

From product designer to solopreneur

Sankalp Sinha, builder of NextDoor.Company, a map of startups hiring near you

Going solo

Before you quit

Money is the only prerequisite
Save 6 to 12 months of expenses, or more

Do it for fun

While having fun, you figure the rest out
Come to communities like this one
Call your friends: his best hack
Take help from people whenever you need it

Dealing with loneliness

Travel and meet your friends
Make good friends
Work from cafes where solo builders work

Getting hired

Publish case studies of companies' GTM
Someone will ask why you don't work for them
Act as the person you want to become
Want to be a PM? Do PM case studies, projects
Build something a company wants
Send it to the founder or management

Extra hands

Hire an intern for specific work
AI can now handle a lot of that

Why launch

Good domain rating (DR)
Creates backlinks
Do it at zero users, to get to 100

Watch out

Beware scams that offer votes for money

Pen and paper shows you the next action item
Overthinking? Go to a cafe, no phone or laptop
Write your thoughts in a diary
Regularly and consistently, for six months
Make time for a hobby, friends, movies
Entrepreneurship is hard; you need these things

Clearing your head

Going solo or a startup is a personal choice
VC money comes with liabilities
Feels undoable? Sleep on it, many times

Solo or startup?

Launch and grow

Give a taste

Get people to engage with your reels
Free resources with real value on Instagram
Want more? They sign up and pay
NextDoor.Company shows five companies, then asks to pay

More content, more audience

Put yourself on the internet
Say what you actually think
People find products through you
Be authentic and post everything

Find your hero channel

Post, and watch what goes viral
Once you know, double down on it

Repeat what works, always

Find a format that works
Keep honing it

Why talk

You talk to them to learn
He is in touch with 1,600+ of his users
Building is easy now; asking questions is harder

Share and show care

Share what you learn on social media
Ask for testimonials
Show you are a real person, not AI
Genuinely care

First 100 customers

Talk to every user, yourself
The more users you talk to, the clearer the direction
Show traction, and show it often

One question he recommends

"What is the last product you used and paid for?"

A designer's advantage

Tools he named

shaden for UI components
Buffer, SuperX, Typefully to schedule posts

Read and follow

Hooked by Nir Eyal
Jason Fried and Basecamp, also for product design
Shreyas Doshi
The growth.design website
Classic experts over this month's hype
Study how copywriting works

User focus is a muscle

Engineers tend not to be user focused
Designers think about the whole experience
Build that muscle first

Go talk to people

Ask about their problems
Try to build something that solves them

His loop

- 1 Design
- 2 Show it to friends
- 3 Gather feedback
- 4 Replan, and design again

Build lots of projects

- Don't expect them to work
- Each one trains you
- His earlier apps trained his user focus

Architecture worries you?

- 1 Check it with developer friends
- 2 Ask AI to draw a diagram explaining it

GTM as a designer

What marketing is

Post your viral moments
Share every press feature
Cross-post your wins
Go meta, share wins

No following yet?

- You still have to find your channels
- Reddit and Instagram trial reels

Rule 2: Your ICP's language

Nail down exactly who you build for
Find out where they hang out
Say out loud what they keep hush-hush
Put your gut out and be yourself
Schedule posts for when your ICP is awake

Posting habits

A few hours a day, spread through the day
Keep posting, but don't obsess
Building? Every two hours, stop to think and post
Don't over-tune: post what comes to mind
You need a personality to grow online
Do it for fun, without expectations

Rule 3: Show traction

Show people interacting with the app
Mention improvements to the app and its data
Post every sale you make

also in the article's key takeaways

1 steps, in his order

Finding ideas

The apps he built

- 1 Notice a problem
- 2 Explore it
- 3 Build it for yourself first
- 4 Still using it after a month? Build for others

His process

Look at what you and others already do
His three daily goals became a to-do app
Wanting jobs nearby became NextDoor.Company
Asking house help to shop became Swiggy, Zomato
Build it, publish or waitlist, see how it performs

Productize existing behavior

Don't copy what works for someone else
Copy for traction and you won't care
Your own pain keeps you solving it
Understand it well enough to infer user needs
No pain or problem? Don't build
Nothing to build? Take a job, learn on it

Build for your own pain

One thing at a time

Build first, then work on go-to-market
GTM test: one user by shitposting daily?

Product people want

Why people pay

People pay for software to get convenience

Read their behavior

Users won't tell you what's wrong
Infer it from their behavior
You can't force use; it happens on its own

Feedback test

Does the app do what it says it does?
Know which features to build and which to skip
Learn UX from your users
Do better what competitors are not doing
Your own insight

How it should feel

The app should feel right
Products should feel fun
UX matters more than the engineering

Page and name

Landing page ticks off every user pain
Simple names that say what it does

Care and story

Show care for your users
Set up a narrative for your product
Be original; be yourself online and in product

Why care wins

Someone will always copy what you build
Users pick you when they see care and trust

Charge from day one

Pre-orders over waitlists

His longest waitlist now: 48 hours
Waitlists are fine to test the waters
Waitlists can get abused by idea copiers
He builds, releases, puts payment in front

How NextDoor.Company charges

Bootstrapped and profitable
Pay once for a fixed period, not monthly SaaS
One month, three months or a year

One product's path

Hackathon 1
MVP 2
Waitlist 3
First payment three days later 4