Will It Fly?

How to Test Your Next Business Idea
So You Don't Waste Your Time and Money

Introduction Chapter

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Grounded

When my son Keoni (kay-oh-nee) turned 3, I couldn't wait any longer. It was time for me to teach him something that my dad passed on to me when I was a kid—a skill that I've gratefully kept with me all of these years. Like riding a bike, it's something you never forget once you learn how to do.

I grabbed a sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper, turned to my son and said, "Do you want to make a paper airplane?"

I remember throwing paper planes around the house with my dad when I was growing up. There must be over 1,000 decommissioned planes in my personal history of paper airplane making. All kinds too. Pointy planes, fat planes, huge ones, tiny ones, planes that flew straight, and others that did loops in mid-air.

And here I was, about to give my own son his first glorious taste of printer-paper-made aerodynamics.

"Daddy, how can you make a piece of paper fly?" he asked.

"Well bud," I replied, "you just have to fold it a certain way. Watch…"

I put a crease down the middle of the page, folded the top corners in so they met and then folded the wings. As I held the finished glider with my right hand, I could see my son's eyes light up with excitement.

I pulled my arm back ready to throw and said, "You ready!?"

"Ready!"

"Okay here we go! Taking off in 10…9…8…"

I learned to stretch moments like this as long as humanly possible. My dad taught me that one too.

"7…6…5…" Keoni was trembling. He couldn't wait any longer!

"4…3…2…1¾…1½…1…0! Liftoff!"

As soon as zero arrived, I launched the plane across the living room and we both watched it sail smoothly over the vast ocean of carpet until it crashed into the window on the other end of the room and landed on the sill behind the couch.

It was a pretty epic flight if I do say so myself.

"WHOAAAAAAA!" my son yelled. "I want to make one! I want to make one!"

Exactly the reaction I was hoping for.

I grabbed another sheet of printer paper and handed it to my son, but before I could give him any instruction he was off to the races, folding and creasing like his life depended on it.

After about 30 seconds he was finished and proudly displayed his new creation in both of his hands to me. I had to lean in to get a closer look because what I was staring at looked nothing like an airplane. It looked more like that piece of paper you forgot you had at the bottom of your backpack from last semester.

I was surprised at which direction he thought was the front, but not surprised that after he threw the contraption, it didn't fly at all. It only landed a couple of feet in front of him.

He picked it up to try again and threw it even harder this time. It had the exact same result: grounded.

Clearly frustrated, he turned toward me and said, "I don't like paper airplanes," and he disappeared into the other room to go back to playing with his brand new Batman figurine.

Wings

Why do you think my son gave up so quickly?

Sure, he was only 3 years old, and many children at that age don't have much patience and react quickly to circumstances like this. When trying something new, if met with failure the activity becomes a sort of threat to children, which is why the typical and immediate reaction is to go back to something familiar that makes them feel comfortable again. That's why security blankets and "binkies" exist, and why Batman would never be lonely in our home.

So what was a father to do? I couldn't just let my son's paper plane making career end like that! I recruited Keoni back for a second go-around. Like I always do when he's met with a challenge, I try to get him to figure out the answers on his own by asking a lot of questions.

"Keoni," I said, "Why do you think your plane didn't fly like mine?"

"Your plane is better," he said.

"What about my plane was better?"

"I don't know." he replied.

I grabbed my plane from behind the couch and held it in front of him. "What do you see on my plane that you think makes it fly?"

"Wings?"

"Wings! That's right!" I brought the plane closer to him. "How many wings can you count?"

He pointed and counted, "One. Two."

"Two wings. Right again! Have you ever made wings before?" I asked.

"No."

"Well then of course your plane didn't fly, you never learned how to make wings yet! Can I show you how to make wings so your plane can fly too?"

He nodded yes.

I retrieved two more pieces of fresh printer paper and laid them flat on the coffee table.

"Follow what I do," I instructed.

Together, step-by-step, we folded our planes and after a few minutes (and with a little bit of help from daddy with some of the more complicated folds), we were ready for liftoff. His plane was a little rough around the edges, but it was still a vast improvement over version 1.0.

"You ready?" I asked him.

He looked at me and asked, "Is it really gonna fly?"

I was pretty confident it would. I mean, the simple dart design was almost foolproof and in my experience had lots of room for error, but how could I know for sure? What if I said yes and then it didn't? This was a crucial moment, so I chose my words wisely:

"You did your best to give it everything it needs to fly. You've given it a chance, and now all we can do is throw it and see what happens."

He pulled his arm back, ready to throw.

"Nice and easy," I said. "A little higher."

He paused for few seconds to make some final and seemingly important adjustments, and then all of a sudden, without any countdown, he launched his arm forward. The plane went airborne. It glided across the room until it crash landed into the front of the couch a few seconds later.

It flew.

And the celebration was massive! High-fives all around as he screamed at the top of his lungs and jumped up and down like he had just won the lottery, but I knew this wasn't due to any sort of luck. It was because he finally slowed down and took some time to give his piece of paper the necessary folds it needed to fly.

Your Upcoming Flight

If you're reading this book, you're somebody who is very close to launching a project of your own and making it fly too. I'm excited for you because you aren't just making paper airplanes, you're thinking of something much bigger that could change your life and the lives of others.

I'm here to help you engineer its wings.

I've launched several successful businesses in the past, starting in 2008 with a website dedicated to helping people pass the LEED exam, which is an exam in the architecture industry related to environmentally-friendly green building practices. It might not sound that exciting to you, but the resource I created has helped tens of thousands of people pass their exam, and it changed my life forever too.

You see, I used to be an aspiring architect. I graduated from UC Berkeley in 2005 with a B.A. in Architecture and landed a dream job immediately after college, working as a drafter in a well-known architecture firm in the Bay Area. I was ready to dedicate the rest of my life to architecture and was doing all I could to prove it. I became the youngest person in the firm to get promoted to Job Captain and everything was going according to plan—until it wasn't.

In June of 2008, I was told I was going to be let go. After some mild depression and a move back home with my parents, I ended up turning my knowledge about an incredibly difficult exam that I took (the LEED exam) into an online business selling study

guides, classes, and practice exams for this test. Within a year, GreenExamAcademy.com generated more than $200,000 in sales. Since then, I've built several other businesses and have earned a total of more than $3.5 million online.

In my book, *Let Go*, I share the entire story about my transition from being laid off to becoming an entrepreneur. If you'd like to download it for free, just visit [web url here].

Today, I can't even imagine what life would be like had I never been laid off and started my own business. The freedom that comes with being your own boss and having full control over your future is amazing, but for me it's not about the money or owning fancy cars (we have a Toyota Sienna—also known as a Soccer Mom van). It's not about sitting at the beach all day sipping pina coladas. I work, and when I do, I work smart, but I have something else in my life that's more motivating than anything else: my family. Everything I do is so that I can be more present with them.

I have a beautiful wife, April, and two amazing kids, Keoni and Kailani, and I count my blessings each and every day I have with them. I go with April to bring Keoni to school and pick him up each day. I go to Kai's dance class. I get to have lunch with April at home. All of these things I love to do, but I couldn't see myself having the same opportunity in my previous profession.

Because you're reading this book, I know you have dreams and aspirations too. You have a *why* that's driving you to figure out how to make all it happen. You can visualize what it might be like on the other end, but the runway isn't very clear.

And that's why I wrote this book, to help you not only build your wings, but also visualize your flight path before you take off. Perhaps you're overwhelmed from all of the information out there and don't know what your next steps should be, or maybe you fear wasting your time and money building something that might not work out for you. Maybe it's both.

Whatever the case may be, I'm here to stop you from rushing into things, because as Joel Barker says, "Speed is only useful if you're running in the right direction."

First, I want to make sure you're clear for takeoff.

Does your idea have merit? Will it succeed in the market you're trying to serve, or will it just be a waste of time and resources? Is it a good idea for you?

In other words, *will it fly*?

This book is here to help you find out.

My Son's Favorite TV Show and What it Taught Me About Confidence

Ever since Keoni's first successful flight, he's created at least 100 other paper airplanes. I'm proud to see him try new designs and not worry about failure anymore. His planes don't always fly as expected, but he's learned that failing is a part of the process of building cool stuff, and I've shifted his thinking from, "I can't," to, "I haven't figured it out yet."

He's twice as old now, and it's clear to my wife and me that he's definitely adopted an engineer's mindset. He's always trying to understand how things work, and if you let him, he'll ask questions for days about things he doesn't understand until he gets it. In fact, his favorite shows to watch on TV are *How it's Made*, and *MythBusters*.

I've especially enjoyed watching *MythBusters* with him. It's a show that has aired on the Discovery Channel for over 10 years (we watch it on Hulu) that uses science to put popular myths to the test to either confirm or completely bust them.

For example, one episode that aired in 2004 tested the myth that a goldfish's memory lasts only three seconds. This myth was busted when the hosts Jamie Hyneman and Alex Savage were able to train a goldfish to recognize color patterns and complete an underwater obstacle course, even a month after it was initially taught.

Other experiments go much bigger, like the myth that a person can reduce their chance of being attacked by a shark by playing dead (confirmed), or that a water heater, if poorly installed, could explode and shoot through the roof of a house like a rocket (also confirmed). And then there are the super practical experiments, like the myth that talking to someone on the phone "hands-free" while driving is safer than actually holding the phone in your hand (totally busted), or that seasickness can be cured by taking a ginger pill (confirmed).

The one thing I've learned from watching almost every episode of *MythBusters* is that experimentation and testing are vital in revealing the truth behind what people say versus what actually is. Through scientific methodology, one can collect real data that either supports or contradicts these myths. Confidence comes with obtaining proof.

Your ideas are sort of like these myths—maybe they'll work, maybe they won't, but through testing and experimentation, just like on *Mythbusters*, we can validate these ideas and collect data to find out if they are ones worth moving forward with.

Let's Talk About Your Ideas

You have an idea, or maybe a thousand. They could be new, or ones you've thought about for years. It could be a couple of words on the back of a napkin, or perhaps you've already crushed through dozens of spiral notebooks detailing exactly how it's all going to work and what it looks like.

When entrepreneurs get ideas, we become possessed by them. They take up most of our brainspace and it doesn't matter what we're doing–we could be taking a shower, driving, or even sleeping–out of nowhere our ideas can suddenly energize us like a bolt of lightning.

At the same time, it's much easier to keep ideas as ideas, because there is little consequence in imagining. Frank Lloyd Wright, a famous architect said that "*an idea is salvation by imagination.*" Good ideas are common, but what's uncommon are those who are willing to take action and execute those ideas.

Here are some reasons why one might just sit on an idea without taking action. See if any of the following resonates with you:

- You don't know where to start or what steps are required to turn that idea into a reality.
- You have a lot of ideas to choose from and you don't want to choose the wrong one.
- Your fear of failure outweighs your fear of not getting started.
- You're not sure if you're qualified.
- You don't want to let others down.
- You've discovered others who have executed a similar idea.
- You don't have the resources required to get started.
- You're just not sure if it's going to work.

It doesn't matter how many of the above you connected with, from this point forward you must make a commitment to take action. I can't predict everything that will happen in the future, but as John F. Kennedy once said, "*There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction.*" In other words, a sure-fire way to predict the future is to do nothing–to take no action at all. When you do nothing, you get nothing.

The following pages of this book are here to help you learn how to know whether or not that idea of yours is worth fighting for. It's the stuff in the middle that everyone else leaves out between getting an idea and starting to build it. You are going to spend a lot of time and effort on whatever it is you choose to do, so it's wise to invest a little bit of time upfront to put your idea through a series of litmus tests and thought experiments to give it the best chance of succeeding, or quickly get rid of it if it fails to pass.

This book is made up of a series of examinations. Not scary ones like you would take in school where your skills are put to the test, and depending on how well you performed that day you are either smiling when you get your grade back, or putting your head down in shame. No.

You cannot fail these tests, because it's not you who is being tested. It is your ideas. No matter what the outcome of the tests are, it's always going to be a win for you. Either way, you'll have a clear indication of what to do next: go forth and conquer, or pull your soldiers back and regroup to try again on a different battlefield. If you go through the book and discover that your idea isn't actually a good one, you will have saved

yourself a ton of time and money. If by the end of this you decide you've found something that works, you're going to be completely motivated to push forward with it, because you will have no more excuses.

Of course, in order for a business to become successful, it takes more than just coming up with the right idea. There's the execution of it, the design, the marketing, the copywriting, the offers, etc.− but obviously if the idea isn't good, then none of those things will help. That's why it's insane to me that most people who teach business and entrepreneurship skip over this part.

Although I'm writing this book for you, I'm writing it with my younger self in mind too.

Over the years, even though I've created successful businesses, I've had a number of complete failures too. When I look back and carefully examine each of these failures, it always comes down to one of two reasons:

1. Making money was more important to me than serving people.
2. I rushed into it.

Number one is a given. You just don't make money if you don't care about people first. I've never been rewarded by putting cash over caring, and I've since learned that your earnings become a byproduct of how well you serve your audience.

And number two? Well−getting excited about something and rushing into it isn't a behavior that only children possess−it's common at all ages, and especially in those of us who embody the entrepreneurial spirit. Unfortunately, we don't just grow out of this nature−we have to learn our way out of it. I used to rush into things because I didn't want to waste time, but because of that I wasted even more time, and lost a lot of money in the process too.

In 2010, I spent over $15,000 building software that never made it to market. I hired a developer way too early in the process, even before my idea was fully fleshed out. The consequences were a ton of miscommunication, wasted money, lots of stress and software that didn't even deserve a "good try." One of many expensive lessons learned, and that's okay.

I've learned that failure is a part of the process of becoming a successful entrepreneur. Yes, we have to pull the trigger or "just ship" as we often hear, but at the same time it's common sense that a little bit of time up front to validate an idea can make all the difference in the world. I'm here to help you fold your piece of paper so it has wings.

Can you imagine picking an idea and working on it for years, only to have a few people finally tell you the truth about it and turn on the lights? How depressing and demotivating would that be? This book is here to be that truth for you with the idea you have in mind. It's here to stop you from saying to yourself down the road, "I wish I would have known..."

How This Book is Structured

This book is divided into 5 sections, each of which is here to help guide you through the validation of your next business idea. This is your flight plan, and where we're going to make sure that conditions are ideal for a successful launch.

Section 1 is **Mission Design**, and it's the most important phase of this book which is why we're starting with it first. Through a series of thought-experiments, we'll make sure your target idea aligns with and supports your target goals.

NASA has never launched a mission just because it "sounded like a good idea," and neither should you. There's a very specific purpose behind each and every launch, and a lot of time is spent planning and considering how each newly proposed idea fits into the overall plan, purpose and mission. Although you're not flying to the Moon or to Mars, you will be putting a lot of time, effort and potentially money into what you're about to do, and if you discover that your business idea does not fit into your overall mission, then it's very easy to make a decision to not move forward with it.

A successful entrepreneur is one who is both successful in business *and* in life. Too often, I come across successful business owners who are still unhappy because their business decisions have not supported the life that they want. The self-examining you'll do in this section will help you locate early warning signs so this does not happen.

In Section 2, we'll be going into the **Development Lab** to uncover important details about your target idea that you haven't even thought about yet. No matter how far along you are, we need to explore these thoughts in your brain—organize them into something cohesive and shareable.

We need to define it.

Through the exercises in this section, you'll begin to see what it might look like, how it will feel and what about it makes it unique. Afterwards, you'll have a lot more clarity on what it is you're really getting into, and therefore have a better understanding of what direction to take from there.

Section 3 is your **Systems Check and Analysis**. This is where you're going to assess the current conditions of the market that you're getting into so that you can see what you're up against.

Although you might think that you're "late to the party," the fact is that you have a great advantage over everyone else who is already there. You get to see how your target market is being served from a higher perspective, and like a general overlooking the battle from the top of a hill, you can see what's missing or what opportunities exist and from there, favorably position yourself to win.

We'll be keeping track of the various locations where your target market resides, we'll discover the top players in the niche and figure out what products and services are already available to them. We'll also conduct a few of exercises to find out the true pains

and struggles they're going through, so you can come in and serve them better than they already are.

A lot of people skip this part of the process and try to wedge their way into a space they know anything about. Your Systems Check and Analysis will give you a huge advantage, even from day one, so you can properly enter a space with confidence.

In Section 4, you're going to enter the **Flight Simulator** where you will be combining everything you've learned through your research together to actually validate and test your idea with a small segment of your target market.

The problem that a lot of startups and entrepreneurs run into, even when they do the proper research, is that they don't validate the research through real-life testing with real-life customers. To really know if this is going to work, you need more than just *interest*, you need a transaction, and for many business models that transaction means literally collecting payments from your prospective customers, even before you build out your product or start your service.

It might seem ludicrous to think that you can get paid for something you haven't even created yet, but when you can understand your target market well enough, truly define the problems they're going through and become the point person who will provide that solution for them, it becomes a completely real opportunity.

In addition to defining the four pillars of product validation, you'll see an index of various business model validation sequences and case studies, featuring several business owners across different niches who have successfully proven their idea before building it out. Depending on which business model best suits you and your target idea, you can get inspired and follow the trail that these other entrepreneurs have already blazed for you.

And lastly, in Section 5, **All Systems Go**, we're going to do some final analysis to make sure this is an idea you're ready to move forward with. In addition to that, you'll get some helpful insight on your next moves, and how you can take a lot of the information you've uncovered during your research in this book forward with you, so you know exactly what your next steps are.

And before we get going, I'd just like to say thank you. Not just for reading this book, but for being smart about your approach with your business. The world needs you. It needs your energy and what you have to offer, so let's work together to make sure you dedicate that time and energy to something that matters—both to the world, and to you.

Credits and Contact Information

Pat's *Will It Fly?* book campaign is proudly produced by the [Winning Edits](#) team. Please direct any questions about the book or opportunities related to the book to the following Winning Edits folks:

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We're excited to hear from you! And thanks in advance for supporting Pat's book launch.