THE AI-NATIVE PLAYBOOKS · Nº 5

How to Sell Before You Build

The Mafia Offer: designing an offer the right customer can't refuse, and counting who actually commits

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CHAPTER 1

An offer they can't refuse

A great interview tells you a problem is real. An offer is how you find out anyone will pay to solve it.

CHAPTER 1

An offer they can't refuse

You've talked to customers. You know the problem is real, you've heard the same Customer Forces Story three times, and you're tempted to start building. Don't — not yet. A validated problem tells you something is worth solving. It doesn't tell you anyone will *pay* you to solve it. The only thing that tells you that is an offer, made to a real person, who gives something up to say yes.

A **Mafia Offer** is an offer your customer can't refuse — not because you strong-armed them, but because you understand them so well you come across as a mind-reader. It nails their top problem, shows a believable way out, and gives them a clear way to start. When the insight underneath it is real, conversion rates of 60–80% are not unusual. When it's a template stuffed with guesses, it converts like every other pitch. The offer doesn't create the understanding; it spends it.

> **Demo-Sell-Build, in that order.** The old reflex is Build-Sell: spend months building, then go find out if anyone wants it. A Mafia Offer flips it. You build an *offer*, not a product — demo it, sell it, and only then build the thing you already sold. It's the fastest honest way to validate demand.

A Mafia Offer has three parts, and you already gathered the raw material for each:

1. **A promise** — your unique value proposition, aimed at the one problem that matters most.
2. **A demo** — the smallest possible showing of *how* you deliver on the promise.
3. **A call to action** — the price, the guarantee, and the clear next step.

The promise comes from what *pulled* them. The demo comes from what you can actually deliver. The price comes from the alternative they're already paying for. This playbook walks all three — **design** the offer, **pitch** it in four acts, **demo** it without building it, **run** the pitches, and **learn** from each one — and shows where LEANSpark does the assembly so your energy goes into the conversation.

Check you've earned the offer

The job: confirm the problem is validated and pull the offer's raw material from your interviews.

IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

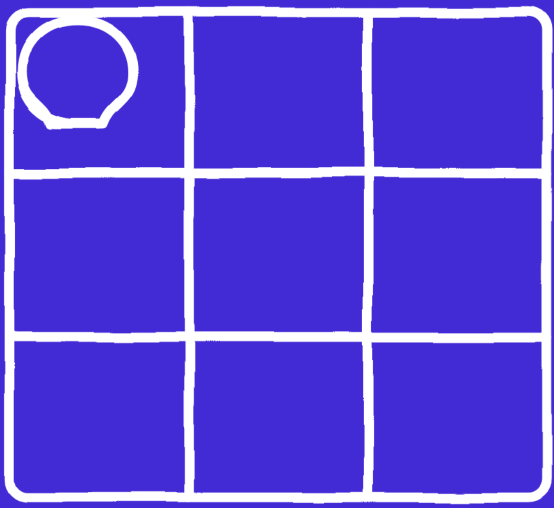
Am I ready to make an offer?

Checks your discovery evidence — how many Customer Forces Stories you have, whether the same top problem repeats across them, whether Pull is captured in the customer's words and a real paid alternative is named — then extracts the three raw materials: the promise, the smallest demo, and the price anchor.

RETURNS A ready / not-yet read with the gap named — and, if ready, the promise line, demo scope, and price anchor to carry into Chapter 2.

VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Read `business_model://current` and my recent interviews. Tell me if my discovery is strong enough to make an offer — same top problem in three or more stories, Pull in their words, a real paid alternative named. If yes, extract the promise, the smallest demo, and the price anchor. If not, name exactly what's missing."



CHAPTER 2

Design the offer

Maximize the dream and the proof; minimize the time and the effort. Anchor the price to what they already pay.

CHAPTER 2

Design the offer

A good offer is engineered, not improvised. The lever is the **value equation:** a customer feels value when the dream outcome and their belief they'll reach it are high, and the time and effort to get there are low.

> **The value equation.** Value rises when you increase the **dream outcome** and the **perceived likelihood** of reaching it, and decrease the **time to value** and the **effort** required. Every part of your offer pushes one of those four dials. If the offer feels weak, one dial is wrong.

You don't have to invent the dials — they're sitting in your interviews. The four customer forces map straight onto the offer:

— **Push** (what was broken) → name the problem and quantify the cost of staying. "Three hours a week on copy-paste is 150 hours a year."

— **Pull** (what they wanted) → state the dream outcome in their words.

— **Friction / anxiety** (what they feared) → answer it with a guarantee. "Worried the migration fails? We'll move your data ourselves, or your money back."

— **Inertia** (the comfortable habit) → design the switch to cost them almost nothing.

Anchor the price to the real alternative

Price is not a number you pick — it's a comparison you set. Before you name a price, name what they spend today on the existing alternative, and what that gets them. Then position yours against it. The customer should hear the price *after* they've felt the value, and measure it against a number you chose.

> **Make it a no-brainer.** "Most people spend $X on the old way and still get the old outcome. We've shown you how to get a better one — so we priced this not at $X, but at *this*." Pair the anchor with risk reversal: concierge onboarding, an easy out, a guarantee. You're not discounting; you're removing the reason to say no.

> **New to this? Each card gives you two ways to run it.** Type the **In LEANSpark** line into the chat, or use the **Via MCP** prompt inside your own AI assistant. LEANSpark does the drafting and the scoring; the pitch to a real person stays yours.

Draft and pressure-test your offer

The job: turn validated forces into an offer that compels a commitment.

IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

Build my offer

Drafts your four-act Mafia Offer from the canvas and your interview forces — promise, demo, price anchored to the real alternative, and ask — scores it on the value equation, and surfaces the objections you'll hear before a real prospect raises them.

RETURNS A drafted Mafia Offer — UVP, demo outline, price anchor, and ask — with the likely objections and how to disarm each. You take it to a real prospect.

VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Read `offer://current` and `competitive://current` to anchor the price to the existing alternative. Draft a Mafia Offer pitch in four acts, then list the three most likely objections and how to disarm each before it's raised."

CHAPTER 3

The four-act pitch

Reset their reference point so the old way feels like a loss — then make the new way the obvious way back.

CHAPTER 3

The four-act pitch

A Mafia Offer is delivered as a story in four acts. The first two do the real work: they take a prospect who walked in feeling fine about how they do things today and reset that reference point, so the status quo starts to feel like a loss. Only then does the demo land with full force.

1. **Context** — *how they do it today.* Name the old way and the change in the world that's breaking it. "The old way worked in the old world. It doesn't in this one."
2. **Confrontation** — *why the old way can't keep up.* Quantify what it's costing them. Make the pain concrete and present. This is where they decide they have a problem.
3. **Resolution** — *the demo.* Show, in the smallest way possible, how the new way gets the job done. Then stop and let them react.
4. **Call to action** — *the offer.* Anchor the price, reverse the risk, and give one clear next step.

> **Why the setup isn't filler.** We feel a loss about twice as hard as we feel an equal gain. So "our product is better" will always feel weaker than the friction of switching. Acts 1 and 2 exist to reset the reference point: by naming what's changed and what it's costing, you make staying put feel like the risky move. When Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad, he first spent minutes establishing the netbook as the alternative — and a bad one — so that $499 against a $999 anchor felt not like a deal, but like an obvious one.

You are not the hero

The pitch is a hero's journey, and the hero is the *customer* — the struggling protagonist who's about to transform. The villain is the existing alternative you're displacing. You are the guide who hands over a gift: your product. Founders who cast themselves as the hero talk about their company, their features, their journey. The prospect tunes out. Make them the hero of their own story and you have their attention.

Name the "why now." Every switch needs urgency. Tie your Act 1 to a real change — a new technology, a regulation, a market shift, a deadline they're already facing. The most powerful pitches name a *macro* trigger: Salesforce didn't sell their software, they declared "the end of software" and rode the movement. Tease the opportunity and name what's at stake if they ignore it.

Write the four-act script

The job: turn the offer into a speakable script where the customer is the hero.

IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

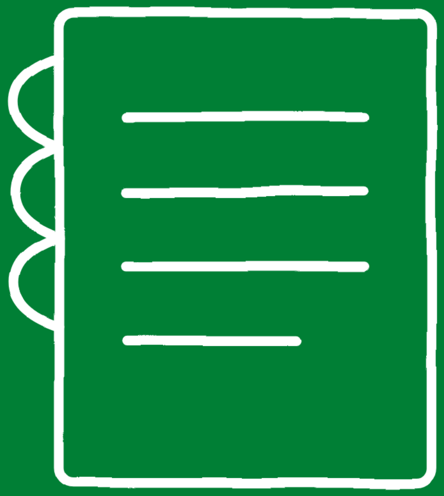
Write my pitch script

Drafts the four acts from your offer and interview evidence — Context (the change breaking the old way), Confrontation (what staying costs them, quantified), Resolution (the demo beat), Call to action (anchor, risk reversal, one next step) — with the why-now trigger named and you cast as the guide, never the hero.

RETURNS A speakable act-by-act script with the reference-point reset up front and one clear ask at the end. You rehearse it aloud before any prospect hears it.

VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Read `offer://current` and `business_model://current`. Write my four-act Mafia Offer pitch script — context, confrontation, demo beat, ask — quantifying the cost of the old way from my interview evidence, naming a real why-now trigger, and keeping the customer the hero throughout."



CHAPTER 4

The demo

Show the smallest thing that makes the sale. You don't need a working product — you need a believable one.

CHAPTER 4

The demo

The most common reason founders delay pitching is they think they need a working product first. They don't. The whole point of Demo-Sell-Build is that the demo comes *before* the build. Your job in Act 3 is to show the smallest thing that resolves the problem you just sharpened — not to teach them the product.

> **Low fidelity beats high fidelity.** A demo doesn't have to work. It has to be believable. Screenshots, mockups, a click-through, sometimes just a vivid verbal walkthrough — any of these can carry the story. A polished, fully-working demo often *hurts*: it invites questions about edge cases and turns the sale into a training session. Show how you get the job done better, and hold the rest back.

The shape that works is **FAVORITE: F**rame the pain you established in Act 2, **V**isualize the before-and-after, **R**eveal the workflow in three to five steps (no more), **I**mplant the value by tying it to their number, and **E**licit a response — stop and check whether they're sold before you go anywhere near price.

Design the smallest viable demo

The job: design the smallest thing you can show to make the sale.

IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

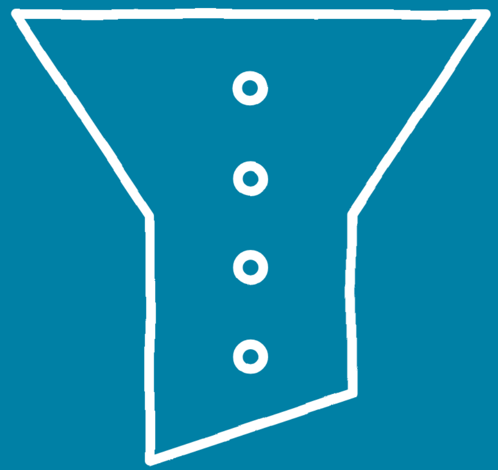
Design my demo

Designs the smallest viable demo that resolves the root cause from your pitch — the format, the three-to-five-step flow, what to deliberately hold back, and a prep checklist — so you can build it from mockups or words, not a working product.

RETURNS A demo design you can deliver in under a minute, with a hold-back list so you don't over-show. You record what actually resonates when you run it.

VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Read `offer://current` and `business_model://current`. Design the smallest viable demo (use the FAVORITE shape) that proves the core promise in under a minute. List what to show, and what to hold back."



CHAPTER 5

Run the pitches

A handful of real commitments beats a hundred 'that's interesting's. Pitch, count, and watch for the fear that kills the deal.

CHAPTER 5

Run the pitches

Now you take the offer to real people. This is an experiment, not a launch — so treat it like one. The bar to aim for: at least **ten pitches**, a **60%+ conversion rate**, and at least one commitment backed by money or a deposit. Pitch a mix of warm prospects who fit your early-adopter profile, a few cold ones to test your insights with fresh eyes, and a new channel or two so you start building a repeatable way to find customers.

A commitment is only evidence if it costs something. Escalate the ask up the ladder, and weigh each "yes" by what it cost:

> **The commitment ladder.** A *verbal* yes is the floor. An *email* confirmation is more. A *deposit* is real money on the table. A *signed* agreement is real reputation. *Paid* in full is the top rung. "That's really interesting" is not on the ladder at all — it costs nothing and means nothing.

The fear that actually kills the deal

When deals go cold, founders assume the problem wasn't big enough. Sometimes. But analysis of millions of sales conversations found a bigger killer: **fear of messing up** beats fear of missing out. The prospect believes the problem is real and your solution is better — and stalls anyway, because if the switch goes wrong, *their* reputation, *their* job, *their* standing is what suffers.

> **Shrink the leap.** You beat fear of messing up by making the first step small and safe: a 90-day pilot instead of a contract, one recommended path instead of a menu, concierge onboarding so they're never alone, a real guarantee, and a frank acknowledgment of what's personally at stake for them. Lower the mountain and they'll take the step.

Plan outreach and track every commitment

The job: pitch the right people and count what they actually give up.

IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

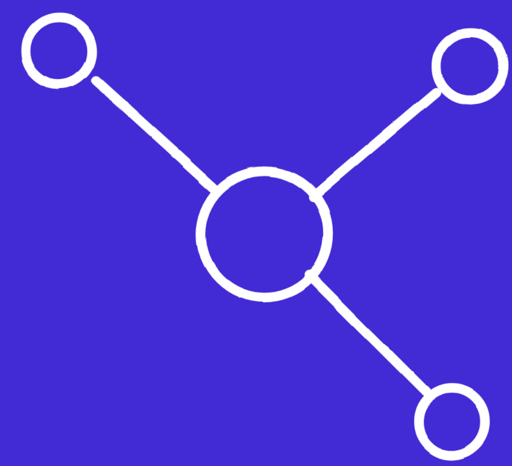
Help me plan my pitches

Builds a prospect outreach plan across warm, cold, and new channels, then tracks every pitch — the outcome and the commitment, from verbal to deposit to signed to paid — so "interested" and "committed" never blur, and your live conversion rate is always against the 60% bar.

RETURNS A prospect list and outreach plan, plus a running pitch tracker with your real conversion rate. You make the pitches; LEANSpark keeps the score.

VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Read `offer://current` and `segments://list`. Build a prospect outreach plan by channel for my early adopters, and draft a short, non-salesy message to book each pitch."



CHAPTER 6

Learn, then decide

Score the conversation, qualify the prospect, and let the numbers — not your hopes — call persevere, optimize, or pivot.

CHAPTER 6

Learn, then decide

Every pitch is a test of the insights underneath it, so every pitch should teach you something. If you have permission, record them. After each one, LEANSpark transcribes the recording and scores the *conversation* against the four acts — which beats you hit, which you missed, how you handled the objections, and whether the prospect actually qualifies as an early adopter.

> **It scores the conversation, not your stage presence.** The analysis reads the transcript — what was said, where the demo over-reached, which objection went unanswered, whether they showed the marks of a real early adopter. It won't grade your tone or pacing. That's fine: the pitch lives or dies on the *insights and the structure*, and that's exactly what it reads.

What it's checking for, prospect by prospect: a real switching trigger, an existing alternative they already pay for, a measurable cost, a clear desired outcome, the authority to buy, and a reason to start soon. A "no" from someone who was never an early adopter teaches you nothing about the offer. A "no" from someone who fits tells you the offer needs work.

Persevere, optimize, or pivot

Once you've logged enough pitches, the numbers make the call — not your hopes:

— **Ten-plus pitches, 60%+ conversion** → you've reached Problem/Solution Fit. Move to optimizing the customer factory.

— **Ten-plus pitches, under 60%** → something is off. Find the constraint — the offer, the demo, the targeting — refine it, and run it again. If it's the problem itself, pivot.

— **Fewer than ten** → keep pitching. You don't have enough signal yet.

Score the pitch and read the verdict

The job: turn each recording into a sharper next pitch and an honest decision.

▸ IN LEANSPARK — YOU TYPE

Help me improve my pitch

Transcribes the recording and scores the conversation against the four acts — beats hit and missed, objection handling, and whether the prospect qualifies — then, once you've logged enough, reads the conversion data as persevere, optimize, or pivot.

RETURNS An act-by-act score, the moments you lost them, the objections to handle better, and a PERSEVERE / OPTIMIZE / PIVOT call backed by your real numbers.

▸ VIA MCP — PROMPT ANY AGENT

"Here's my pitch transcript: [paste]. Score it against the mafia-offer four acts — context, confrontation, demo, ask — flag the beats I missed and where I lost them, and draft tighter responses to the two objections I handled worst."

CHAPTER 7

Resources

Run your offer on LEANSpark. Go deeper on the method.

CHAPTER 7

Resources

Run your offer on LEANSpark

- **Draft the offer** — the Mafia Offer pitch generator builds your four-act pitch from the canvas and your interview forces, scored on the value equation, with the objections you'll face.
- **Design the demo** — the demo designer produces the smallest viable demo (FAVORITE), with a hold-back list, so you sell before you build.
- **Run the experiment** — the Mafia Offer Delivery sprint runs the whole 14-day cycle: prepare, pitch, log outcomes, and read the traction decision.
- **Track commitments** — every pitch and prospect is tracked from first contact to paid, so your conversion rate and commitment evidence are always live.
- **Score the conversation** — upload a pitch recording and get an act-by-act read of what landed and what to tighten. *(The conversational Campaign Designer, which sequences discovery → offer → optimization as one guided 90-day plan, is rolling out now.)*

Make your first offer at leanspark.ai.

Go deeper on the method

- **How to Talk to Customers** (No. 3 in this series) — the discovery that earns the insights a Mafia Offer spends.
- *Running Lean* and **The AI-Native Founder's Playbook** (No. 1) — where Offer Delivery sits in the journey from idea to traction.
- The Demand Validation Playbook and the **Mafia Offer Delivery Sprint** — the full course track behind this playbook.

The offer at a glance

STEP	WHAT YOU'RE DOING
Design	Engineer the value equation; anchor the price to the real alternative.
Pitch	Four acts: reset the reference point, demo, then the offer. You're the guide, not the hero.
Demo	Show the smallest believable thing. Demo-Sell-Build, not Build-Sell.
Run	Ten-plus pitches; escalate the ask; beat the fear of messing up.
Decide	60%+ converts → persevere. Below → optimize or pivot. The commitment is the evidence.

LEANSpark

How to Sell Before You Build is part of The AI-Native Playbooks, a series from LEANSTACK / Ash Maurya. LEANSpark turns your pitches into commitments.