STARTUP IDEA SCORECARD | One sheet per idea

IDEA / COMPANY		**DATE**	
ONE-LINE PITCH		**FOUNDER(S) / EVALUATOR**	

#	CRITERION	WHAT TO TEST	WT.	SCORE 1–10	WEIGHTED /100	EVIDENCE / NOTES / ASSUMPTIONS
1	**Founder-Market Fit**	Do we have unusual insight, credibility, access or ability to win here?	**15%**	____	____	
2	**Market Size / Growth**	Large enough today, or small but expanding fast enough to become very large?	**10%**	____	____	
3	**Problem Acuteness**	Is this a painful / urgent problem rather than merely useful or convenient?	**15%**	____	____	
4	**Competition + Edge**	Does demand already exist, and do we understand what incumbents get wrong?	**10%**	____	____	
5	**Real User Pull**	Do we personally want it, or have we observed users actively seeking / hacking a solution?	**10%**	____	____	
6	**Why Now?**	What changed recently (AI, regulation, behaviour, costs, APIs, infrastructure) to enable this?	**10%**	____	____	
7	**Proxy Evidence**	Is there proof via an analogous company, geography, segment or adjacent market?	**5%**	____	____	
8	**Founder Commitment**	Would we still want to work on this for 5–10 years if it becomes hard / boring?	**5%**	____	____	
9	**Scalability**	Can revenue grow substantially faster than headcount / manual operations?	**10%**	____	____	
10	**Idea-Space Fertility**	If this exact idea fails, are there strong adjacent pivots using the same insight / assets?	**10%**	____	____	

Scoring guide: 1–2 = weak / unproven 3–4 = below average 5–6 = plausible 7–8 = strong 9–10 = exceptional. Weighted score = Score × Weight ÷ 10.

RED FLAGS / KILL TESTS	☐ Solution in search of a problem ☐ Tarpit idea ☐ No clear why-now ☐ Service disguised as software ☐ Regulatory / dependency blocker	**UPSIDE / MOATS**	☐ Proprietary data ☐ Distribution advantage ☐ Network effects ☐ Switching costs ☐ Brand / trust ☐ Technical moat ☐ Operational moat
NEXT VALIDATION	Single most important assumption to test next: ____	**DECISION**	☐ Pursue now ☐ Validate first ☐ Park / revisit ☐ Reject
TOTAL SCORE	_______ / 100	**RANK**	Idea # ______ of ______

Decision threshold suggestion: 80+ = exceptional | 70–79 = strong | 60–69 = validate | <60 = usually park/reject. Red flags can override score.

HOW TO USE THIS SCORECARD

1) Step-by-step: how to use the sheet

- Use one sheet for one idea only. Do not put multiple ideas on the same scorecard.
- Fill in the basics at the top: idea/company name, date, one-line pitch, and who is scoring it.
- Read each criterion carefully and give a score from 1 to 10. Score the current evidence, not your excitement.
- Write proof in the notes column: customer quotes, interview counts, market facts, competitors, pricing, prototypes, pilots, or assumptions still unproven.
- Calculate the weighted score. Formula: Score × Weight ÷ 10. Example: score 8 with a 15% weight = 12 points out of 100.
- Tick any red flags and any moats. A high total score does not cancel a serious red flag.
- Complete the bottom section: the single most important next validation test, the final decision, and the rank compared with your other ideas.

2) How to score 1–10

- 1–2 = Very weak. Little evidence, poor fit, or a major problem.
- 3–4 = Weak. Some logic, but important concerns or missing proof.
- 5–6 = Plausible. Could work, but still quite unproven.
- 7–8 = Strong. Good evidence and a credible path to success.
- 9–10 = Exceptional. Rare strength, strong proof, and clear advantage.

Beginner rule: if you are unsure, do not score 8, 9 or 10. Use 5 or below until you have evidence.

3) What to score with (and what not to do)

- Score based on facts where possible: real customer interviews, observed pain, willingness to pay, market size research, competitor analysis, prototype feedback, pilot usage, and your own direct experience.
- Use the notes column to separate facts from assumptions. An assumption is something you believe but have not yet proved.
- Do not inflate scores because you like the idea. The scorecard is meant to help you reject weak ideas quickly.
- Important rule of thumb: if Founder-Market Fit or Problem Acuteness is below 5, be very cautious even if the total score looks good.

4) What each scoring criterion means

1. Founder-Market Fit
How well suited you or your team are to solve this. Look for relevant skills, insider knowledge, credibility, access, and motivation.

2. Market Size / Growth
How big the market could become. It can score well if it is already large or if it is small today but growing fast.

3. Problem Acuteness
How painful and urgent the problem is. “Nice to have” scores lower; “must solve now” scores higher.

4. Competition + Edge
Whether demand exists already and whether you have a believable advantage over current options.

5. Real User Pull
Whether real users genuinely want this. Signs include active searching, workarounds, complaints, and willingness to pay.

6. Why Now?
What changed recently that makes the idea timely now: AI, regulation, cost changes, behaviour changes, APIs, or infrastructure.

7. Proxy Evidence
Evidence that something similar works elsewhere: another country, adjacent industry, customer segment, or analogous business.

8. Founder Commitment
Whether you could stay committed for years, even if the work becomes hard, repetitive, or less exciting.

9. Scalability
Whether revenue can grow faster than manual work and headcount.

10. Idea-Space Fertility
Whether this idea opens up nearby pivots or adjacent opportunities using the same learning, customers, or assets.

5) Technical terms and plain-English meanings

Weighted score:
Some criteria matter more than others. Weighting gives more importance to the most important areas.

Red flag / kill test:
A warning sign that could make the idea not worth pursuing, even if other areas score well.

Solution in search of a problem:
Starting with a cool technology or product and then trying to invent a problem for it.

Tarpit idea:
An idea that looks obvious and attractive but has trapped many founders before because of a hidden structural difficulty.

Service disguised as software:
A business that looks like a software company but actually needs lots of manual human work behind the scenes.

Regulatory / dependency blocker:
A risk caused by laws, compliance, approvals, or heavy dependence on another platform, partner, supplier, or API.

Moat:
A durable advantage that makes it hard for competitors to catch you.

Technical moat:
An advantage based on difficult engineering, algorithms, deep tech, IP, or specialised know-how.

Operational moat:
An advantage based on execution: better processes, logistics, supply chain, partnerships, service delivery, or speed.

Other moat examples:
Proprietary data = unique data others do not have. Distribution advantage = better way to reach customers. Network effects = more users create more value. Switching costs = hard for customers to leave. Brand / trust = customers buy because they trust you.

Quick decision tip: Compare total scores across ideas, but pay special attention to low scores in Founder-Market Fit, Problem Acuteness, and Why Now?