BUILDING YOUR FIRST VERSION (TECH)

What an MVP really is, how to build one with little money, and how to learn from your first users.

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AT A GLANCE

- An **MVP** (minimum viable product) is the simplest version of your product that solves the main problem for real users.
- It's meant to **learn**, not to impress. It can be manual, plain and missing features.
- Many MVPs today can be built with **no-code tools or AI building tools**, before you hire developers.

Why it matters

Founders often spend a year and their savings building a full app, then learn users wanted something different. An MVP gets something real into users' hands in weeks, so you learn what matters before you spend big. Investors also want to see real users, not just plans.

Types of MVPs

Type	What it looks like	Example
Manual ("concierge")	You do the work by hand behind a simple front end	Matching tutors to students by text message and spreadsheet
No-code	Built with website, form, database and automation tools	A booking site built with a no-code builder and a payment link
Clickable prototype	Screens people can tap through, without real code	A design prototype to test with 10 users
Single-feature app	One core feature, nothing else	An app that only sends appointment reminders

Step by step

1. **Name the one problem** your product must solve. See **I-03 Talking to Customers: Learning What They Really Need**.
2. **List every feature you imagine**, then cross out everything that isn't required to solve that one problem.

3. **Choose the cheapest way to build** what's left: manual, no-code or a simple custom build.
4. **Set a time limit**, usually 4 to 8 weeks.
5. **Get it to 10 to 20 real users.** Watch them use it.
6. **Measure** whether they use it again, pay for it and tell others.
7. **Improve or change direction** based on what you learn.

> EXAMPLE
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> **Sofia** wanted to build a full scheduling platform for clinics. Instead, she set up an online booking form, a shared calendar and automatic text reminders using no-code tools, in three weeks. Five clinics used it. She learned they cared most about cutting no-shows, not fancy calendars, and built that first when she hired a developer.

Who builds it?

- **You,** with no-code or AI tools. Cheapest and fastest for simple products.
- **A technical co-founder,** who shares ownership. See **B-10 Co-Founder Agreements: Splitting Ownership Fairly**.
- **A freelancer or agency.** Get a written scope, a fixed price or capped hours, and make sure **the business owns the code**. See **B-09 Contracts Every New Business Needs**.

> WATCH OUT
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> Whoever builds it, the code, designs and accounts should be **owned by your company**, in writing. Investors check this.

What to measure

- **Activation:** do new users complete the main action?
- **Retention:** do they come back next week and next month?
- **Payment:** will they pay, and how much?
- **Referrals:** do they tell others?

Common mistakes

- **Building too much.** If you're not a little embarrassed by your first version, you probably waited too long.
- **Building without talking to users.**
- **Paying for a custom app before testing manually.**
- **Not owning your code** when someone else builds it.

Your checklist

☐ Write the one problem your MVP solves

☐ Cut your feature list to the minimum

- ☐ Choose manual, no-code or custom
- ☐ Set a 4 to 8 week build limit
- ☐ Recruit 10 to 20 first users
- ☐ Track activation, retention, payment and referrals

Key words, explained

Word	What it means
MVP	Minimum viable product: the simplest version that works.
No-code	Tools for building apps and sites without writing code.
Prototype	A model of a product used for testing.
Retention	Whether users keep coming back.

Where to go next

- **L-09 Launching an App or Online Product (Tech)**
- **P-11 Software and Apps**
- **B-08 Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents in Plain Language**

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