Placement Scotland

Growth and scale up issues for small & start-up technology firms

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What is growth/scale up?

Growth can be described as an increase in:

- Financial measures such as Turnover, Profit, Return to investors, Assets
- Organisational employment, operations, and complexity
- More use of or diversity of products/services
- Reach and influence via more customers, users or uptake of behaviours

Scale up refers adding significant numbers of clients/ customers/ users, and increasing revenue without necessarily expanding costs, although often operations & support systems will need to be enlarged. Often this is technologically leveraged.

Tech Ecosystem Influences on Growth

- **Technology providers** – APIs, cloud hosting, & competing/ complementary/ providers
- **Customers & Users** -- accessing / paying for technologies
- **Support providers** – e.g. business support or networks
- **Finance** – investors, government grants, and payments
- **Skills** – acquiring the right skills via employment or contractors
- **Regulators** – some are regulated industries, and data is regulated

Stages of Growth

Supporting

Enhancing

Ideation: It's when the entrepreneur or team of founders come up with an innovative concept, product or service that they believe has potential in the market.

Seed Stage: the founders of a company are seeking funding or bootstrapping to build a prototype or minimum viable product (MVP)., and focuses on validating the idea and creating a product/service that meets target customer needs

Early Stage: The product or service is validated and launched with a focus on acquiring customers, building the team, and refining the product or service

Growth Stage: The company has found product-market fit, and focuses on scaling the business, usually characterised by rapid growth in revenue, customer base, and team size.

Expansion Stage: This is where the company expands its operations, either by entering new markets, launching new products, or both.

Maturity Stage: Here the company has established itself as a industry leader and has a stable customer base. The focus is on maintaining market share and profitability while continuing to innovate and improve the product or service.

Tech Context for Size (Indicative)

Stage	Use of No-Code Tools	User Requirement & UX	Testing & Prototyping Systems	Production Systems	Tech Support	Digital Security Focus
Ideation	Low	Idea Validation	Low	None	Low	Low
Seed Stage	Medium	Minimum Viable Product	Medium – Especially Minimum Viable Product	None/ Minimum Viable Product	Low	Low
Early Stage	Low to Medium	User needs focus	Medium	Basic	Customer facing	Low to Medium
Growth Stage	Medium	Prioritize high value user needs	High	More Sophisticated, Dev Ops Intention	Customer and some Internal facing	Medium to High
Expansion Stage	High	Understand new markets/ users	High	Sophisticated, Dev Ops Integrated	Both	High
Maturity Stage	High	Continuously gather user feedback,	High	High Sophistication	Both	High

Tech Team Issues

Stage	Formal Technology Teams Likelihood	Project Teams Likelihood	Project Management/ Development Techniques
Ideation	Low	Low	N/A
Seed Stage	Low	Low	N/A
Early Stage	Low	Medium	Scrum, Kanban, Agile
Growth Stage	Medium	High	Scrum, Kanban, Agile, Prince2
Expansion Stage	High	High	Prince2, Agile, DevOps, Waterfall
Maturity Stage	High	High	Prince2, DevOps, Waterfall

Working within Ideation Stage

- Your primary focus should be on research and analysis. Conduct market research to identify potential customers, competitors, and gaps in the market. avoid assuming you know what users want without doing thorough research & validation.
- Work with your team to brainstorm ideas and contribute your own creative ideas. Be open-minded and flexible as the idea may pivot several times before it is finalized. Avoid getting attached to any one idea too quickly.
- Founders may provide initial direction and guidance, intern may have opportunities to pitch ideas and get feedback

Working within Seed Stage

- Your focus is on building the product or minimum viable product (MVP), and you could work on developing the prototype or MVP collaborating with the development team, and contributing to the design and development process. Avoid overcomplication - keep it simple and meeting users' needs.
- You could help with testing and providing feedback to improve the product, avoid working in isolation and not seeking feedback from the team or users.
- At this stage you may work closely with founders and/or senior team members, and have opportunities to provide input and get feedback.

Working within Early Stage

- Your focus should be on supporting the team and helping with customer acquisition. You could help with customer support, digital marketing, and social media management, and improving the product by testing and providing feedback. You can help with customer support and communication also.
- Avoid making assumptions about user needs and preferences. Instead, validate all assumptions with data and user feedback.
- You may have regular check-ins with founders or senior team members, may present updates or provide input on decisions so there's opportunities for you to be employed

Working within Growth Stage

- The company is rapidly expanding, and there may be new challenges in scaling the technology infrastructure. You could work on developing and implementing scalable production systems, improving DevOps processes, and contributing to the development of new features.
- Avoid neglecting the importance of technical debt and scalability. As the company grows, it's important to ensure that the technology infrastructure can support the increased demand. Be aware of getting bogged down in day-to-day tasks and not taking the time to plan for the future.
- You may work closely with mid-level managers, may have opportunities to present to or get feedback from C-suite members.

Working within Expansion Stage

- The focus is on expanding the business, either through new products or entering new markets. You could work on researching new markets, marketing campaigns, and contributing to the development of new products
- Avoid expanding too quickly without doing proper research and validation. It's important to enter new markets with a clear strategy and understanding of the user's needs, and avoid neglecting existing customers/ users in pursuit of new ones.
- You may be working on specific projects related to expansion efforts, may have opportunities to present research or provide input on strategy for your manager or for C-Suite.

Working within Mature Stage

- The focus is on maintaining market share and profitability while continuing to innovate. As an intern, you could work on improving the product or infrastructure, contributing to DevOps processes, and collaborating with the team on new initiatives.
- Avoid stagnation and complacency. Keep innovating and improving the product and infrastructure. Think about team dynamics and culture.
- You may work closely with department heads or team leaders, may have opportunities to present research or provide input on technical or product strategy.

Areas to Think About

1. **Technical Skills**: Focus on building skills such as coding, database management, software architecture, and DevOps. Be open to learning new programming languages or tools, and stay on top of technical developments. Also contribute by documenting processes and technical documentation to help the team.
2. **User Requirements and User Experience Skills**: Hone your skills it's important to understand user requirements and have strong user experience (UX) skills.. As the company grows, focus on conducting user testing and gathering feedback to iterate and improve the product.
3. **Project Management**: You can learn project management methodologies such as Scrum, Agile, or Prince2 and apply them to the project at hand. Keep track of project timelines, communicate effectively with team members, and learn to identify and mitigate risks. Contribute to project documentation to help your career.
4. **People Skills**: People skills are essential for success in any workplace and to network in the ecosystem. Focus on developing communication and collaboration skills including asking an being open for feedback. Be a team player who is willing to help out and build relationships with team members, stakeholders and people you interact with in the ecosystem – they may help you be employed now and in the future.

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