FRACTIONAL EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

The Nearly Impossible Imperative of Going from Niche to Mainstream

Why startups must start small to be funded big

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THE PARADOX

You must start small to be funded big.

A new brand cannot launch to everyone. It has no money, no distribution and no proof. The only way in is a narrow product for a specific customer who cares more than anyone else.

But the capital that funds growth wants scale: sales velocity, a large market and a margin story that improves with volume.

So the founder must prove niche love and mainstream potential at the same time.

THE GAP I SEE WITH EVERY CLIENT

Scrappy today. Ready to go big.

This challenge shows up at $3 million in revenue and again at $30 million.

The best entrepreneurs hold two ideas at once: be scrappy with every dollar now, and be prepared to go big when the opportunity arrives.

Lose the first and the company runs out of cash. Lose the second and the first big order finds the business unready.

NICHE VERSUS MAINSTREAM

Same brand. A different business.

AREA	NICHE STAGE	MAINSTREAM STAGE
Customer	Passionate enthusiast who seeks you out	Busy, price-aware shopper buying on habit
Operations	Small runs, founder-led quality	Documented systems, capacity headroom
Margin	Premium price, low trade spend	Heavy trade spend and freight, managed net margin
Brand	Sharp point of view	Clear core promise, wider reasons to buy
Leadership	Founder decides everything	Managers, planning rhythm, experienced executives

THERE IS NO STANDARD PLAYBOOK

Every company needs its own solution.

None of these challenges has a one-size-fits-all fix. The right answer depends on the product, the category, the channel, the cash position and the people in the room.

A plan that works for a $3 million beverage brand can be wrong for a $30 million snack company.

A bigger portfolio means a better-fitted solution.

Working across many companies, categories and stages builds a large portfolio of experience to draw on. That is what lets a solution be tailored to the customer's need instead of copied from the last one.

An executive from a long career in only a few companies has a much more limited playbook to pull from.

THE TAKEAWAY

Be scrappy today.
Be ready to go big.

Where is your brand on the path from niche to mainstream?

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