PHASE 5

PILOT AND ITERATION

Agile development process

So you've developed your idea and built a prototype to refine it. But this is all for nothing if real people don't respond to your solution - which is exactly why you need to run rigorous pilots to see how people experience the product.

This is a well-established element of the design process, but it tends to be far more difficult to do with supply chain solutions. By their nature, these are likely to be complex products designed to work at scale - which means piloting will be highly risky and expensive.

Gartner, the world's largest research company, estimates the piloting process for a new supply chain solution will take anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months, depending on the approach vendors take.[10] However, by opting for what they term a 'Lightweight Customer Demo', you can gain much of the information you need without the extreme cost or time commitment.

Enough to build on

In essence, a 'Lightweight Customer Demo' means providing a demo of the solution, and allowing businesses to use real-life data to project how it would fit into their existing system. This will begin to expose your solution to real-world supply chain dynamics and will provide vital insight into how supply chain managers will actually perceive what you're building.

This should be enough to build on: by analyzing this feedback, you should be able to iterate and refine your solution to the point where you're ready to build a fully-fledged solution and start truly taking off.

The power of pivoting

Just as during the research phase, it's vital that you stay open to negative feedback. Never become too attached to the vision you started with that you can't see its failings - because those failings are vital information about how you can succeed.

Starbucks started out making espresso machines, Nokia began as a paper mill and Blackberry - once synonymous with cell phones - has become a major player in cybersecurity.

So never overlook the power of the pivot; that's exactly what this phase of the process is for!

10 https://emtemp.gcom.cloud/ngw/globalassets/en/supply-chain/documents/trends/piloting-supply-chain-technology.pdf

PHASE 6

MVP

Establishing the Minimum Viable Product

This is what it's all been working towards, bringing your solution to life. The Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is essentially the bare bones of your solution, enabling you to launch it into the real world and see how it fares.

Finding the right 'early adopters' to use your MVP first is crucial here, especially given the complexity of supply chains. You need businesses with exacting standards that will help you develop better features and confront weaknesses others might simply let slide.

But it's also vital that you don't pretend this is just another round of prototyping.

You've got to play for keeps

Our most essential piece of advice regarding your MVP is this: don't launch it until you're ready. Despite the clear benefits of the lean methodology, research suggests that launching an MVP too soon actually harms many brands.[11]

So while iteration will surely continue, and you'll doubtless receive plenty of actionable feedback, the MVP marks the clear transition from being in development to operating a bona fide supply chain solution.

Ultimately, this final process should be considered an official 'launch'. Yes, you'll continue to iterate and improve your product, but at the most basic level, once your MVP is in the hands of real supply chain managers - your journey from concept to completion is done.

11 https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/the-limitations-of-lean-startup-principles/