GROWTH HACKING

YOUR SAAS STARTUP

A GUIDE

I've worked with a number of SaaS businesses over the past few years with the goal to accelerate growth and on-board new users to their respective platforms.

This is no easy feat and I've had a lot of learning curves with the different companies that I've worked with. That said, I've also had a lot of success. Within this guide I'm going to talk you through some of the core fundamentals of promoting a SaaS startup and outline some of the specific techniques that you can use to promote your own startup.

Not only this, but I've spoken to some of the most innovative and exciting SaaS companies of late to get their insight into what worked for them.

For the purpose of this guide, I've broken down the individual strategies into concise chunks of information that will tell you why it's useful, how you can implement it and any tools that may help.

List of Hacks

Pre-Launch Strategy

One of the most important times for your SaaS startup is before you've even launched. This is a stage where you can start cultivating a following of early adopters and get crucial feedback on your product before you open it up to the wider public.

An effective pre-launch strategy will create momentum that can follow through into your launch stage and help you enter into competitive markets without a standing start. I can't stress enough how important this is, and most successful startup founders will echo this.

So enough scene-setting and onto the strategies!

Get Concept Feedback from Reddit

Why: Improve your product and add features that your potential users want to see, plus build relationships with potential advocates.

Implementation:

1. Find a relevant subreddit for your product or post in the /r/startups with an overview of what your product aims to do.
2. Ask for feedback on the idea and any particular features that people would like to see.

3. Engage within the comments and compile all of the feedback into a manageable format. You could consider using Google Forms for quick multiple choice questions.
4. Direct anyone that seemed interested to leave their details with you for future updates on the product's progress (you could use a data capture form on a landing page or just message the Reddit user).
5. When it comes to launch time, get in touch with these individuals and explain the changes you made (if any) based on their feedback. Give them early access as a thank you, ideally for free when possible, and ask if they'd share it with their peers.

Useful Tools: Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Reddit.

Use Reddit for concept validation before you launch and nurture early brand advocates

CLICK TO TWEET

Give Away a Relevant Free Tool/Course

Why: Data should be at the forefront of your mind before you launch. The more data you have, the more ammunition you have when it comes to gaining launch momentum. Giving away a relevant free tool or online course (via an email series) is the perfect way to gather relevant data for upselling later.

Implementation:

1. Find a small problem that your target audience are having that's particularly relevant to your product (you could use Reddit for this).
2. Develop a small tool or plugin that isn't too advanced in features (HubSpot do a great job of this – just check out Sidekick that was created by them). Alternatively, develop a short online course that could be delivered via email or behind a data capture gate (I recently signed up for a free course like this from Programming for Marketers – I've now purchased their book).
3. Develop a landing page on your domain or a microsite that has a data capture form.
4. Use the data that you've gathered to inform people of when your product goes live. Make sure you don't leave it too long between communicating with these users, try to keep them engaged during the pre-launch period.

Useful Tools: Unbounce (landing page creation), Interrupt (data capture forms), WelcomeGate (landing pages), MailChimp (email).

Bonus Tip: Use this technique to run your automated email series for less than $30 a month.

Give away a free tool/course to gather data before you launch your startup

CLICK TO TWEET

Crowdsource Funding

Why: This is less about getting funding and more about building a community before you launch. Individuals who have helped fund your venture will have an attachment to your brand and could prove to be instrumental in getting the word out about your business once you go live.

Implementation:

1. Decide on the reward package that you're going to offer and the target for your funding campaign.
2. Put together a compelling pitch and upload it to KickStarter (or a similar crowdfunding platform).
3. Incentivise early adopters to spread the word via social media to help stimulate press coverage.

Useful Tools: KickStarter, Indiegogo, Crowdfunder, Rockethub, Crowdrise, Appbakr.

Use crowdfunding platforms to build a pre-launch community around your startup

CLICK TO TWEET

Invite Influencers to Beta Test

Why: Aside from the valuable feedback that you can get from influential individuals within your industry, this is the perfect inroad to building a long term relationships with them.

Implementation:

1. Use a tool like BuzzSumo, Followerwonk, Topsy or Social Crawlytics to identify individuals within your industry that have a large social following.
2. Compile all of the influencers into a spreadsheet and upload it to BuzzStream to gather extra contact information. If you don't want to use a paid tool like BuzzStream then you can go through and search for contact data manually or use a service like Microworkers to get this done quickly and at a low cost.
3. Once you have the contact data, craft a pitch to the individuals that tells them why they would find your product useful and how they can become a beta user. If you think it's worth it, you could even offer payment in return for feedback (I've done this in the past and it's definitely worth it).
4. Incentivise beta testers further when you get close to launch by asking if they'd review the product on their website or simply share with their social following and newsletter.

Pro Tip: Tie this into an early affiliate program to give the beta testers even more reason to get the word out about your product.

Useful Tools: BuzzSumo, Followerwonk, Topsy, Social Crawlytics, BuzzStream, Microworkers.

Get industry influencers to become beta testers of your product to build early relationships

CLICK TO TWEET

Run a Pre-Launch Giveaway

Why: Competitions are a great way to gather data that can be used for remarketing or for gaining insights into your product/brand. They can also be a cost effective channel for getting bulk loads of relevant contact information for upselling.

Implementation:

1. Sign up for an account on Rafflecopter ($13 per month) to easily run interactive competitions via their widgets.
2. Decide upon a competition prize that's **relevant to your target audience**. As you probably guessed, this is very important. There's no point in just giving away an iPad so that you get more entries (unless your product is relevant to iPads!). You want to go as specific as possible so that you can validate the entries you're getting. To do this, I often

ask the question of, "What would only my target audience want?" In the case of my blog, this could be a subscription to an SEO tool. This would filter out anyone who's just after a freebie and get down to those that I'd like to engage with.

3. Create some custom imagery for your competition that can be used on the Rafflecopter widget and also when sharing on social media. Check out this social media image size guide for directions on the image dimensions you'll need.
4. Embed the competition widget into a page on your website and share the link to your social following.
5. Set up some advertising via Facebook ads, Twitter ads and Reddit ads, ensuring that your targeting is right. This guide from AdEspresso might help.
6. Build a list of influencers whom you'd like to share the competition and reach out to them individually via Twitter or email (you can incentivise them further by offering them extra competition entries for each referral they make).
7. Work with relevant blogs in your industry to send out the competition to their email subscribers and their blog readers (you'll need to pay for this).

Useful Resource: Check out my huge guide on running online competitions to go into more detail on the process above.

Useful Tools: Rafflecopter, PunchTab (another competition tool).

Run a pre-launch giveaway to gather data that can be used for remarketing when you go live

CLICK TO TWEET

Track Pre-Launch Visitors for Social Remarketing

Why: Facebook's 'custom audiences' and Twitter's 'tailored audiences' are seriously powerful features that can be exploited to gain momentum upon your launch through remarketing. Pre-launch, whilst you're building an audience, you'll want to track and store your web visitors' social accounts so that you can direct ads on Twitter and Facebook to them. They're incredibly cost effective and can generate a TON of traffic to your website.

Implementation:

1. Log in to Facebook and navigate to the 'audience' section of the advertising tab.
2. Click on the 'Create Audience' button at the top right (it's a green button).
3. Select the 'Custom Audience' option.
4. Select the 'Website Visitors' option.
5. Enter your domain name and leave the rest of the fields the same, only changing the 'In the last X days' value to 180 days.
6. Press 'Create Audience' and then paste the tracking code within the <head> and </head> tags of your website.

Here's a detailed guide from Jon Loomer on setting up the Facebook tracking code.

1. Log in to Twitter and navigate to the Twitter Ads section.
2. Under the 'Tools' menu, select 'Audience Manager'.
3. Click the 'Create new audience' button and select the 'Create website tag' option.
4. Give your audience a name (e.g. 'my website visitors'), select the conversion type as 'Site visit' from the drop-down list and then press 'Save tag and generate code snippet'.
5. Paste the tracking code within the <head> and </head> tags of your website.

Once you've set these tracking codes up, any new visitors to your website that are logged into Twitter or Facebook will be added to your custom audience list. Once you're ready to launch, create some targeted ads and drive through traffic to early adopters to get the word out and accelerate growth.

Important: Get this set up as soon as possible so that you don't lose out on adding early visitors to your custom audience lists.

Useful Tools: AdEspresso, Facebook Power Editor, Qwaya.

Store pre-launch visitors within FB/Twitter custom audiences to remarket to them when you launch

CLICK TO TWEET

Hack LinkedIn to Find Out Who Visits Your Site

Why: Ever wished you could know exactly **who** is visiting your website – I mean, like a list of individuals who went to your website? Well, with this sneaky LinkedIn hack you can do just that. Then, once you know this you can connect with them on LinkedIn and get in touch directly with them. Sounds good, right?

Implementation:

1. Sign up for a LinkedIn Premium account (if you haven't already). You can just get the entry level package here – it's just so you can view who's viewed your profile.
2. Go to your website and add the following code within the <body> and </body> tags of the page(s) you wish to track visitors on:

```
<img
src="https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?authToken=zRgB&authType=name&id=XXXXX" />
```

   You will just need to replace the **XXXXX** with your LinkedIn user ID. You can find this by logging into LinkedIn, clicking the *Profile* button and then taking the numerical code from the page URL that directly follows the text 'profile/view?id='.

3. After a few days, go back into your LinkedIn account and click on the section to view who's looked at your profile. You'll notice that there are a lot of people in this list now. That's because LinkedIn is now tracking everyone that visits your website (that's still logged into their LinkedIn account) as someone who's viewed your profile!
4. Go through the list and start building individual relationships with your web visitors through the LinkedIn platform. A perfect intro would be to offer them early beta access to get their feedback on your product.

Useful Resource: Check out the original article that uncovered this awesome hack.

Hack LinkedIn to find out exactly WHO visits your website #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Run an Early Adopter Focus Group

Why: Get invaluable feedback on your product from your target market before you launch. Not only will this help you to adapt your product in a way that will benefit your users, but it'll also help to build an audience of early adopters that could become the catalysts for marketing your product upon launch.

Implementation:

1. Hop on over to Erli Bird.
2. Put together a detailed brief on what your product does and what you'd like the beta user to do and drop it in an email to team@erlibird.com.
3. The Erli Bird team will get in touch with you about next steps and get your campaign up and running. Just FYI, these campaigns cost $1,000 to run but they seem well worth it considering Erli Bird offers features like screen capture as the users navigate through your product, heat mapping and much more.
4. Once you've had your feedback, make changes based on the requirements of your audience and get in touch with the beta testers once you're ready to go live.

Useful Tools: Erli Bird.

Use @erlibirdapp to get beta testers for your new product #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Submit Your Startup to BetaList

Why: BetaList is a community similar to Product Hunt but it's exclusively for startups that haven't launched yet. Being featured on BetaList can result in a moderate influx of traffic, and from the feedback of many startups that were featured on BetaList, the main benefit seems to be the large numbers of sign-ups it generates. On average this seems to result in between 300-500 sign-ups.

Implementation:

1. Go to the submit page on BetaList.
2. Click on the 'Submit your startup now' button and sign-in to BetaList via Twitter.
3. Follow the instructions on the page to enter the details of your startup and submit it to the moderation team. This is free to do but there's no guarantee that it will be accepted (success is all dependant on the merit of your product). You can also pay a small fee to have your process expedited.

Useful Resource: check out this awesome thread on Quora that talks about successful applications and what they've brought to other startups.

Useful Tools: BetaList.

Submit your startup to @betalist to drive through a ton of early signups #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Create a PR Hit-List

Why: Before you go live, you'll want to do everything you can to build momentum around your startup. Get organised early on and create a hit-list of journalists that you can approach when the time is right.

Implementation:

1. Use a journalist database like Hey.Press (free) or Muck Rack (paid) to search for journalists relevant to your startup.
2. Once you've got a good list, extract their information and add it to a spreadsheet.
3. Head on over to Followerwonk and run the following search (only searching within a user's bio): **keyword** "journalist" Just replace **keyword** with a keyword relevant to your startup (for example, 'tech'). This will return a list of Twitter users who state that they're journalists covering stories relevant to your business.
4. Again, export this list and add it to your master spreadsheet.
5. Use a backlink analysis tool like Open Site Explorer, Majestic or Ahrefs to search through websites

that are linking to your competitors. Pick out any links that have come from editorial mentions and find the author of the article (usually by-lined at the bottom of the article).

6. Find the social profiles or personal websites of the authors and add them to your master spreadsheet.
7. Monitor all of the mentions that your competitors get from publications/journalists online with a tool like Mention, Google Alerts or TalkWalker.
8. Add any new mentions from journalists or publications into your master spreadsheet.
9. You'll now want to gather all of the contact information for those on your hit-list. You can do this in three different ways. The first is to manually go through each of their websites/social profiles to gather emails, etc. The second is to upload all of the data into BuzzStream which will automatically extract any contact information from their website(s). The final way is to outsource this task via Microworkers or Mechanical Turk.

Useful Resource: check out this interesting article from Chris Winfield that lists 92 ways to get coverage for your company.

Useful Tools: Open Site Explorer, Majestic, Ahrefs, Hey.Press, Muck Rack, Followerwonk, Mention, Google Alerts, TalkWalker, BuzzStream, Microworkers, Mechanical Turk.

Create a PR hit-list before you launch to build momentum and get early coverage #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Create a Press Kit

Why: Before you go live, you'll want to have everything prepared to send over to the press in order to get coverage of your business. Getting all this ready in advance will be hugely beneficial and enable you to reach out to journalists a lot quicker.

Implementation:

1. Create a page on your website on which you can host your entire press kit (this makes it easy to just send over a URL to journalists, as opposed to attaching loads of files to an email).
2. Create the following assets:
   - **Introduction/pitch letter** – this should explain why people should care about your product.
   - **Company history/profile** – an overview of the company and its core staff.
   - **Logo/product images** – you'll want a few variations of your company and product/service logos that can be used by the press.
   - **Screenshots/videos** – simple screenshots of the product in action, along with a walkthrough video.
   - **News coverage** – any other news or coverage around your product/business should be shown here.

- **Speeches/interviews** – any talks at events or interviews with your founders.
- **FAQs** – this gives journalists a quick resource to get their questions answered.
- **Awards** – any awards you've received.
- **Stats/case studies** – any statistics on your product or successful customer case studies.

3. Once you've got everything ready, upload all of this information to your press kit webpage, laying it out in different sections.

Useful Resource: one of the best press kit examples I've seen is on Balsamiq's website.

Create a press kit before you launch to maximise coverage potential #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Optimise Your Website for Search

Why: Getting your website optimised for search engines in advance of going live will help you get some quick wins with traffic and ensure that you can capitalise on all the promotion that's going on within other marketing channels to drive through traffic from the search engines.

Implementation:

1. First you'll want to identify a list of keywords/phrases that are relevant to your business to target within the search engines. I've outlined the process for keyword research in more detail here but you can use a combination of KWfinder, Google Keyword Planner and SEMrush to identify new keyword opportunities.
2. Once you've carried out the keyword research, ensure that you make the following changes on your website:
    - **Install Google Analytics** – see here for details.
    - **Set up Webmaster Tools** – see here for details.
    - **Update page titles to include keywords** – see here for details.
    - **Update meta data to be relevant to keywords** – see here for details.
    - **Add keyword(s) to H1 tags** – see here for details.
    - **Add keyword(s) to image ALT tags** – see here for details.
    - **Add more content to your pages that relate to keywords** – see here for details.
    - **Ensure there isn't duplicate content on your website** – see here for details.
    - **Check for broken links and fix architecture issues** – see here for details.
    - **Add any relevant Schema.org markup** – see here for details.
    - **Create and submit a sitemap** – see here for details.

Useful Resource: here's an extensive guide on website optimisation for search that you can follow step-by-step.

Optimise your website for search pre-launch to maximise traffic potential #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Post-Launch Strategy

Once you've pushed the button and gone live with your new venture, there's no looking back. If you've followed some of the advice above then you've given yourself the best chance of success pre-launch.

Now that you've launched, it's time to take it to the next level.

Here are a ton of strategies that you can use to gain immediate traction and sustain long-term growth.

Get Featured on Product Hunt

Why: If you're looking for a big hit of traffic and new user signups then Product is for you. On average, a front page feature will bag you around 10,000 visitors within a week and convert at anywhere between 5-10%. Not bad, right!

Implementation:

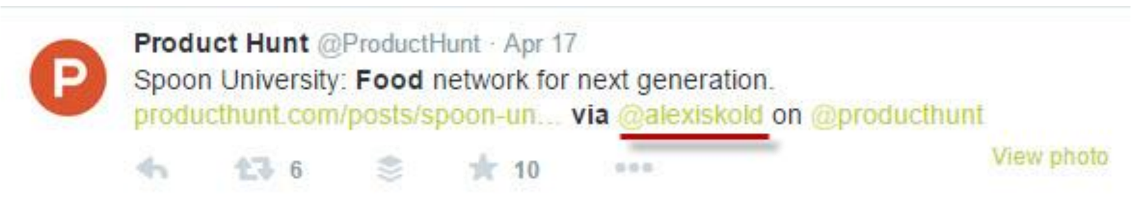
It's not easy to get featured on Product Hunt, especially if your product isn't great (that would be the ultimate stumbling block!). That said, I've spoken to a lot of companies that have been featured on Product Hunt and worked with some of them as well.

I'm going to share my process for getting featured on Product Hunt that I'd recommend any new startup follows:

1. Unless you have an invite, you can't comment or submit a new product to PH. Even then, if you were to submit yourself, the likelihood is that you'd miss out on a lot of traction compared to someone influential on PH submitting. You only get one chance to submit to Product Hunt so you'll need to identify someone who would be interested in your startup and also have influence within the PH community. To do this, go to Twitter and search the following query in the search bar:

   ```
   via "on @producthunt" from:producthunt
   ```

   This will display tweets from the @ProductHunt Twitter account that mention who has submitted a product (via that person's Twitter account). All you need to do is search for a similar product to yours and then find the person who submitted it. This person will be perfect to submit yours.

2. Once you've got a PH member in mind, it's time to reach out to them via Twitter to ask if you can drop them a quick email. It's important not to just ask them to submit straight away – you'll want to do something for them first.

3. Drop them an email that gives them a brief explanation of your product and get them on-board to test it. You may need to incentivise them somehow. For example, you could give them access for free.
4. Once you've built the relationship, ask them to submit your website to PH. You'll want to set up a landing page URL to give them that has a specific discount/offer for PH members – this dramatically increases conversions and also helps to boost interest within PH. Here's an example of a website doing this.
5. As well as setting up a landing page for Product Hunt members you may want to add a banner on your site that displays a discount or just links back to your PH listing (to encourage more voting). You can use IntroBar (free) to set this up in a few minutes and only display to people coming from Product Hunt.
6. Once you've been submitted, you'll want to ask the submitter to mark you as the *Maker* of the product so that you're able to comment. If they have trouble, just drop @ProductHunt a tweet.
7. Once you're able to comment, ask the PH community to give you honest feedback on your product and make sure you answer any question or comment as quickly as possible – this is what the PH community loves and it can be some invaluable feedback for you.
8. Drop through a link to your Product Hunt listing to your social media followers and email subscribers to get them to engage in the comments and upvote.

9. Add a call-to-action on your website to visit the PH page so that people can upvote or comment – this could be a simple pop-up.

Useful Resource: check out this case study from the founder of Nomad List on how he got featured on Product Hunt.

Useful Tools: IntroBar.

Target @ProductHunt once you've launched to capture 10,000+ web visits #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Get Featured on Hacker News

Why: Like Product Hunt, Hacker News has the potential to bring through large volumes of relevant traffic in a short period of time. On average, you can see around 3,000 visits within a couple of hours!

Implementation:

As with Product Hunt, it's not easy to get featured on Hacker News. In fact, it's probably much more difficult and relies heavily on good timing and the right person.

1. Hacker News works in a very similar way to Reddit in the sense that the more upvotes you receive in a short period of time, the higher you will rise in the list. Within Hacker

News, it's important to have influential members upvoting your content, so this is the starting place. You'll want to identify around 20-30 influencers whom you can call upon to upvote your startup on Hacker News. To do this, you could check out people who are tweeting the @NewsYCombinator Twitter handle using this search query within Twitter:

```
to:newsycombinator
```

In addition to this you can go through Hacker News and message people who have submitted similar things to your product/business.

2. Make contact with the Hacker News members and give them an overview of your product (brief) and what it's looking to solve. Ask them for feedback on what could be changed, etc. and it could even be good to ask them for a quote that you could place on your website (give them as much ownership as possible).
3. Once you've built a relationship with a few of them, submit your website to Hacker News.
4. As soon as you've submitted, you'll want to get an email over to all of the people you've built a relationship with to upvote the post. It's important here that **you don't send them the link to your Hacker News post** as they don't count any upvotes that come from direct link visits. Instead, you'll need to ask them to go to

the https://news.ycombinator.com/newest page and find your website from the list.

5. If you get a bit of early traction (around 10 upvotes in quick succession should do it), you'll hop over to the front page. Once you're there, get active in the comments and ask for as much feedback as possible. You could even offer Hacker News discounts.

Useful Resource: check out this case study from Alex Turnbull of Groove in which he explains his experience of hitting Hacker News front page.

Hacker News has the potential to bring 1000s of new visits in a matter of hours #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Set Up & Respond to Press Request Alerts

Why: Journalists are always looking to cover the latest interesting products/services. Through press request alerts you'll be able to connect with journalists and get featured in top tier publications.

Implementation:

The key to success with press requests is to be organised. You'll be receiving over 100 press request emails every day once you sign up to any of the services below. To ensure that you don't miss big opportunities, follow this process:

1. Sign up to any of the following press request services:
    - HARO (one of the most popular free services)
    - ResponseSource (paid service aimed more at the UK)
    - Muck Rack (paid service)
    - Gorkana (paid service)
    - SourceBottle (free service)
    - PressQuest (UK free service)
    - Vocus (paid service)
2. Create separate folders within your inbox for each of the different services you use (i.e., ResponseSource, HARO, Muck Rack, etc.).
3. Create rules for any new emails from each of these services to go into their allocated folders.
4. Create sub-folders underneath each main folder that are broken down into different topics. For example, I have folders marked as *Small Business*, *SEO*, *Social Media*, *Blogging*, etc.
5. Once you've created these sub-folders, create rules on any of the emails that include keywords related to each topic to be filed under the relevant sub-folder. For example, any request mentioning SEO will go into my SEO sub-folder. I also exclude any emails from going into the folders that mention competitions or review products (this avoids me getting irrelevant requests). This may not be the case for you, though.

6. The final thing that I do is create rules on any of the emails from these services that will flag any email that comes through from a publication that I'm targeting. In my case, I have alerts for any PR requests that come through from Forbes, The Guardian, The Financial Times and a few others.
7. For really important requests, you can use this IFTTT recipe that I created that will send you an SMS alert to get your immediate attention.
8. Create a set response template that you can edit quickly and get sent to the press in order to stand the best possible chance of being featured. The template should give a 1-2 sentence description of you/your business and then 4-5 bullet points with the information requested by the journalist. Be sure to add your email address, phone number and social profiles so that it's as easy to reach you as possible.

Useful Resource: check out this full guide to using press requests that I wrote for Search Engine Land.

Utilise press request alerts to get coverage in top tier publications #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Event Hashtag Hijacking

Why: Instead of paying thousands to get an exhibition stand at an event, utilise Twitter advertising around event hashtags to bring through tons of relevant new users.

Implementation:

Setting up exhibition stands at events can prove to be an expensive exercise. Not only that but the conversion rate off the back of these events aren't always great. To cut costs and increase conversions, I tend to stay clear of event attendance and hijack the event hashtags instead.

The quickest way to do this is to run some Twitter advertisements that can bring people through to your sign-up page. Considering that it will mainly be people attending the event who will be using the hashtag, it's fair to assume they're relevant to you and could be on the lookout for new software.

Here's how you can get it all set up.

1. Log in to your Twitter account and navigate to the 'Twitter Advertising' section.
2. Click the 'Create New Campaign' button and then select *Website clicks and conversions*.
3. Set up your ad to go through to a landing page on your website. You'll also want to add conversion-tracking code to your website.

4. In the targeting section, add the event hashtag, along with some misspellings, within the 'Keywords' section. You'll be able to find the event hashtag on the event's website/Twitter bio.
5. Set your budget and get the ad running throughout the time that the event is going on, plus the week afterwards.
6. Make sure that you're engaging with people using the event hashtag throughout the duration of the event to absorb some more relevant followers.

Useful Resource: check out this 'quick and dirty' guide to Twitter advertising from the HubSpot blog.

Hijack events by running Twitter ads against their hashtag #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Feature Industry Influencers on Your Blog

Why: Not only can you have some engaging content produced on your website, but you'll be able to tap into the wider network of the influencer to promote it. This can gain your brand a lot of exposure and result in new user signups, social shares, backlinks and traffic.

Implementation:

This is an approach that I use within a lot of campaigns (not just for SaaS businesses). I've outlined the full process that I take in a lot more detail here, but here's a simplified list:

1. Identify a number of major publications within your industry that have multiple outside contributors. For example, Forbes, Entrepreneur and Huffington Post.
2. Within these publications, earmark a few of the authors who have written content particularly relevant to your target market.
3. Gather their social media profiles and any personal websites they have and add them into a spreadsheet. Also, you'll want to find a contact email address.
4. Reach out to the writers with the largest following first to see if they'd be interested working on some content for your blog (give them an example topic). Make sure you ask for their fee and availability at this point as well. When you have this info, add it to the spreadsheet.
5. Agree on topics and dates with your chosen influencers and add them to a content calendar (this helps you stay on top of things). Here's a template you can use.
6. Once you publish an article, ensure that the author is by-lined and get them to share it with their social following. Also, you'll want to ask them to submit the link to any communities they're part of to get further exposure.

Useful Resource: check out this article that I wrote on the Wordtracker blog that shows my process for identifying and engaging influencers.

Feature influencers on your blog and get exposure to their network #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Create a Viral Sign-Up Form

Why: Getting someone to sign-up or subscribe on your website is pretty tough. That said, you can make it a lot easier through viral sign-up forms.

All this entails is incentivising your customers/prospects to refer people they know to you. Simple.

Implementation:

There's a number of ways to run a viral referral system, but all of these start with users coming through and giving you their details (in most cases, email addresses).

This is the starting point so that you're able to create a unique referral URL for them so that you can track any referrals they bring through. The things that change are the ways they refer people.

One way is to get them to share the sign-up page via social media. Another is to get them to email friends and colleagues with their unique referral link, and you could even have them share the link on their websites, etc.

All of this revolves around the way you incentivise your users. This system is something that platforms like Rafflecopter execute really well with their competition widgets. In this case, you can gain extra entries to competitions by sharing on different social networks or giving extra contact data.

This same principle can be applied to your sign-up process. It's exactly what Harry's, the men's grooming products company, did to gather 100,000 emails in just one week!

Useful Resource: if you'd like to build your own viral sign-up form then you should read this tutorial from Justin Mares and Nat Eliason.

Grow email sign-ups by implementing a viral referral system #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Set Up Metrics Dashboards

Why: It's really important to analyse how each of the channels you're working on is performing. Dashboards are a great way to gain an overview of the performance of your campaign at any moment in time.

Implementation:

There are quite a few out-of-the-box dashboard solutions that can be cost-effective and link up to a number of other platforms to give you all the data you need.

My preferred weapon of choice is Cyfe (no affiliation).

Using Cyfe you can pull in data from Google Analytics, Twitter, Facebook, MailChimp, Aweber, Saleforce, Pinterest and hundreds of other platforms to get data on your campaign. I use Cyfe for all of the projects that I work on and it only costs me $19 a month – a worthwhile investment.

There are lots that you can do with Cyfe so here's a video tutorial to get your dashboard all set up:

Use @Cyfe dashboards to monitor your campaign performance in real-time #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Add Data Capture Forms

Why: Data is incredibly valuable to any SaaS business. Adding a range of different call-to-action mechanisms to your website will increase the likelihood that your visitors will give you their details.

Instead of hiding away your email subscription forms in the footer of your website, you can use the likes of scroll-box forms, exit pop-ups and pop-under bars to get a good mix between UX and CTA.

Implementation:

There are lots of tools out there that you can use (as shown below) but the basic principle behind getting someone to hand over their data remains the same:

1. Create something of value to your target audience. For example, you could create an ebook, an online course or free tool.
2. Offer the asset to your visitors for free and create individual call-to-action forms for each of them.
3. Split test each of your forms and make adjustments accordingly.
4. Link your forms to your mailing list and set up email automation to get your email engagement on autopilot.

Useful Resource: give this case study from Robbie Richards a read. He shares some excellent advice on growing your email list.

Useful Tools: SumoMe (free), OptinMonster (paid), Hello Bar (free), Bounce Exchange (paid), Usability Tools (paid), Exit Monitor (paid), Reel (paid),Popu.ps (paid), PicReel (paid) and Ouibounce (GitHub open source).

Use scroll-box forms, exit pop-ups and pop-under bars to grow your email list #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Set Up Automated Email Workflows

Why: Capturing data from potential customers takes a lot of time and money. Unfortunately, most companies that go to these lengths to capture data will never really utilise it.

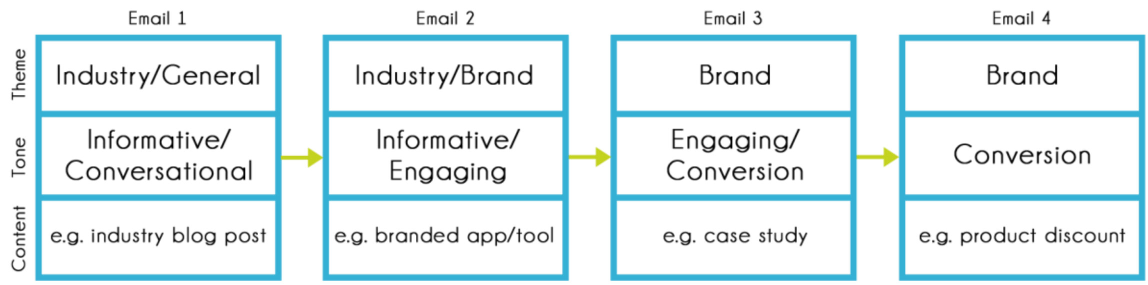
Through setting up automated email workflows you'll be able to add value to all of your new subscribers without having to constantly create new content for them.

Implementation:

There are many different ways you can approach email automation, but I'll start with a simple process that you can use as a framework:

1. Map out your sales funnel, step-by-step to understand the journey that a new user takes when purchasing your product.
2. For each stage of your sales funnel, you should have a specific piece of content that can help nurture leads to the next stage in the process.
3. Now that you have a range of content for each stage in your funnel, you'll need to create email messages to push

these through to your prospects. Here's a basic example:



4. Once you have the basic design of your email workflow, you can move onto designing the look/feel of your email template(s). If you're not savvy with coding, you could get a freelancer on Upwork (formerly oDesk) to design you one or you could purchase a pre-made template through a site like ThemeForest.
5. Choose an email marketing/automation platform to run your campaign through. You can go with either MailChimp, Intercom or HubSpot, depending on your budget, but there's a lot of choice out there.
6. Import your template and set up your workflows within your email marketing software. Each platform is set up differently but they will all have guides on how to get things set up. Another thing worth doing is integrating Google Analytics tracking into your email platform (if it allows you) so that you can trigger emails to go out based on actions occurring within your website/app. This is where tools like HubSpot and Intercom add serious value.
7. Constantly track the performance of your workflows and adapt them where necessary. After a few months you

should have enough data to really improve the email journey of your users and start having a positive impact on its conversion rate.

Useful Resource: learn from the best by workflow that they use to dominate e-commerce. You can also check out my tutorial on setting up email automation within MailChimp for under $30 a month.

Get email design inspiration from Really Good Emails, and find out what the top companies in the world are doing to acquisition via email.

Useful Tools: HubSpot (paid), Intercom (paid), MailChimp (paid) and Customer.io (paid).

Set up automated email workflows to drive user acquisition via email #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Use Your Email List to Grow Your Social Following

Why: Executing a successful social media strategy can be tough. One way to help grow your social following is to find the social accounts of your email subscribers and get them to follow you.

Implementation:

1. Export all of your email data on your current paid users and prospects from your email/CRM software.
2. Process your email list through FullContact's Person API to find any social media accounts that have been registered under these email addresses.
3. For all of the Twitter accounts, upload them into Tweepi and follow around 100-150 of them each day. A large number of them will follow you back, but after a week, unfollow any that don't.
4. For the Facebook users, add them into a 'Custom Audience' within Facebook ads and target a simple page like ads at them to get them to follow your Facebook page. You can do a similar thing with Twitter to capture those that didn't follow you back.

Useful Resource: look through FullContact's Person API documentation to see what other data you can gather.

Useful Tools: Tweepi (free) and FullContact (paid).

Use @FullContactApp's Person API to find the social accounts of your email subscribers #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Twitter Chats

Why: Twitter chats are a great way of both gathering data on your target audience and enabling a deeper level of engagement from them. In addition, they add a lot of value to your brand and seriously grow your social following.

Implementation:

Twitter chats often take time to build a substantial level of participants, but there are a few ways that you can quickly hack your way to larger audiences.

1. The first step is to identify a pool of 10-20 key influencers within Twitter that are relevant to your niche. You can do this with a tool like Followerwonk.
2. Gather their contact information and drop them an email that incentivises them to get involved with your Twitter chat. It's worth creating a webpage with all of the details/times within it that you can link to.
3. Create a calendar invite that you can send through to the influencers so that it gets locked into their diaries as well. It's also worth discussing the format of the chat, how many questions there will be and what they will be so that they can prepare in advance.
4. Use this IFTTT recipe to add any people that engage within similar Twitter chats to a spreadsheet. You can then tweet each of these people an hour before you go live to get them involved.
5. Before you begin your chat, create image templates using a tool like Pablo to visually display the questions with the hashtag. This helps encourage sharing.

6. Once the chat has finished, round up some of the best answers into a blog post and link back to the Twitter users that contributed. You can then share it with them via Twitter/email.

Useful Resource: this guide on running Twitter chats is really useful to look through.

Useful Tools: Followerwonk, TweetReach, IFTTT, Canva and Pablo.

Run Twitter chats to reach a wider audience and build brand awareness#growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Track & Follow-up on Branded Mentions

Why: Once you've started promoting your business, driving activity on social media and creating content, the likelihood is that people will be mentioning you online. If they're not linking to your website when they do this then you're missing out on a load of SEO benefits and traffic generation.

Implementation:

1. Sign up for a free account with Mention.
2. Set up an alert for your brand name and set up email alerts.

3. When you have a new mention of your brand online, get in touch with the website owner and politely ask that they link back to your website, supplying them with a URL.
4. Share any mentions through your Twitter account, mentioning whomever featured your brand. This often results in them following you on Twitter as well.

Useful Resource: check out this guide from Neil Patel that showcases a number of ways to monitor brand mentions online.

Useful Tools: Mention.

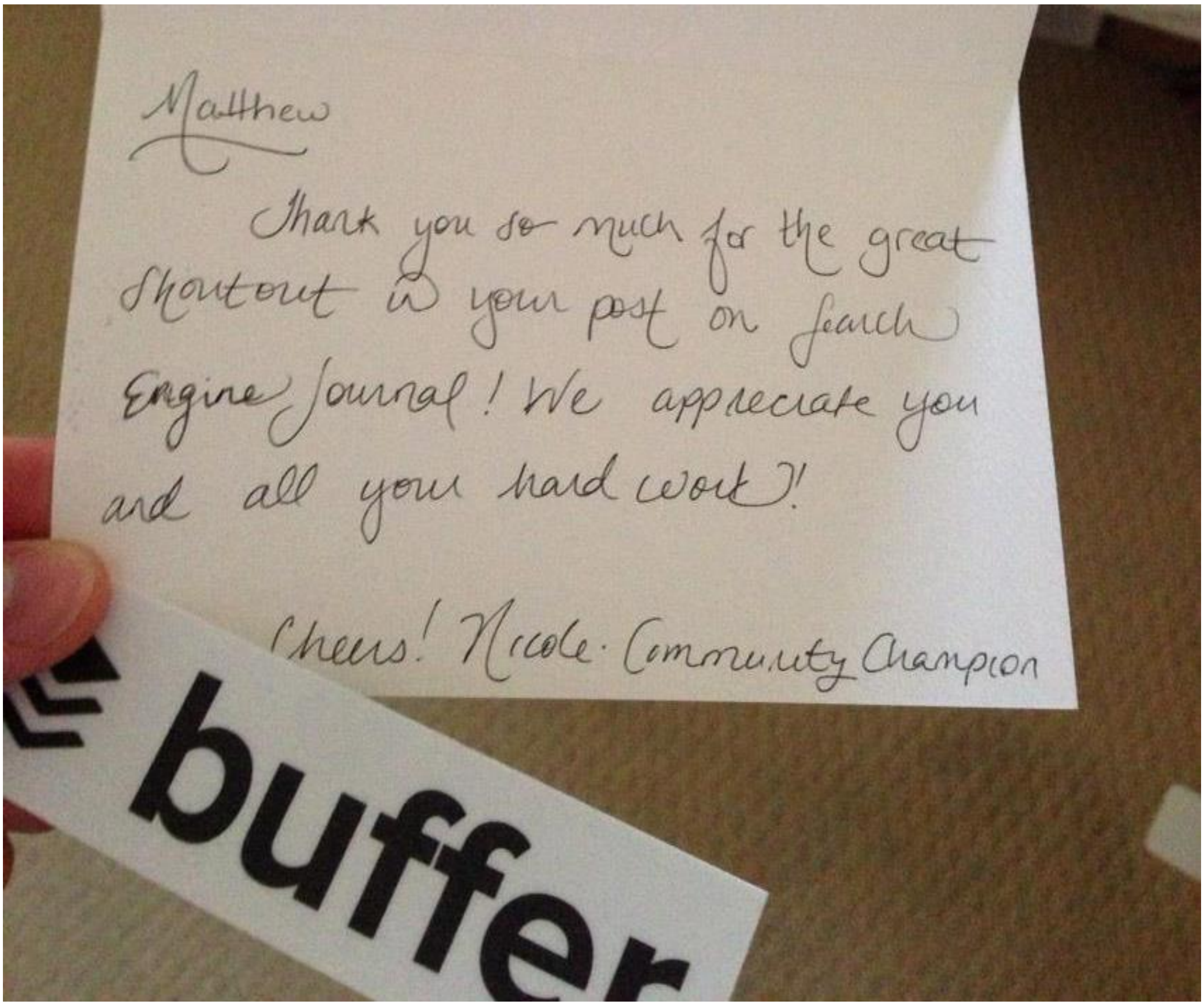
Track branded mentions online and follow up to gain more links #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Send Physical Gifts to Users That Reach Milestones

Why: Positive comments being shared by advocates of your brand are more valuable than anything you can say yourself. To build these brand advocates, the little things often make the biggest difference.

I've personally had hand-written letters come through from the awesome teams at Buffer and Nudge which have led to me shouting about them (and mentioning them here!).



Implementation:

1. Design and print a number of postcard-sized branded cards that have a space for you to write a personalised message within. You could also get some stickers to send out with the letters (these work well within the tech-focused industries).
2. Set some criteria for sending out letters to individuals. These could be that they've been customers for 3 months, they've mentioned you within their blogs/publications, they've been engaging within your Twitter chats, etc.

3. Send out the branded postcards with stickers, ensuring that the message is as personal as possible.
4. Sit back and watch all the engagement happen around your brand.

Useful Tools: 99 Designs (quick design work from freelancers) and Printfection.

Send physical gifts to customers to promote brand advocacy #growth

CLICK TO TWEET

Experiences of Successful SaaS Startup Founders

Alongside all of the hacks that I've listed above, I've spoken to a number of successful SaaS startup founders to share their experience on how they've grown their respective businesses.

Cyril Nicodème – VoilaNorbert

1. Which specific marketing tactics have you found to impact growth significantly?

In total honestly, none. We started VoilaNorbert as a service we needed (find emails of someone in a specific company) for our personal use, Antoine and me, and we didn't find anything that was what we were looking for. We built the initial product in an afternoon, very basic, and that was it.

Almost a year after, someone (we don't know him at all) posted our service in ProductHunt, and this started an increase of visitors. I wrote an article about that at my personal blog (http://blog.cnicodeme.com/the-story-of-how-we-got-featured-on-lifehacker). With the lots of visitors, we were talking about improving the overall service and implementing a paid version.

We got featured on LifeHacker a month later and that's when we decided to rebuild VoilaNorbert, implement new things and the paid plans. (The comments on LifeHacker did motivate us to update the service, most of them was saying the service wasn't useful, not great, buggy, etc.).

There was no truly marketing tactics we followed, except maybe being pro-active and listening to our users (we read all the comments, answered most of them and applied the changes that were requested when we found out that they were useful).

(I'm sorry this story can't be more "awesome" and have great things in it).

2. What advice would you give to a new SaaS startup looking to formulate a plan to onboard new users.

Listen to your customers (the ones you've already got). They are early adopters, and these kinds of users are those that give a lot of feedback.

Improve your service based on their feedback, answer to everyone, even those where you feel it's not necessary, and don't wait too long to answer.

If you are reactive, people will like you and they will talk about you.

3. What did you find most challenging when launching Norbert?

There were two challenging points with Norbert…

The first was when we saw that LifeHacker had made an article about us, we felt it was urgent to build the new version. We built it in 3 days, and it's still the current version you can see today (except some changes).

The second was that many blogs started to talk about Norbert and we started to see an increase in visitors. We are now mostly between 300 and 700 visitors daily, and that increase in interested visitors faced us with an issue – many email servers started to ban us.

Since we connect to the email server to verify the email address, many queries means many connections, and some didn't like that (Google email servers mostly, because they manage a lot of companies).

We had to implement a system that would support those bans and avoid them. I started to modify the code in order to make the connection to the email servers in a separate server, but provide the results (and the website) in another. Then, I added this server to a list that could be expanded at my needs.

When the website tries a query, it searches in the database for the servers list, removes those that are banned for that specific email server, and query those available. If there is none available, I'm notified, so I know I need to buy more servers.

This was really interesting to set up.

Scott Savarie – Napkin

I'm not exactly sure what made the launch of [Napkin] go so well. Product Hunt was invaluable in terms of distribution—but otherwise I didn't honestly do anything out of the ordinary.

Build a website, get a Facebook / Twitter page, have marketing material ready that you can send to people the moment they get in touch, reach out to blogs and websites ask them to write about you, and try to engage with people who are interested in your app as much as possible (on your personal behalf and on that of the company).

I received lots of questions on Product Hunt which I tried to answer as soon as possible. Likewise for Facebook, Twitter, and email. Ultimately, I think a lot of the attention came from the app being a generally interesting idea to the audience—this was particularly convenient on Product Hunt as you can imagine most of the people upvoting are designers/engineers/PMs/etc. working in tech.

My app is made for that audience which helped a lot. Knowing your audience and where to connect with them would be super important for other apps, especially outside of the tech space—for example, you could imagine posting within a topic related subreddit to reach your audience. I don't think I did anything out of the ordinary, but I hope some of what I rambled about was helpful!

Reilly Sweetland – FollowUpThen

To quote David Packard (HP Co-founder), "*Marketing is too important to be left to the marketing department*."

The first versions of FollowUpThen were built with this in mind. We thought that if enough people used the "cc" option (which reminds both the sender and recipient) we could get a viral loop – resulting in that elusive arcing, exponential growth curve. That would have bene amazing. But no. That didn't really work.

Instead we stumbled on another, much more useful maxim that seemed to work out pretty well: Build something people want (Paul Graham maxim).

Now "people" is a pretty broad term – when I tell "people" (random acquaintances) about FollowUpThen, it only clicks with maybe one out of 20…if that. But for the right person, when it clicks, it really clicks. So this "core user" of ours is somewhat rare, but over time, we have started collecting these passionate users, and they are the core of our growth.

The other part of it is that we made our free plan generous enough to be worth sharing. People who share it really feel like they are helping their friends – it's a useful service with a generous free tier. This is a double-edged sword of course, but I can't deny that it's played a role in people sharing the service.

Conrado Lamas (PR/Comms) – MailTrack.io

In terms of promoting our product, our biggest mistake was to overwork social media in an early stage of our product. I think we were right when we decided to expand our work to other areas of Communication after we've reached our objectives months in advance, but now it's clear to me that we should have given much more emphasis to Content Marketing than to the social media channels themselves.

It doesn't mean we won't (or don't) take care of them. It's just that social media is the result of a more consistent work, that at least in our case has been maturing month after month. Social media will be an important user acquisition channel in the future, so the best we can do now — and we should have started before — is to make a very solid work with the our original content on our blog and for public relations, something that will even reinforce the power of social media in the long run.

Our main strategy so far has been on PR and it's been working great. You can check out a case study on what we've been doing here.

Alex Turnbull – Groove

Our blog has easily been the biggest driver of our growth over the last 18 months. Content marketing is probably the most cost-effective way to win online right now, as long as you do it strategically:

1. Deeply understand your audience, what their biggest challenges are and what they search for.
2. Invest the time into writing the very best content of its kind on the web.
3. Spend far, far, far more time promoting than you spend on writing. Build an influencer outreach strategy, guest blog and get your name out there.

The returns from consistently executing on this strategy will compound over time, and before you know it you'll have more traffic than you thought possible.