

# 1

---

## The Importance of a Robust Go-to-Market Strategy

### What Is a Go-to-Market Strategy?

Before starting this first chapter, I want to define what a go-to-market (GTM) strategy is so that readers of this book understand my perspective. I see GTM as a holistic thing, not the domain of one single team or department but that of the whole, the entire organization. It's reflected in the business culture and philosophy, processes, technology, leadership, grassroots teams, finance, operations, and social policies. Ultimately, I think your customer experiences, or views, your go-to-market as your brand.

According to Gartner, an American technological research and consulting firm, "A GTM strategy is a plan that details how an organization can engage with customers to convince them to buy its product or service and gain a competitive advantage. A GTM strategy includes tactics related to pricing, sales and channels, the buying journey, new product or service launches, product rebranding, or product introduction to a new market."

In short, it's a strategic plan for launching a product or service. Let's unpack that for a minute. The easiest way I can explain go-to-market strategy is that it is how a company executes its business

strategy over a given period. This period is typically 12 months, although you can have a 2, 5, or 10-year strategy. For the most part, anything longer than two years is more of a plan or a hypothetical guess, as you simply cannot forecast or predict market forces (Figure 1.1).

This diagram lays it out as clearly as I can envision it. The business strategy sits at the top of the chart. Your operations, finance, and product teams are on the next layer, and then your customer-facing teams and product user data sit on the lower level.

### For Startups

For early-stage startups, potentially pre- or just post-product-market fit (PMF), I expect to see the business strategy, product team, sales team, and at least a single marketing resource. However, I am a massive fan of selling your product or service first and marketing it second, as it's more straightforward to pay for marketing from a revenue-generating position than to burn through your runway marketing something to an audience you might not yet fully understand (or an audience that might not understand you).

In my experience, many startups do not have a proper finance function. Early-stage founders typically adopt a founder-led sales approach with maybe a few sales or business development reps (BDRs) until they are comfortable they have fit and forego everything else.

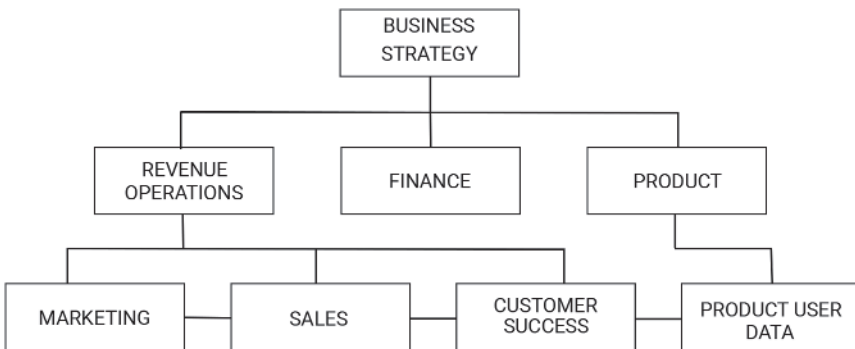


Figure 1.1 Company structure for executing the business plan.

A strong GTM play often feels like a maturity model in the business's developmental process for early-stage founders, as is a RevOps model, when, in fact, building with the end in mind is the ideal approach. There are many tools out there that can help you do this. With my expertise in HubSpot and our HubSpot CRM-enhancing GTM engine, we can remove the barriers to best practices and see more growth, data-driven decision-making, and tactical analysis with the AI.

Any founder launching a business, and it doesn't matter if it's a tech platform or a service business, should follow the three best practice principles and answer them clearly:

1. How do I convey the value of my product or service to my end user or customer?
2. How do I enable my buyer to buy from me?
3. How do I plan to onboard, retain, and expand my buyer?

This oversimplifies the GTM process, which must be redundant to digest this concept. I want to forego buzzwords and industry jargon where possible and lay out clear, easy-to-follow pathways and guidelines as we examine each stage in-depth to get your GTM firing on all cylinders.

1. How do I convey the value of my product or service to my end user or customer?
  - (a) Value proposition
  - (b) Positioning
  - (c) Messaging
  - (d) Storytelling
  - (e) Customer feedback
  - (f) Win/loss research
  - (g) Competitive analysis
  - (h) SWOT
  - (i) Porters Five Forces
  - (j) Jobs-to-be-done
  - (k) Buyer/user persona research and interviews

2. How do I enable my buyer to buy from me?
  - (a) Jobs-to-be-done
  - (b) Buyer/user persona research and interviews
  - (c) Win/loss interviews
  - (d) Competitive analysis
  - (e) Sales enablement (training, assets, technology)
  - (f) Pricing strategy
  - (g) Buyer funnel stages and tactics
  - (h) Marketing tactics (content, events, ads, social media)
3. How do I plan to onboard, retain, and expand my buyer?
  - (a) Customer onboarding framework
  - (b) Customer journey map
  - (c) Automated email sequences
  - (d) Customer portals
  - (e) Renewals playbooks
  - (f) Usage-based upsell/cross-sell
  - (g) What new features to ship or services to develop?
  - (h) How do I measure it all?

As you can see, the exercises you perform often impact more than one stage of the GTM strategy cycle. Therefore, they must be implemented and executed repeatedly to ensure your GTM continues to align with your buyer and user audience.

In this book, we will discover the ARISE methodology, my trademark approach to GTM strategy. While it's primarily focused on B2B product companies, we have successfully used it on service companies, too. One example is a small two-person company, The Reinhart Group, run by a couple, Christina de Buekelaar and Emmanuel Stiels, where we used it to rebrand and productize their services for a Health and Well-being business and private health practice. I dive into this in more detail in the case studies section of the book.

## For Scaling Teams

Post PMF, I expect the company to have a proper finance function, either full-time or fractional. The product team should be sharing user data into your CRM, and from my HubSpot expertise, you can

connect your product to HubSpot through APIs or, as I prefer, use Mixpanel and HubSpot as a combination.

This is especially useful for product-led (PLG) companies, where user segmentation and CRM segmentation are crucial to understanding user segment drivers and translating that into marketing and sales tactics. This is a slimline tech stack, as you should use the HubSpot Customer Platform, including marketing and content hubs, sales hubs, and service hubs, simply because the single-code platform makes it easy to scale. Their embedded app cards further simplify life by dropping other third-party apps directly into your user interface, giving the ability to experience your third-party apps directly inside HubSpot, which changes the game.

Where HubSpot drops off in reporting, use Databox. Pete Caputa, the CEO, is an ex-HubSpot employee, so he knows how and why the two tools connect to enhance financial reporting right out of the CRM while keeping HubSpot at the heart of the business. It also focuses deeply on other areas of reporting so everyone across the organization benefits from the product.

Later in this book, I'll share how you bring product teams into HubSpot so that a business's revenue focus becomes a shared experience. You can make smarter decisions by reporting how feature releases impact usage through user data and correlating that with sales and marketing data. This also helps identify where significant financial impact or lack thereof comes from with feature releases. But this is how I see the world; you can disagree.

## **For the Enterprise**

My experience with enterprise companies is in two places: strategic account-based marketing (ABM) and when they spin out a new product including moving from sales-led to product-led as a business model. The use case for the ARISE Go-To-Market Methodology® has been proven in both situations.

When the largest companies use ABM, it is almost always to out-compete their rivals in landing key accounts, so the heavy research-based element of ARISE plays a significant role in enabling this as it focuses on deep understanding of target accounts and competitive landscape.

When enterprise teams spin out a new product, you might think this should be easy due to their current size and longevity in the tech space. However, often, you hire people with different skills for enterprise business management than you would for a startup, so the skill set is ill-fitted. This is where ARISE comes into its own, and to be clear, my simplified diagram wouldn't fit most enterprise companies as they have large product marketing teams, enablement teams, multi-regional sales teams, and more, but the premise remains the same without the nuance and granularity of team specialisms.

As we traverse the book, I'll discuss innovation and account-based marketing and how the two complement each other.

## **Why GTM Strategies Are Crucial for Business Success**

As a product and business owner, I can't stress enough how crucial it is to have a robust go-to-market strategy. I've seen firsthand how it ensures a successful product launch by providing a clear road map and helping to avoid common pitfalls. It's amazing how a well-crafted GTM strategy can streamline your processes, reducing time to market and giving you a competitive edge. However, it's just as amazing to see how many people shortcut and discount a thorough GTM approach. The number of times I've been told by prospects that they don't want to spend months on research, they want to get going, like there's some magic bullet we consultants and agencies have that immediately solves their leaky or underperforming funnel. Get real; months, maybe not, but none at all, that's sheer stupidity.

I've learned that it's not just about getting the product out there quickly; it's about doing it smartly to minimize financial risks and delay achieving PMF. You can address potential challenges proactively and use your marketing budgets more effectively by identifying those challenges early. And to do that, you have to keep speaking to people, and that starts at day one.

One of the main aspects I love most about a solid GTM strategy is how it enhances the customer experience. When we truly understand our target audience and their needs, we can tailor our product, marketing, and sales efforts to meet those needs, building customer loyalty and driving repeat business. I've seen how this approach significantly improves your customer acquisition effectiveness, helping identify the

most impactful channels and messages to reach your audience. By understanding this, it makes the creative process far easier as you know the best mediums, assets, and channels to engage with.

From experience, a comprehensive GTM strategy is invaluable for market penetration and growth. It gives you a clear plan for entering or expanding within existing markets, outlining the steps you need to take to gain market share and achieve sustainable growth. It's incredibly effective in aligning your organizational efforts, ensuring that all departments, from product development to customer support, work toward the same goals.

Perhaps most importantly, I've witnessed how a robust GTM strategy can provide a real competitive advantage. By thoroughly analyzing the competitive landscape and positioning your product effectively, you can differentiate yourself and attract customers in even the most crowded markets. It helps you raise awareness about your product among your target audience, generating interest and demand, which is crucial for success.

Ultimately, I've come to understand that a GTM strategy isn't just about the initial launch; it's about ensuring long-term success. By continuously monitoring market trends, customer feedback, and competitive actions, we can make informed decisions and adapt our strategies as needed. In my role, I've repeatedly seen how a well-executed GTM strategy is essential for minimizing risks, enhancing customer experience, and achieving sustainable growth. This book's road map guides you toward your goals and contributes significantly to your overall business success.

## **Common Pitfalls in Your GTM Strategy**

During my career, I've encountered numerous pitfalls and challenges in developing go-to-market (GTM) strategies. One of the most common issues is failing to define a clear target market, which leads to ineffective marketing efforts and wasted resources. The ARISE GTM framework has been instrumental in addressing this. During the Research stage, we conduct thorough market analyses and gather customer insights, which helps us clearly define the target market and understand customer needs.

Another challenge I've faced is insufficient market research, which can result in misaligned product offerings and ineffective strategies. The ARISE framework emphasizes comprehensive market analysis in the Research stage, including competitive intelligence and market trends, ensuring our strategies are evidence based. Over-reliance on a single marketing channel is another pitfall; ARISE's Ideate and Strategise stages encourage us to explore multiple channels and develop a multi-faceted approach to reach our audience effectively. This isn't about random experimentation, it's driven by your customer research and understanding their habits and favorite channels for collecting information about products and services like yours.

I've also seen how a lack of data-driven decision-making can lead to ineffective strategies and missed opportunities. ARISE ensures data collection and analysis, particularly in the Research and Assess stages, so solid data backs all our decisions. Ensuring product-market fit is crucial, and the Assess and Research stages focus on understanding market needs and validating this fit before moving forward.

Poor alignment across teams can lead to inconsistent messaging and ineffective execution. The ARISE framework promotes a holistic approach, ensuring all teams are aligned from research to execution. The fact that we've been calling for closer alignment of marketing and sales since the turn of the century beguiles me, allowing a whole industry to moan about best practice and then do little in the way of actually making that happen. Maybe the end of the latest bubble and growth at all costs mindset will see a return to proper business administration, or maybe not; maybe the people currently running businesses will delay and delay, harking back to the glory days of raising your way out of trouble rather than focusing on good business governance. But I digress.

Insufficient risk assessment is another common issue, and the Assess stage includes thorough risk analysis, helping you anticipate and plan for potential challenges. By deep diving into current under-performance and identifying gaps in your data, you move toward a more streamlined approach to customer acquisition, using data-driven triggers with reporting that tells stories teams can understand and execute against.

Ineffective positioning and messaging can confuse customers and hinder product or service adoption. The Ideate and Strategise stages

focus on developing clear, compelling positioning and messaging based on first-party data, market insights, and competitive analysis. Additionally, inadequate sales enablement can lead to poor conversion rates. Still, the Execute stage includes comprehensive sales enablement, providing your sales teams with the right tools and knowledge they need based on the competitive and customer research previously undertaken.

Finally, neglecting customer retention often leads to high churn rates and reduced lifetime value. The ARISE framework includes customer onboarding and retention strategies, ensuring long-term success beyond the initial launch. By addressing these common pitfalls, the ARISE GTM framework provides a comprehensive approach to developing and executing effective go-to-market strategies that significantly improve your chances of success in Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), Financial Technology (Fintech), and the services industries.

## What Does a Good GTM Outline Look Like?

To execute a solid GTM strategy, you must optimize eight pillars. Neglect any one of them, and you will severely decrease your ability to succeed in the long term. Nearly every founder, business leader, or GTM leader can tell you a story about how they are constantly pressured to cut a corner for speed or budget, which causes frustration and often undermines their ability to deliver results in a realistic and timely manner. Shortcuts are for suckers, as they almost always cost you more than you think in the end.

The new narrative in GTM, which has been incorrectly deployed and interpreted, is that done is better than perfect, and it is. Being agile in your approach to running campaigns is crucial for smaller, less established businesses; maybe not so for larger organizations with a well established brand. But, that doesn't mean spraying and praying and hoping for a miracle on the other end; it means once you have the complete information you need, enter the market fast and run as many experiments as possible to find out what works. You will succeed when you develop an experimental mindset: **segments and experiments**; memorize that. However, I am sure that the marketers reading this book immediately thought, well my boss will ask me about ROI, so

experimentation isn't a high priority when numbers matter. I feel for you, I do, but remember, Rome wasn't built in a day and you have to sometimes stand your ground to get respect and gain more control of the marketing mix.

Poor go-to-market has seen too many founders and leadership teams fall victim to employing underperforming agencies that use flattering metrics and supportive reporting systems, allowing poor performance to continue. While agencies have a place in the GTM process, because they have specialist skills or simply augment smaller teams, you shouldn't hand responsibility to them for your businesses success. They are there to deliver a result, but the ownership of their performance is that of the leadership team. When you hand responsibility off, a culture of blame often develops with a revolving door of agencies and consultants with no effective change occurring, just tick-box activity. When this happens, eventually the internal culture suffers because staff start to disbelieve change will ever happen, or in severe cases, your staff are working against you to ensure failure to maintain the status quo. Additionally, some founders go through senior management like a hot knife through butter, causing chaos, misalignment, and a further deteriorating employment culture.

I'm talking about people here because people are the key asset to successful GTM; technology is just an enablement tool. Wrong leaders, you fail; wrong team, you fail. Ultimately, it's about the right bums in the right seats. Achieve that, and you will likely see a more considerable improvement in results than any one SaaS platform brings.

But is this all it takes, or is there more to it? Are there fundamentals we need to adopt, such as best practices, frameworks, methodologies, flywheels, and funnels, just to name a few? Potentially, yes, and there are some I'd like to dive into. As I mentioned earlier, I believe there are eight fundamental pillars you have to master in order to build a robust go-to-market strategy—one that is customer-centric, sustainable, and profitable and we'll cover those in the next chapter.