

concept

A FOUNDER'S READINESS TOOL

The 10-Point Partnership Readiness Checklist

A self-assessment for founders who are considering strategic partnerships as a lever for growth — before you bring in outside capital, a distributor, a co-brand, a franchisee, or a partnerships consultant.

BRAND LAUNCH BRAND SCALING VISIBILITY & DISTRIBUTION MVP VALIDATION / FUNDING
FRANCHISING

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Before you look for a partner, look at yourself.

Most founders reach out for partnerships help at the wrong moment — either too early, before they know what they actually need, or too late, after a few bad deals have already cost them time, equity, or trust. Strategic partnerships work when a founder has done the internal thinking first: what growth actually looks like, what you have to offer, and what you're genuinely ready to share control of.

This checklist isn't about finding partners. It's about getting your own thinking straight first — so that when you do sit down with a partnerships consultant, an investor, a distributor, or a franchisee, you walk in as a founder who knows exactly what they want, not one who's hoping someone else will figure it out for them.

Whichever stage you're at, this checklist applies:

1 · Brand Launch

2 · Brand Scaling

3 · Visibility & Distribution

4 · MVP Validation / Raising Funding

5 · Franchising

How to use this: Go through all 10 points honestly. Tick the box only if you can back your answer with something concrete — a document, a number, a decision already made. A gut feeling doesn't count. At the end, you'll find a short scoring guide to tell you whether you're ready to pursue partnerships now, or what to fix first.

☐ 01

I can name my growth goal in one sentence, not five.

"Grow the brand" is not a goal. "Get into 200 more retail doors in 12 months" is. Know which of the five purposes you're actually solving for — launch, scaling, visibility/distribution, validation/funding, or franchising — because each demands a completely different kind of partner and deal.

Ask yourself: If a consultant asked "why partnerships, why now?", could I answer in one breath?

☐ 02

I know what success looks like in numbers, not adjectives.

Revenue share, new markets opened, users acquired, units sold, franchise locations signed — pick the 1–3 metrics that will tell you, in six or twelve months, whether the partnership route actually worked.

Ask yourself: Do I have a number in mind, or just a feeling of "bigger"?

☐ 03

My business is actually ready to be someone else's partner.

Do you have proof points — traction, testimonials, unit economics, a working MVP, repeat customers — that make you a credible partner rather than a pitch? Partners and consultants can shape a story, but they can't manufacture proof that doesn't exist yet.

Ask yourself: If I were the other side of the table, would I say yes to me today?

☐ 04

I know exactly what I bring to a partner — beyond "a great product."

Distribution reach, an audience, IP, manufacturing capacity, category credibility, capital, speed — every partnership is a trade. Know your currency before you ask what someone else's is.

Ask yourself: Could I list three concrete things I bring, without mentioning my product itself?

☐ 05

I've named the type of partner I actually need — not just "someone bigger."

A distribution partner, a co-branding partner, an investor, a franchisee, a channel/retail partner — these are different relationships with different expectations, timelines, and risks. "Anyone who can help me grow" is not a partner profile.

Ask yourself: Could I describe my ideal partner in 3 sentences to a stranger?

☐ 06

I've looked honestly at why past partnerships or deals stalled.

If you've tried before and it didn't work — an investor conversation that went quiet, a distributor who lost interest, a franchise inquiry that never closed — you owe yourself an honest post-mortem before trying again with a new partner or consultant.

Ask yourself: Do I know the real reason the last attempt didn't close?

☐ 07

I have a rough shape of the deal I'd want — before anyone asks.

Revenue share, licensing, equity, franchise fee structure, co-marketing spend split — you don't need final terms, but walking in with zero sense of structure hands all the leverage to the other side.

Ask yourself: If someone said "so what did you have in mind?" right now, would I have an answer?

☐ 08

I'm genuinely willing to share control, credit, or upside — not just say I am.

Partnerships require real trade-offs: shared decision-making, shared branding, shared margin. Founders who unconsciously want a partner who changes nothing usually sabotage the deal, or the relationship, later.

Ask yourself: What specifically am I prepared to give up to make this work?

☐ 09

I have the internal bandwidth to actually execute a partnership, not just sign one.

A signed deal is the beginning, not the end. Onboarding a distributor, opening a franchise location, integrating a co-brand launch, or managing an investor relationship all take real operating time. Know who on your team owns that before you go looking.

Ask yourself: If we signed a deal next month, who on my team runs it day-to-day?

☐ 10

I'm ready to invest real time and budget into getting this right.

Good partnerships strategy — sourcing the right partners, structuring the right deal, negotiating well — takes dedicated focus. If you're not ready to prioritize it for the next few months, or to invest in the right guidance, it's worth waiting until you are.

Ask yourself: Is this a genuine priority for this quarter, or a "someday" idea?

What your score tells you

Count the boxes you honestly ticked with proof behind them — not hope.

SCORING GUIDE

8-10 ticked — You're ready. Bring in a partnerships consultant now to move faster and avoid costly missteps.

4-7 ticked — You're close. Tighten your goal, proof, and deal shape first — a consultant can help you close these gaps quickly.

0-3 ticked — Not yet. Focus inward first: clarity, proof, and readiness. Partnerships will be expensive distractions until then.

Ready to turn this into a partnerships strategy?

If you scored 4 or above, you're in a strong position to work with a partnerships consultant to sharpen your approach, identify the right partners, and structure a deal that actually serves your growth goal — whether that's launch, scaling, distribution, funding, or franchising.

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