



This guide provides startup founders with a **step-by-step framework to create an investor-ready pitch deck**. It covers essential slides, from Title and Ambition to Financials and Execution Plan, while highlighting best practices for **structure, content, and consistency**. The guide also includes practical tips on **aligning value propositions, market insights, and team strengths**, helping startup founders clearly communicate their vision, opportunity, and growth potential to investors.

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2. TERMINOLOGY

Bottom-up Forecast - A realistic financial projection built from detailed, operational data such as customer counts or pricing.

Business Model - The structure showing how a company creates, delivers, and captures value.

Call for Action (CTA) - The final slide that clearly outlines next steps or investment requests for investors.

Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) - The total expense incurred to acquire one new customer, is part of the Marketing expenses.

COGS (Cost of Goods Sold) - The direct costs of producing a company's products or services.

COR (Cost of Revenue) - The total cost required to generate revenue. Customer acquisition costs are not part of COR. Besides COGS it includes positions like delivery or customer support.

Critical Path - The sequence of essential tasks that determine the minimum time needed to achieve project goals.

CLTV (Customer Lifetime Value) - The total expected gross profit from a single customer over their lifetime.

Execution Plan - A timeline and strategy for achieving milestones and deploying resources effectively.

Financial Model - A structured forecast of a company's financial performance based on assumptions and key metrics.

Go-To-Market (GTM) Plan - The strategy outlining how a product or service will reach and attract target customers.

Growth Strategy - The plan describing how a business will expand its customer base and revenue over time.

Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) - The description of the type of customer most likely to benefit from and purchase the product.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) - Quantifiable measures used to track performance and success.

Liquidity - The availability of liquid assets that allow a business to meet short-term obligations.

Management Team Slide - The slide introducing key members of the startup's leadership and their roles.

Market Assessment - Analysis of potential market size, customer segments, and growth opportunities.

Moats - Competitive advantages that protect a business from competitors, such as patents or trade secrets.

Pain Points - Specific customer problems or unmet needs that require a solution.

Payback Period - The time required to recoup the CAC.

Pitch Deck - A short presentation used to communicate a startup's business idea and investment opportunity.

Problem / Opportunity - The issue or unmet need that the startup's solution aims to address.

Proof of Technology - Demonstration that the underlying technology functions as intended.

Sales Architecture / Channels - The structure and strategy used to sell and distribute the product.

Solution - The product or service offered to solve a customer's problem.

TAM (Total Addressable Market) - The total market demand for a product or service if 100% of the market were captured.

Top-down Forecast - A high-level financial projection starting from total market size and estimating share.

Underlying Magic - The unique technology, insight, or innovation that differentiates the company from competitors.

Unique Selling Proposition (USP) - The distinctive advantage or feature that sets the company apart in the market.

Unit Economics - The direct revenue and cost associated with serving one customer or selling one unit.

Value Inflection Points (VIPs) - Key milestones that significantly increase the company's valuation or traction.

Value Proposition (VP) - The specific value or benefit offered to customers to solve their problems.

3. WHY IS A PITCH DECK NECESSARY?

A **pitch deck** is one of the most essential tools for any startup seeking investment, partnerships, or strategic support. It provides a concise, visual overview of your business, communicating the most important aspects of your idea, market, and team in a compelling narrative.

The primary purpose of a **pitch deck** is not to secure immediate funding, but to **generate interest** and earn a **follow-up meeting** with investors. It acts as a bridge between your concept and potential backers, helping them quickly understand your opportunity and why it is worth their attention.

A well-crafted pitch deck helps you:

- Clarify your business model and value proposition.
- Present data and assumptions in a structured, easy-to-follow format.
- Demonstrate that you understand your customers, competitors, and market dynamics.
- Build investor confidence in your team's ability to execute.

Whether presented live or sent electronically, the deck should **tell a story** that captures both the rationale behind your business and the emotion that drives it. The ultimate goal is to inspire trust and curiosity, not to overwhelm investors with detail.

4. FORM AND LAYOUT OF PITCH DECKS

While the strength of your content ultimately determines your success, the **form and layout** of your pitch deck strongly influence first impressions. A clean, consistent, and visually engaging design communicates professionalism and focus.

Which of these slides tells your story better?

EXECUTED BY A POWERFUL TEAM WITH THE NECESSARY RESOURCES



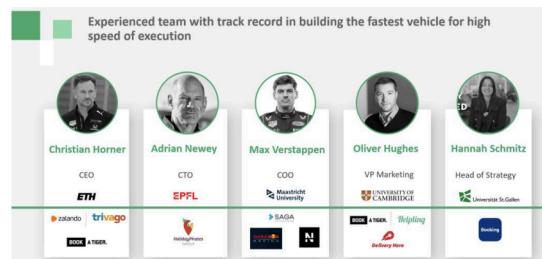
Bill Gates
Co-founder & CEO
Head of Sales



Elon Musk
Co-founder & CTO
Head of Marketing



Jeff Bezos
Co-founder & CFO
Head of Operations



Think of design as a **hygiene factor**. It will not secure investment by itself, but poor design can distract from your message. Use form to **support** your story, not to overshadow it.

Key principles for form and layout:

- **Keep it simple.** Avoid cluttered slides, long sentences, and excessive graphics. Each slide should convey one key idea.
- **Be consistent.** Use the same font family, color scheme, and formatting throughout the deck.
- **Readable fonts.** Use at least 28-30 point font for clarity, especially in live presentations.
- **Visual support.** Use charts, diagrams, and images to illustrate points rather than relying solely on text.
- **Limit length.** Around 14-17 slides is ideal. More slides risk losing investor attention.
- **Prioritize clarity over design flair.** A simple, logical structure will always outperform a flashy but confusing one.

Use this list to understand the key do's and don'ts of pitch deck format and layout every startup founder should know:

Do – crucial points:

- Be precise and concise
- Be consistent
- Use visuals to enhance, clarify your message
- Present a convincing team slide
- Have a clear ask
- Show financials, traction
- Invest time in the design

Don't – avoid by all means:

- Overload with text and digressions
- Have typos, inconsistencies
- Neglect content and design
- Make false claims or unrealistic projections
- Claim you have no competition
- Neglect your revenue model and go-to-market

5. PITCH DECK CONTENT & STRUCTURE

Focus on organizing the content effectively. The following key topics represent the **core structure** every startup should cover. You can dedicate one slide per topic, combine several topics on a single slide, or expand one topic across multiple slides depending on your design and storytelling preferences. The sequence below serves as a general guideline, but you can adjust the order to best fit your narrative. Keep your content concise and focused, as investors value **clarity and impact over excessive detail**.

5.1. THE 'TITLE' SLIDE

This is the first impression investors will have of your startup, so make it count. Include your **company name**, **your own name** and **title**, as well as your and the **funding round** (Seed, Series A, etc.) and **contact details** (address, email, and phone number) to make it easy for investors to reach you. It is also helpful to give a quick sense of what your company does by adding a **tagline** or a **mission statement** that hints at your business focus or value proposition.

5.2. AMBITION

This slide communicates your **vision**, that you have identified an untapped opportunity, recognized its **economic potential**, and are **driven to capture it**. Keep your ambition statement **short and powerful**, often just a few words that encapsulate your big idea or long-term goal. It is typically the slide with the fewest words, but it can be one of the hardest to craft effectively.

5.3. IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILE (ICP) & PAIN POINTS

Define your **ideal customer**, the type of individual or group who experiences a **specific pain or unmet need** that your product or service addresses. Use the ICP to demonstrate the pain point: highlight the challenges, frustrations, or inefficiencies that make them open to a new solution. Include a brief example or story to make the problem tangible, helping investors understand why this issue matters and why the market is ready for your solution. In complex markets, remember that a “customer” can represent a group of stakeholders rather than a single individual.

5.4. SOLUTION

This slide provides a **clear, objective description of your product**. Show what users experience when they interact with it, including features, design, and overall look and feel. If your solution includes multiple components, such as a mobile app, web service, or hardware, be sure to represent all of them. Keep this description **neutral**, without discussing value or customer pain points.

Next, explain **how your product addresses the problem** introduced earlier. Highlight the benefits and real-world impact, showing investors why your solution matters and how it creates value.

5.5. VALUE PROPOSITION

This section explains **how your product addresses customer needs and solves their pain points**. Each value proposition should directly correspond to a specific customer pain point you identified earlier. Avoid highlighting benefits that are not connected to those pains, as investors will be looking for a clear, logical link between the problem and your solution.

5.6. TECHNOLOGY

If your product is based on a new technology, this slide should show that you have validated:

- **Proof of technology** showing that the technology works
- **Product reliability and scalability** demonstrating that the product functions reliably and can be scaled
- **Supply chain management** showing that risks associated with new technology are addressed

Describe the **technology, secret sauce, or unique features** that make your company special. Include a **demo or prototype**, use illustrations, and focus on **benefits rather than features** to help investors engage with your idea. Highlight what makes your product stand out.

5.7. BUSINESS MODEL / VALUE CAPTURING

Explain **how your company creates and captures value**. Show the **flow of money** and ensure the model is **easy for customers to use**. The business model is a key part of product-market fit. Make sure it is **easy for customers to engage with** and does not create unnecessary barriers to purchase. Describe how your company currently generates profit or how it plans to do so in the future, highlighting the mechanics that make your model sustainable and compelling.

5.8. MARKET ASSESSMENT

Use **graphics** to clearly illustrate your market assumptions. In addition to Total Addressable Market (TAM), include Serviceable Available Market (SAM) and Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM) (remember to add these terms to the Terminology section). **TAM is best calculated bottom-up**: number of ICPs multiplied by their willingness to pay, broken down by geography. For all market sizes, also list the calculation method or source (top-down estimates, research reports, or other data) on the slide.

5.9. CUSTOMER'S BUSINESS CASE

If your product requires the customer to justify its value internally, make sure you **understand their business case** and present it clearly in your slide deck.

5.10. TEAM

Investors invest in **teams as well as business ideas**. Use this slide to show why your team is the best possible one to execute your vision. Highlight **relevant experience, skills, and team dynamics**, and be transparent about any gaps you are aware of and how you plan to fill them. Avoid simply listing headshots and titles; instead, explain why your team is uniquely positioned to make the company successful. Position the Team slide either at the front of the deck or at the end between Financials and the CTA slide (the latter is more common). If applicable, also list Advisory Board members who add strategic value.

5.11. GO-TO-MARKET (GTM) STRATEGY & SALES ARCHITECTURE

Describe your **go-to-market strategy, including your sales approach**, as these two are closely linked. Explain how you plan to earn the right to scale, usually starting with a **beachhead market to manage uncertainty**, and how your sales model supports your business objectives.

Detail your sales architecture: are you using direct sales or indirect sales through distributors and resellers? Explain why you chose this approach and how it aligns with your GTM strategy.

Outline your distribution and marketing plan. Simply mentioning social media is not enough. Every company must find customers, even if you are selling advanced technology. Include:

- How you will **acquire and retain customers**
- Which **partners** you will leverage and why they are motivated to collaborate
- How your sales and marketing efforts **work together to reach the market efficiently**

Investors want to see that you have thought through the practical steps needed to reach the market and are ready for investment. Underestimating these efforts is a common reason startups fail.

5.12. ROADMAP

If applicable, use this slide to show your **growth strategy** and the current state of your company. Outline **milestones you have achieved** so far and those you aim to reach in the near future. Clearly explain **how you plan to use the investment** and why funding is needed at this stage of development. This is also the place to specify **how much capital you are seeking**, helping investors understand the purpose and timing of your funding request.

Visualize your **Value Inflection Points (VIPs)**, showing **when they occur** and **how much funding is needed** to reach them. Include planned **funding rounds** on the timeline. Add the **major activity streams** that lead to each VIP and highlight the **critical path** required to achieve your milestones.

5.13. COMPETITION

Provide an overview of your **competition** and highlights how your company stands out. Identify which companies offer similar value propositions and show **what they lack in comparison to you**. Explain your **unique selling proposition (USP)**, the value only your company provides that customers are willing to pay for. Highlight your **unfair advantage**, how it gives you an edge over competitors, and how **sustainable** that advantage is in the long term.

5.14. MOATS

Moats are **mechanisms that protect your company from competition** or make it difficult for competitors to replicate your success. Common examples include:

- **Intellectual Property (IP)**: patents, trademarks, and other legal protections
- **Company secrets**: proprietary knowledge needed to build your product
- **Significant head start**: a time advantage that competitors cannot easily recover
- **Control of key resources**: such as data sources, raw materials, or other critical inputs

5.15. FINANCIALS & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

Select a **representative set of metrics** that showcase your company's performance or potential. Examples include:

- **Adoption**: installed units, daily active users, number of new customers
- **Revenue**: derived from adoption

- **Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)**
- **Gross Margin (%)**: revenue minus cost to deliver the product/service, divided by revenue
- Sales Cycle

For recurring revenue businesses: CLTV, retention and churn, unit economics: $CLTV \div CAC$, payback period.

If your company is **pre-GTM**, provide estimated KPIs based on **market research, analogies, experience, or insights from similar startups**.

Guidelines for financial modeling

- Avoid overly ambitious forecasts; support assumptions with industry benchmarks and **GTM strategy**
- **Track actual performance** against forecasts and adjust regularly
- **Model monthly** to capture seasonality and liquidity risks
- Consider **multiple scenarios** to understand potential outcomes
- Use **cash flow modeling** to maintain clear visibility on liquidity

Benefits

- **Validates assumptions** and pricing strategy
- Provides sensitivity analysis for **different market and customer behaviors**
- Demonstrates **financial viability** and investor-readiness
- Serves as a tool to **communicate vision and startup potential**
- Supports a **potential DCF valuation**

Financial Model Dos and Don'ts

Do – crucial points:

- Be detailed
- Avoid shortcuts
- Document your assumptions
- Stay close to reality
- Show potential and levers
- Show historical numbers and forecast
- Invest time and update regularly

Don't – avoid by all means:

- Be too ambitious with unrealistic projections
- Have inconsistent formulas
- Neglect assumptions and reality checks
- Make a yearly forecast without liquidity plan
- Hard code number excluding assumptions

5.16. FUNDING ASK / USE OF FUNDS

State the **total funding amount** you are seeking and the characteristics of the round (e.g., seed, Series A, equity, convertible note). Show **how the funds will be used**, ideally with a pie chart breaking down key allocations (e.g., product development, marketing, hiring, operations). If applicable, indicate the amount already committed by other investors.

5.17. CLOSING / CALL TO ACTION (CTA)

Conclude by thanking the audience and clearly **stating your desired next step**, such as scheduling a follow-up meeting or reviewing a term sheet. Include **key contact information** (name, role, email, phone, and optionally your website or LinkedIn), and consider adding a small company logo or tagline to leave a lasting impression.

6. MIND THE GAPS

Ensure your **pitch deck is consistent** across topics, especially from **Pain Points → Value Proposition → Solution → Business Model → Market Assessment**. Gaps often appear when:

- **Value propositions don't match pain points:** Some pain points have no corresponding value proposition, or vice versa.
- **Market assessment misalignment:** Bottom-up market calculations are based on customer segments that don't align with your pain points or value propositions.

Solution overreach or mismatch: Your product may include unnecessary features that don't correspond to value propositions, or fail to highlight features that do create value. This signals to investors that you may not fully understand the opportunity.

Consistency across these elements is crucial to show **clarity, focus, and a solid understanding of your market and solution**.

7. FINAL COMMENTS AND BENEFITS

Creating a pitch deck is challenging because you must **condense content** while ensuring key messages are clear. Avoid overloading slides and focus on **the core story**. Before presenting to investors, share your deck with other founders or your network and ask them to describe the messages they take away. This helps ensure your story comes across as intended.

Remember, even the most visually impressive deck cannot compensate for weak fundamentals. A **work-in-progress pitch deck** is valuable for founders to track the big picture, detect deviations, and ensure the narrative remains plausible from start to finish.

For additional inspiration, review pitch decks from successful startups like Airbnb, BuzzFeed, and Dropbox [here](#) (external source).

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The guide incorporates insights and expertise from leading startup professionals and organizations in the **Swiss startup ecosystem**:

[Patrick Griss](#) - Co-Founder and CEO, Zühlke Ventures

[Julian Stylianou](#) - Senior Account Executive, Salesforce

[Marco Brunner](#) - CEO, BV4

[David Emmrich](#) - Analyst, BV4

[Swiss Startup Association](#)

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