How to Get Your First 100 Users: Real Stories from Indie Builders

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How to Get Your First 100 Users: Real Stories from Indie Builders The five channels that actually work for first-100 users: **niche communities** (Reddit, Slack, Discord), **Product Hunt**, **building in public** (Twitter/X), **direct outreach** (cold emails that aren't cold), and **SEO content** (the slow burn). Most founders try to do all five at once and fail. Pick one, go deep, get to 50 users, then add a second channel. Forget paid ads until you know your funnel converts. Nobody tells you how ugly the process of getting your first 100 users really is. You'll post in a subreddit and get two upvotes. You'll send 30 emails and hear back from three people. You'll launch on Product Hunt and watch the upvote counter move slower than you thought possible. One user will sign up, poke around for 11 seconds, and never come back. Every product you admire went through exactly this. It's normal. We asked builders on fromscratch how they actually got their first 100 users — not theory from VC blogs, not "10 growth hacks" listicles, but what real solo founders did, the numbers they hit, and what flopped. The patterns are surprisingly consistent. Why the first 100 is the hardest (and most important) Getting from 0 to 100 users is harder than getting from 100 to 1,000. Sounds wrong, but here's why it's true: at 0 users, you have no feedback loop. You don't know if people want what you're building, if your messaging resonates, if your onboarding works, or if your pricing is right. You're making decisions in the dark. Once you hit 100, everything changes. You have data. You know which features people actually use, which landing page copy converts, and where people drop off. You can ask users for referrals. Write case studies. Run experiments. Your first 100 aren't just users — they're your research team, your marketing department, and your product roadmap. Get the wrong 100 and you'll build the wrong product. Get the right 100 and they'll tell you exactly what to do next. Here's what we got wrong early on: we obsessed over the number. But 100 random people from a viral tweet are less valuable than 30 people who match your ideal customer profile and actively use the product. It matters *who* your first 100 are, not just that you hit the number. The 6 channels that actually work We looked at dozens of builder stories and launch retrospectives. These six channels came up again and again. Everything else — influencer marketing, press coverage, referral programs — either requires an existing user base or doesn't work reliably at the first-100 stage. 1. Reddit and niche communities This is the single most reliable channel for indie builders getting their first users. Not because Reddit is magic, but because it puts you in rooms where people are already talking about the problem you solve. **How it actually works:** Find 3-5 subreddits or communities where your target users hang out. Not r/startups or r/entrepreneur — those are full of other founders. Find the communities where your *customers* are. If you're building an invoicing tool for freelancers, that's r/freelance, r/graphic_design, and freelancer Slack groups. Spend a genuine week contributing. Answer questions, share useful resources, be helpful without mentioning your product. Then, when you do share it, lead with the problem: > "I was spending 3 hours a week chasing unpaid invoices. Built a tool to automate reminders. Here's what I learned and why I'm giving it away free for the first 50 users." Why does this framing work? Because it's a story, not an ad. Reddit downvotes ads. Reddit upvotes stories. **Realistic numbers:** A well-received post in a mid-sized subreddit (50k-200k members) drives 200-1,000 visitors. With a decent landing page, 5-10% sign up. One good post can deliver 10-100 users. **Timeline:** 1-3 weeks from first post to first users. 2. Product Hunt Product Hunt is a 24-hour sprint, not a one-day event. The real work happens in the 2-3 weeks before launch: building your profile, preparing assets, and lining up supporters. But a strong launch can deliver your first 100 users in a single day. We wrote an entire Product Hunt launch strategy guide with the week-by-week playbook. The short version: - Build your PH presence for 2-3 weeks before launch - Prepare polished assets (images, tagline, first comment) - Line up 20-50 supporters with established PH accounts - Launch at 12:01 AM

PST - Reply to every comment within 10 minutes **Realistic numbers:** A top-5 launch gets 1,000-5,000 visitors. Conversion to signups runs 1-3%. That's 10-150 users in one day. A #1 Product of the Day can deliver 500+ signups. **Timeline:** 3 weeks of prep, 1 day of launch, users on day one. 3. Building in public on Twitter/X Building in public works because it turns your development process into content. Every feature you ship, every problem you solve, every revenue milestone — that's a post. Over time, you build an audience of people who feel invested in your success because they watched you build it. This is a slow burn. Don't expect 100 users from your first tweet. But founders who consistently post 3-5 times per week about their building journey typically accumulate a following of 1,000-5,000 within 2-3 months — and 2-5% of those followers convert to users. **What actually converts on Twitter/X:** - Revenue milestone posts ("Just hit $1k MRR — here's every channel that contributed") - Before/after comparisons ("Rewrote the onboarding flow. Completion rate went from 23% to 71%") - Failure stories ("Launched to 4 signups. Here's what I'm changing") - Specific tactical threads ("How I got 200 signups from one Reddit post") What doesn't convert: vague motivational posts, "just shipped!" with no context, or anything that sounds like a press release. **Realistic numbers:** 3-5 posts per week for 8 weeks builds a following of 500-2,000. Direct signups from Twitter/X: 20-60 users in the first 2 months. **Timeline:** 6-10 weeks for meaningful results. 4. Direct outreach This is the channel nobody wants to do and everybody should do. Sending personalized emails to people who have the problem you solve is uncomfortable, unglamorous, and insanely effective. **How to find people to email:** - Search Reddit for complaints about the problem you solve - Look for tweets/posts asking "is there a tool that does X?" - Check job boards for roles that deal with the pain you're solving - Browse forums, Slack channels, and Discord servers **How to write emails that get replies:** Don't pitch. Connect. The email should be three sentences: 1. I noticed you [specific thing they posted/wrote about] 2. I built [one-line description] because I had the same problem 3. Would you be up for trying it? Happy to give you free access Three sentences. No feature lists. No pricing. No "I'd love to schedule a call." Just a human reaching out to another human about a shared problem. **Realistic numbers:** 10-20 emails per day, 10-30% reply rate, 30-50% of replies convert to signups. That's 1-3 new users per day. **Timeline:** 2-4 weeks to reach 100 users with consistent daily outreach. 5. SEO and content marketing SEO is the slowest channel on this list. It takes 3-6 months before content starts ranking and driving consistent traffic. But it's also the only channel that builds a permanent traffic asset. Every other channel on this list requires ongoing effort to maintain. SEO content compounds. At the first-100 stage, you're not going to get 100 users from SEO alone. But starting your content engine now means you'll have a steady stream of organic traffic by the time you're going from 100 to 1,000. Check our SaaS launch checklist for how content fits into your launch timeline. **What to write:** - Comparison posts ("X vs Y" for tools in your space) - How-to guides targeting problems your audience searches for - Listicles ("Best tools for [your niche problem]") **Realistic numbers:** 1 post per week for 3 months. By month 4-6, organic traffic starts at 100-500 visitors/month and grows from there. **Timeline:** 3-6 months for first meaningful organic traffic. 6. Paid ads on a tiny budget Paid ads at the first-100 stage are mostly useful as a validation tool, not an acquisition channel. You don't know your conversion rate yet, so you can't calculate a sustainable cost per acquisition. But $50-100 on Reddit ads or Twitter promoted posts can be a useful smoke test. If you drive 500 people to your landing page and nobody signs up, that's data. If 5% sign up, that's also data — and 25 users. **When it makes sense:** - You have a clear landing page and want to test conversion - You've identified a specific subreddit or Twitter audience - You're testing messaging variants - Your product has a short time-to-value (people understand it in 10 seconds) **When it doesn't:** You're burning $500 on Google Ads before you know who your customer is. That's not marketing, that's hoping. **Realistic numbers:** $50-100 spend, 300-800 clicks, 2-8% conversion = 6-64 signups. **Timeline:** Instant traffic, but only useful with a proven landing page. Channel

comparison: effort, cost, and speed What fromscratch.dev builders actually did Theory is one thing. Here's what actually happened when builders listed on fromscratch went after their first 100 users. We asked them the uncomfortable question: what didn't work? Marco — client portal for freelance designers **The product:** A simple dashboard where freelancers share deliverables, collect feedback, and send invoices. Built solo in 6 weeks with Next.js and Supabase. **What worked:** Marco posted a brutally honest teardown of his own freelance workflow in r/graphic_design — screenshots of his messy Dropbox folders, the email chains, the missed revision notes. Didn't even mention his product until the second paragraph. The post got 340 upvotes and drove 1,200 visitors to his landing page. 87 signed up that week. **What didn't work:** He tried cold-emailing design agencies he found on Dribbble. Sent 60 emails over two weeks. Got 3 replies — all "not interested." Agency buyers don't read cold emails from solo devs. Freelancers do. **The numbers:** 100 users in 11 days. 87 from one Reddit post, 13 from Twitter followers who saw him building in public. **Key takeaway:** Go where the pain is loudest. For Marco, that was a subreddit full of freelancers venting about client communication — not agencies on Dribbble. Lena — expense tracker for micro-SaaS founders **The product:** A dead-simple tool to track SaaS expenses, calculate burn rate, and forecast runway. $9/month. Built in 4 weeks. **What worked:** Direct outreach, one person at a time. Lena searched Twitter for founders posting screenshots of their Stripe dashboards and sent 15 DMs per day: "Saw your MRR update — nice growth. Curious, do you track your expenses anywhere or just wing it?" About 20% replied. Half of those tried the product. **What didn't work:** Product Hunt. She launched on a Tuesday, got 89 upvotes, and barely cracked the top 20. Around 40 people clicked through, 6 signed up. She spent three weeks preparing for what turned out to be her worst acquisition channel. "Honestly, I should've spent those three weeks sending more DMs." **The numbers:** 100 users in 5 weeks. 72 from Twitter DMs, 18 from an Indie Hackers post, 6 from Product Hunt, 4 from word of mouth. **Key takeaway:** When your audience is founders, meet them where they're already sharing — Twitter and Indie Hackers. Product Hunt can flop if your product doesn't photograph well or isn't "novel" enough for the PH crowd. Nico & Sara — appointment scheduler for tattoo studios **The product:** Booking tool built specifically for tattoo artists — deposit collection, design approval flow, and a waitlist. $19/month per studio. Built by a two-person team in 8 weeks. **What worked:** They physically walked into 12 tattoo studios in their city and demo'd the product on an iPad. 7 signed up on the spot. Then they asked those 7 studios to post about it in a private Facebook group for tattoo artists (14,000 members). One studio owner wrote a mini-review. That single post drove 64 signups in 3 days. **What didn't work:** Reddit was a dead end. They posted in r/tattoo and r/tattooartists — both communities are for showcasing art, not discussing business tools. Got 4 upvotes and zero clicks. They also tried Instagram DMs to tattoo artists with large followings. Sent 40 DMs. Got 1 reply. **The numbers:** 100 users in 18 days. 7 from in-person demos, 64 from one Facebook group post, 19 from referrals by early studios, 10 from a follow-up post in a different tattoo business group. **Key takeaway:** For niche verticals, the community that matters might not be on Reddit or Twitter. Find the actual watering hole — even if it's a private Facebook group or a local meetup. Amir — open-source error tracking tool **The product:** A lightweight Sentry alternative for solo devs and small teams. Free tier with a $12/month pro plan. Built over 10 weeks. **What worked:** SEO — but not the traditional way. Amir wrote a single long comparison post: his tool vs. Sentry vs. Bugsnag vs. Rollbar. He published it on his blog and on Dev.to. The Dev.to post got picked up by a newsletter and drove 800 visitors in one week. The blog version started ranking on page 2 of Google within 6 weeks and gradually climbed to page 1. **What didn't work:** Building in public on Twitter/X. He posted consistently — 4 times a week for two months — and gained 380 followers. But the conversion to signups was near zero. "Dev tool founders follow other dev tool founders on Twitter. My actual users — junior developers drowning in error logs — they're not on dev Twitter. They're Googling solutions." **The numbers:** 100 users in 7 weeks. 48

from the Dev.to post and newsletter pickup, 31 from the comparison blog post (organic search), 14 from a Show HN post, 7 from GitHub stars leading to signups. **Key takeaway:** Know where your users actually look for solutions. If they're Googling, invest in SEO. If they're on Twitter, build in public. Don't assume — test and follow the data. Julie — AI meeting notes for sales teams **The product:** Records sales calls, generates summaries, and pushes action items to CRM. $29/month per seat. Built solo with heavy use of AI APIs. **What worked:** Julie joined 4 Slack communities for sales professionals (RevGenius, Sales Hacker, Modern Sales Pros, Pavilion) and spent two weeks just answering questions about sales workflows. When she eventually shared her tool, she positioned it as "the thing I built because I was tired of writing call summaries at 10 PM." Three people tried it that day. Two of them posted about it in their company Slack channels. Word of mouth did the rest. **What didn't work:** Paid ads — painfully. She spent $200 on LinkedIn ads targeting "Head of Sales" titles. Got 12 clicks. Zero signups. The landing page converted at 0% from paid traffic. "LinkedIn clicks are expensive, and decision-makers don't sign up for random tools from ads. They sign up when a peer recommends it in a Slack group." **The numbers:** 100 users in 6 weeks. 11 from Slack communities directly, 67 from internal word-of-mouth at companies where early users worked, 14 from a cold email campaign targeting sales managers, 8 from an Indie Hackers launch post. **Key takeaway:** For B2B tools, your first users are your best salespeople. One happy user inside a company can bring their whole team. Optimize for that viral loop rather than paying for eyeballs. The pattern across all six We keep seeing the same thing: **one channel does most of the work.** Marco's was Reddit. Lena's was Twitter DMs. Nico and Sara's was a Facebook group. Amir's was SEO content. Julie's was Slack communities leading to word of mouth. Nobody succeeded by doing everything at once. The founders who hit 100 fastest picked the channel closest to their users, committed to it for 2-4 weeks, and let the other channels play supporting roles. Here's the common path: 1. **Week 1-2:** Go deep on one community channel. Get 10-30 signups from people who feel the pain. 2. **Week 2-3:** Add direct outreach (DMs or emails) as a second channel. Get 5-10 more signups per week. 3. **Week 3-5:** Ride word of mouth from early users. Optionally launch on Product Hunt for a spike. 4. **Ongoing:** Start a content engine. Post building-in-public updates. Signups trickle in at 2-5 per day. It's not glamorous. It's not "going viral." But it works consistently. The timeline: how long each channel takes The "optimistic" column is real — some founders hit 100 users in their first week from a single Reddit post or a great PH launch. But the "realistic" column is where most people land. Plan for that. Anything faster is a bonus. Common mistakes that waste your time After watching hundreds of launches, these patterns keep destroying early traction: The biggest one: channel hopping You try Reddit for a week, get 8 signups, decide it's not working, switch to Twitter, post for three days, get 2 followers, pivot to paid ads, burn $100, get nothing, and conclude that "marketing doesn't work for my product." Marketing works. You just didn't give any single channel enough time. Pick one channel. Work it for 3-4 weeks. If after 4 weeks of genuine effort you have zero traction, switch. But most founders abandon channels after 3-5 days. That's not enough time to learn what works. The second biggest: building instead of selling Every week you spend adding features is a week without users. Your onboarding flow doesn't need to be perfect. Your dashboard doesn't need dark mode. Your API docs don't need to be comprehensive. Ship the thing. Get 10 people using it. Listen to what they complain about. Build that. Repeat. The founders who reach 100 users fastest are always the ones who launched with something embarrassingly simple and iterated based on real feedback. Your first-100 game plan If you've read this far and feel overwhelmed by the options, ignore everything except this checklist. It's the sequence we'd follow if we were starting a new product tomorrow — based on what actually worked across every builder story above. Do them in order. Don't skip to step 6 because Product Hunt sounds more exciting than sending DMs. The uncomfortable truth No growth hack replaces talking to people. Your first 100 users will come from manually finding individuals with the problem, reaching out personally,

and convincing them one by one that your product is worth trying. Not sexy. Not scalable. But that's how every great product starts. We'll be honest: we built fromscratch with the same playbook. Our first users came from posting in indie builder communities, DMing people who were looking for a project directory, and manually onboarding each one. We tried paid ads too early and wasted $150 before we even knew our activation flow was broken. The manual work taught us things that no analytics dashboard ever could. Paul Graham wrote "do things that don't scale" in 2013. More than a decade later, it's still the best advice for getting your first 100 users. Scalable channels — SEO, paid ads, referral programs — only kick in after you've done the unscalable work of finding your people and understanding exactly what they need. The founders who get to 100 users fastest all follow the same pattern: pick one or two channels, show up consistently, lead with the problem (not the product), and do genuine outreach. Reddit and communities are the fastest path for most indie builders. Product Hunt is the best single-day spike. Building in public compounds over time. Direct outreach has the highest conversion rate. SEO is the slow burn that pays off forever. Start with the channel that matches where your audience already is — and actually commit to it for more than a week.