A playbook by Saurav Kumar Nanda

Go-to-Market for First-Time Founders

Selling your way to product-market fit

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Preface

The most common mistake I see first-time founders make is treating go-to-market as something that happens after the product is "ready." Product and GTM are the same project. A product with no GTM dies on the shelf. A GTM with no product is a Powerpoint. The work is to braid them together from day one.

This playbook is written for founders who have never sold B2B before. It is not a Gartner report. It is the operating manual I wish I had when I started selling Boomerangme's loyalty product to 20-person teams, or when I first had to convince an Odisha textile factory to trust my bus company. The moves work. I have used all of them in the last 36 months.

CHAPTER 01

Define Your ICP

If you cannot describe your ideal customer in one sentence, you do not have one.

Ideal Customer Profile — ICP — is the most abused term in B2B. Most founders write a paragraph of vague demographics and call it done. A real ICP is a sharp, falsifiable, one-sentence description of the customer you win fastest, retain longest, and can reach cheapest.

The 10-dimension ICP worksheet I use:

Dimension	What to capture
Company size	Headcount band or revenue band
Stage	Pre-seed / seed / Series A / growth / enterprise
Industry	Vertical or horizontal specificity
Team structure	Who owns the pain today
Tech stack	What they already use and pay for
Geography	Timezone, language, regulatory
Buying trigger	What event forces them to look
Budget signal	Who signs, and at what size
Objection profile	Predictable pushback
Wedge fit	Why your v1 is their v1

Testing your ICP in seven days

Write your one-sentence ICP. Then reach out to ten people who fit it exactly. If seven reply, your ICP is sharp. If two reply, you are vague or wrong. Iterate the ICP sentence, not the message, until you get the reply rate above 50%.

> The tightest ICP I ever wrote for Boomerangme: "A 10-40 seat hair salon owner in Texas or Florida who runs their front desk on Square and has never run a loyalty program before." Reply rate: 62%.

CHAPTER 02

Your Wedge

One knife. One customer. One problem.

A wedge is the smallest possible product you can ship that solves a real pain for a real customer, fast enough that they say yes. Wedges are unglamorous. They look nothing like the vision deck. That is the point.

Three traits of a good wedge:

1. Solves a problem that costs real money or real time right now.
2. Is cheap enough to try without a committee.
3. Delivers value in under 10 minutes of first use.

My wedge at Nandighosh was not "modernize intercity bus travel in Odisha." It was: one route, Balasore to Cuttack, one departure at 6:30 AM, on WhatsApp booking, paid via UPI. That was the whole product for month one. Eight buses now run off the same template.

The wedge test

Can you describe the wedge in the form: "I help [specific person] do [specific thing] in [time window]" — no marketing adjectives? If not, keep cutting until you can.

CHAPTER 03

Pricing with Three Anchors

Price is a story. Tell it with three numbers.

Setting a price when you have no data is paralyzing. The three-anchor method gives you a defensible starting point in an afternoon.

Anchor 1 — Cost

Calculate fully-loaded cost to serve one customer per month: hosting + support time + integrations + CAC amortized. Your floor is 3× this. Below it you are subsidizing, which is fine temporarily but not a price point.

Anchor 2 — Competition

List the three nearest substitutes, not the three closest competitors. Substitutes are what the customer does today. Spreadsheets. Interns. Agencies. Inaction. Price yours between the cheap substitute and the bloated one.

Anchor 3 — Willingness to pay

From your 30 discovery calls you should have asked: "How much does this problem cost you per month?" The median answer, divided by 10, is a starting number. If the pain is worth $10k/month in lost productivity, $1k/month is cheap insurance.

> The first price I quoted for Boomerangme enterprise was $299/month. The answer most common? "That's it?" I raised it to $599 and closed the next eight deals. If nobody blinks, you are too cheap.

CHAPTER 04

The First 50 Conversations

The fastest way to learn GTM is to do GTM.

A founder's first 50 sales conversations are the most important marketing investment they will make. Not because they will close 50 deals. They will not — the first 50 are to calibrate message, objections, and urgency. Closed deals are the bonus.

How to book them

LinkedIn Sales Navigator + a ten-sentence outbound template + 30 sends per day = roughly 5-8 meetings per week. Here is the template:

> *"[Name], saw you [specific thing they did publicly — a post, a hire, a launch]. Reason I'm reaching out: we built [wedge] for companies in your stage. Two customers in [specific segment] recently reported [specific outcome with a number]. If that's interesting, 15 minutes this week?"*

What to say

The structure of my first-call script, honed across 200+ cold meetings:

1. 0-2 min: thank them for the time, context-set.
2. 2-10 min: discovery — same questions from the customer interview chapter.
3. 10-15 min: 90-second demo. Not 15-minute. 90-second.
4. 15-20 min: objections and pricing if they bring it up.
5. 20-25 min: clear next step with a date.

What to listen for

- Specific numbers (users, hours, dollars) in their answers
- Active voice: "I did X yesterday" beats "we sometimes do X"
- Unprompted mention of a competitor or workaround
- A question about pricing (buying signal)
- A request to send it to a colleague (amplification signal)

CHAPTER 05

Pipeline as a System

Pipeline is not a list of deals. It is a physics experiment.

A pipeline that you cannot predict is a pipeline that is lying to you. The goal is not to have a big pipeline. It is to have a predictive one. That means a well-defined stage model, honest stage definitions, and relentless velocity tracking.

The 5-stage model

Stage	Entry criteria	Exit criteria
Prospected	Fits ICP, not contacted	First reply
Engaged	First reply received	Discovery call booked
Qualified	Discovery call done, pain + budget + champion confirmed	Proposal sent
Proposed	Proposal and pricing sent	Verbal yes / no
Closed	Signed or lost	Signed MSA

Velocity and win-rate

Track two numbers per week:

- Pipeline velocity: (# deals × avg deal size × win rate) ÷ avg sales cycle. Moves only when you change one of those four levers.
- Win rate by stage: out of everyone who entered Qualified, what % closed? If below 30%, your Qualified criteria are too loose.

Win/loss reviews

Every deal closes won or lost. Every single one should be reviewed in 5 minutes:

1. Why did they buy / not buy? (in their words, not yours)
2. What objection was strongest?
3. What would have shortened the cycle by 30%?
4. One change to the playbook: yes / no?

CHAPTER 06

Content and the Long Game

Outbound compounds linearly. Content compounds exponentially. Do both.

Cold outreach gives you 5-8 meetings a week, reliably, forever, as long as you keep sending. Content — written well — gives you meetings that never stop coming, long after you write it. The founders I know who have built the most durable demand have done one of three content moves, consistently, for 18+ months.

Move 1 — Public playbooks

A founder writes down how they solved a specific problem — pricing, hiring, onboarding — in 1500 words with screenshots. It ranks on Google. Founders in the same seat find it. Some of them become customers. My own writing on product discovery has brought me four paying consulting engagements in the last year; I wrote it once.

Move 2 — Narrow newsletters

Weekly or bi-weekly email to a focused audience — not a general audience. 1000 true fans beats 50,000 drive-bys. Pick the smallest interesting segment you can credibly write for. Write for them every week for a year before you look at the numbers.

Move 3 — Public case studies

Every customer outcome becomes a 600-word post with their permission. Link heavily. Tag the customer. Send it to their network. One of my Boomerangme customers tripled their referral rate in 8 weeks; the case study I wrote about them drove 18 net new meetings.

> Content that works is content written for one person you can name. "Founders" is not a person. "A 3-year-out YC founder running a 15-person team" is.

A simple content cadence

- Monday: draft 400 words from the prior week's learning
- Tuesday: sharpen, add one visual
- Wednesday: publish, share in 3 communities by hand
- Thursday: respond to every comment personally
- Friday: note what worked. Next Monday, do it again.

Chapter 6 checklist

- One recurring content format chosen and committed for 90 days
- Audience defined as a named, describable person
- Weekly cadence locked in a calendar, not a preference
- Every customer win converted to a case study by default
- At least 12 pieces live before evaluating ROI

CHAPTER 07

Scaling Beyond the Founder

Founder-led sales only gets you to about $1M ARR. After that, you must build a repeatable motion.

The dirty secret of early GTM is that it is mostly the founder's charisma, market knowledge, and willingness to outwork everyone. That is fine until about 50-100 customers. Then it breaks. The job stops being "sell" and becomes "build a system that sells."

Signs you are ready to hand off

- You can describe your pitch in 5 slides and it works for anyone who reads it
- Your win rate by stage has been stable for 8+ weeks
- Your ICP is clear enough that a new hire can replicate it
- Deal cycles are under 45 days and predictable
- You personally are the bottleneck — pipeline is bigger than your calendar

The first sales hire

Not a VP of Sales. A senior AE. Someone who has sold at your stage, not managed 10 people selling at a later stage. Senior AEs close; VPs coach. You do not need coaching yet — you need another closer. Compensation: modest base, aggressive variable. On-target earnings at median close rate.

What to hand off, in order

1. Outbound motion — booking first meetings
2. Discovery calls with warm inbound
3. Discovery calls with cold outbound
4. Demo + proposal

5. Negotiation (last — you will want to own this longest)

> Do not hand off the entire funnel at once. Hand off the top, watch it, measure it, then hand off the next stage. Each handoff is its own mini-playbook.

Chapter 7 checklist

- ICP, pitch, and discovery script written in a single doc
- First sales hire is a senior AE, not a VP
- Outbound motion handed off first, cleanly measured
- Win-rate tracked monthly by seller once team > 2
- Founder reserves time for 5+ customer calls per week indefinitely

CHAPTER 08

The Founder-Sales Operating System

Ten habits that turn a founder into a repeatable closer.

Before you hand off sales you must first become excellent at it yourself. Founders who skip this step hire sales people too early, cannot evaluate them, and end up writing their own job requirements from theory instead of experience. Here are the ten habits that took me from losing half my deals to closing 62% of qualified opportunities at Boomerangme.

The 10 habits

1. Calendar the week — block Monday mornings for outbound, afternoons for discovery, Tuesdays for demos, Thursdays for proposals
2. One-touch the inbox — every email gets a reply or a calendar move within 24 hours
3. Record every call — review one per week, self-critique
4. Keep a living FAQ — every objection you hear twice goes in the doc
5. Close every meeting — "what is the next step, and when" — before hanging up
6. Track the funnel weekly — pipeline, velocity, win rate
7. Write after every deal — 60 seconds on why it closed or did not
8. Ask for referrals on every close — a warm intro during the afterglow converts 3x
9. Call losses after 30 days — the loser teaches you more than the winner
10. Build one new playbook a quarter — new segment, new price point, new wedge

> Sales is a craft that responds to deliberate practice. A founder who treats it as one becomes uncopyable.

The self-review ritual

Every Friday, 30 minutes, answer three questions in writing:

1. What did I say in a sales conversation this week that I want to say again?
2. What did I say that I will never say again?
3. What do I still not know how to answer when asked?

Chapter 8 checklist

- 10-habit operating system adopted and logged weekly
- Friday self-review written every week for 12 weeks
- Living FAQ updated with every repeated objection
- One new playbook shipped per quarter

CHAPTER 09

Appendix — Templates

Steal freely. Every template in this book is battle-tested.

The highest-leverage thing I can leave you with is the exact language I use. Copy it, change the names, send it. Every line has been tested against real buyers, real investors, and real rejections.

Cold outbound (B2B SaaS)

> *"[Name], saw [specific signal — a hire, a post, a launch]. Reason I'm reaching out: we built [wedge] for teams in your stage. Two recent customers in [segment] reported [specific outcome with number]. Worth 15 minutes this week?"*

Discovery call booking

> *"Hi [name] — I'm Saurav, building a [one-line product description] for [segment]. I'm not selling anything. I'm doing 30 discovery calls to understand how people actually solve [problem] today. 25 minutes on Zoom next week? I promise no pitch."*

Proposal follow-up

> *"Following up on the proposal I sent [date]. I'd love your honest read — even if the answer is no, I'd learn a lot. Happy to adjust on [price / terms / scope] if something is off. 10 minutes this week to walk through?"*

Price objection response

> *“That's a fair pushback. Two options: we can start with the [smaller wedge] at [lower price] — it covers [specific outcome]. Or we can keep the full scope and structure as an annual with [discount]. Which is a better shape for you?”*

Lost-deal follow-up (30 days later)

> *“Hi [name] — not pitching. You passed on us in [month]. I'm running a 30-day loop back with every founder who did. One question: what would have made the call easier? 5 minutes this week?”*

Copy-paste works until you have 20+ live conversations. After that, your own voice will emerge. Let it.

CHAPTER 10

Closing

Sell the thing you have. Then build the thing they wanted.

Most founders wait too long to sell. They polish the product, rewrite the landing page, tweak the copy — anything but face a customer. Face the customer. The conversations will be awkward, the product will not be ready, the rejection will sting. That is the whole job.

— Saurav Kumar Nanda · Chicago & Balasore · 2026