzie (Patio11)**
MicroConf 1:13:28
- 7 **Cheap & Easy Customer Support - Sarah Hatter**
MicroConf 40:19
- 8 **Staying on Top of Your SaaS Metrics: Know What to Measure to Maintain Sustainable Growth - Craig Hewitt**
MicroConf 31:37
- 9 **Playing the Long Game: Making Entrepreneurship Sustainable - Dr. Sherry Walling**
MicroConf 56:17
- 10 **Prescriptions & Descriptions: Blind Spots of the Developer Entrepreneur - Ben Orenstein**
MicroConf 37:53

Wrapping up

I hope you found a lot of value in these eight things you must know when starting your first SaaS.

I tried to make this guide pretty digestible and actionable. It's based on my own learnings from my career, as well as founder conversations and years of advising.

I'd love to hear what you learned from this guide and how you are implementing these tips. Now, start building!

