Problem Solution Fit

Many new products fail, not because they are badly built, but because nobody really needed them. Problem-solution fit is the first test for any new product, service or startup. It means proving that a real customer problem exists, and that our solution actually solves it. Ash Maurya, in his book Running Lean, places this stage before product-market fit, when we check that a large enough market wants the product. Five simple steps take us from an idea to real evidence.

1. Identify the Customer and the Problem

The first step is to describe clearly who the customer is and what problem they face. A vague answer such as "everyone" is a warning sign, because different people have different needs. We write the problem in the customer's words, not in the language of our product. We also note how people solve the problem today, even if their solution is poor. A clear problem statement keeps the whole team focused.

Example: a young cook who wants to sell home-made lunches chooses busy office workers near his home as his customers.

At work: Nadia, a product manager at a software company, has an idea for small clinics. She writes the problem clearly: patients miss appointments, and clinics lose time and money.

2. Validate the Problem

Next, we check that the problem is real and important, not just an idea in our head. The best tool is the customer interview, where we ask about recent experiences, not about our idea. Asking when the problem last happened and what it cost gives facts instead of polite opinions. We also look for other evidence, such as complaints, extra work or money spent on poor solutions. If few people feel the pain, it is better to learn this early.

Example: the cook talks to twenty office workers and learns that many skip lunch because nearby food is expensive.

At work: Nadia interviews the receptionists of twelve clinics. Missed appointments cost each clinic several hours every week.

3. Design a Minimum Solution

Once the problem is confirmed, we design the simplest solution that could solve it. This is often called a minimum viable product: just enough to test the main idea with real people. It can be

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a simple prototype, a drawing of the screens, or even a service delivered by hand. The goal is to learn quickly and cheaply, not to build a perfect product.

Example: the cook does not rent a kitchen; he prepares ten meals at home and delivers them himself.

At work: instead of building a full app, Nadia's team sends reminder messages by hand to the patients of three clinics.

4. Test with Real Users

Then we put the minimum solution in front of real users and watch what they do. Actions matter more than words, because people often praise an idea but never use it. We check whether they use the solution again, recommend it, or agree to pay for it. We test with the customers from the first step, not with friends who want to be kind.

Example: the office workers order again the next week, and some bring their colleagues.

At work: after one month, the three clinics ask Nadia to continue, and one clinic manager offers to pay.

5. Measure and Learn

Finally, we measure the results and decide what to do next. We compare the numbers with a simple goal set before the test, such as the share of users who come back. If the solution works, we improve it and test it with more customers. If it does not, we change the solution or even the problem, and this change of direction is called a pivot.

Example: the cook sees that salads sell twice as well as rice dishes, so he changes his menu.

At work: missed appointments fall by almost a third, so Nadia's team decides to build a simple automatic version.

Conclusion

In summary, problem-solution fit proves that we are solving a real problem in a way that customers value. We identify the customer and the problem, validate it, design a minimum solution, test it with real users, and then measure and learn. Only after that does it make sense to look for product-market fit. Evidence, not enthusiasm, should guide the next investment. Fall in love with the problem, not with your first solution.

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