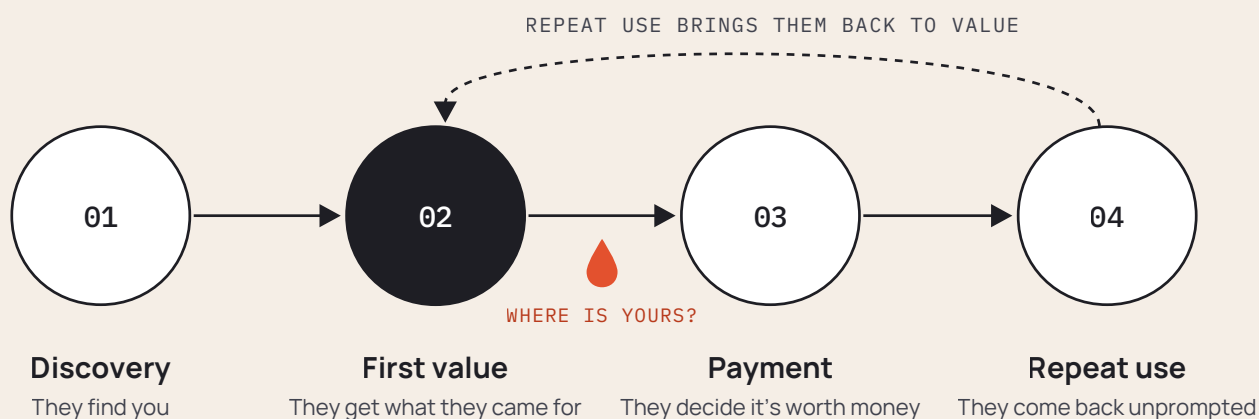


FOR FOUNDERS WITH A LIVE APP

Find the leak in your app's *core loop*.

Map how people find you, reach value, pay, and come back. Then pick one bottleneck and run one experiment against it.



Start with one question.

How does this app make money?

WHAT TO HAVE OPEN

Your subscription dashboard (RevenueCat or similar), your analytics tool, App Store Connect and Google Play Console, recent reviews, and recent support tickets. Bring whoever runs engineering if you can.

WHAT YOU LEAVE WITH

Your core loop in one sentence. The evidence behind each stage. One bottleneck worth fixing. One experiment with an owner and a review date.

INSIDE

Start here 2
The four stages 3 to 4
Worked example 5
Your leak and experiment 6

Business first. *Code second.*

When I take over an app, my first question is never about the codebase. It is: **how do you make money?** The answer points straight at the core loop, the few steps a user repeats that keep the business alive. Until that loop works, everything else is decoration.

I think about apps the way I was trained to think about games. There is a loop, a moment of value, and a reason to come back. A game with fifty features and a broken loop doesn't get played. Apps work the same way. Three features that bring people in, get them to value, get them to pay, and bring them back are worth more than ten features that only check boxes.

This worksheet walks the loop one stage at a time and asks you to write down what you can prove, separately from what you believe. The gap between those two columns is usually where the leak is.

Ken Vermeille, Founder, Vermillion

WHERE LOOPS USUALLY LEAK

- The store page promises one thing and the first screen delivers another.
- New users get **stranded in the UI**: they open a screen, hit a dead end, and nothing pulls them to the next step.
- The paywall asks for money before the user has felt the value it is charging for.
- People pay once and never build a habit, because nothing brings them back.
- Nobody talks to users outside the app, so the ones who drift away are never asked why.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKSHEET

- 01 Answer the three questions below. If you can't answer the first one clearly, stop and settle it. That is your first leak.
- 02 Work through the four stages on pages 3 and 4. Write what you see, not what you hope.
- 03 Pick one bottleneck and design one experiment on page 6. Page 5 shows a filled example.

BEFORE YOU START

A. How does this app make money? Plans, prices, trials, one-time purchases, ads. Plain words.

B. Your core loop in one sentence.

A (who)

comes to (do what)

gets (the moment of value)

and comes back because (the reason)

C. Which users make you money today? Not the most users. The ones who pay and stay. What do they have in common?

For each piece of evidence, write **S** if you have seen it this month, **O** if it is old or secondhand, or **M** if it is missing.

STAGE 01 **Discovery** How the right people find you

Every path that puts your app in front of the right person: store search, referrals, content, partnerships, ads, search engines, and AI assistants. Look hardest at the paths nobody paid for. Organic demand is gold dust. If people are already finding you on their own, your job is to follow it back to the vein it came from and build around that.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- Where do your best users come from? The ones who pay and stay, not the biggest channel.
- What words do people use when they find you, in search terms and in reviews?
- Does your store page promise the thing your first screen actually delivers?
- If you could keep only one channel, which would it be, and why?

What we see (facts only)

EVIDENCE TO PULL

- ☐ Store analytics: impressions, product page views, and downloads by source
- ☐ Search terms from Play Console, Apple Search Ads, or Google Search Console, where available
- ☐ Your last 20 reviews, read in full
- ☐ Where your last 10 paying customers heard about you. Ask them.

What we believe but can't prove yet

STAGE 02 **First value** The moment it clicks

First value is the moment a new user gets what they came for. Not the end of onboarding. The moment they think, this works. If you can't name that moment in one sentence, your users can't find it either.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- What is the moment of value? What does the user see, do, or feel?
- How many screens, steps, and permission prompts stand between install and that moment?
- Where do new users get stranded, with no obvious next step?
- What share of new users reach the moment of value in their first session? Do you know?

What we see (facts only)

EVIDENCE TO PULL

- ☐ A funnel from install to the moment of value in your analytics tool
- ☐ Ten session recordings of brand new users, watched start to finish
- ☐ Drop-off at each onboarding step
- ☐ Crashes and errors in first sessions, plus support tickets from week one

What we believe but can't prove yet

Same rule: **S** seen this month, **O** old or secondhand, **M** missing.

STAGE 03 Payment When value becomes money

Payment is where a user decides the value is worth money. For subscription apps that usually means a paywall, a trial, and a renewal. Look at when you ask, not only how. A great paywall shown too early is still too early.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- When does the paywall appear, relative to the moment of value?
- Of people who see it, how many start a trial or buy? How many trials become paid?
- Do purchase, restore, and renewal work every time on both platforms? How do you know?
- What does a user lose, in their own words, if they cancel?

What we see (facts only)

EVIDENCE TO PULL

- ☐ Subscription dashboard: trials, trial conversion, new paid subscribers, and refunds, by platform
- ☐ Paywall views compared with purchases
- ☐ Billing and restore errors from crash reports and support
- ☐ Cancellation reasons from Google Play's survey, support, or your own exit question
- ☐ A real purchase and restore on a real device, on each platform, this week

What we believe but can't prove yet

STAGE 04 Repeat use Why they come back

Repeat use is the reason someone returns without being chased. It is the difference between a download and a customer. Early on, the people who repeat are also your best product testers. What they do tells you what to build next, and it is often worth more than what they pay.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- What brings a user back: a reminder, a habit, new content, other people, a real-world trigger?
- How many new users are still active after one week? After four? After the first renewal?
- What do your most loyal users do that everyone else doesn't?
- Where does the app leave an open loop, a task started with no reason to return and finish it?
- Do you reach users outside the app, like a founder note after signup or a check-in when they go quiet?

What we see (facts only)

EVIDENCE TO PULL

- ☐ Retention by signup week from your analytics tool
- ☐ Renewals and cancellations by plan
- ☐ Push and email opt-in rates, and what you actually send
- ☐ Five conversations with users who stayed and five with users who left

What we believe but can't prove yet

Fernwell, a plant care app. *Fictional.*

Fernwell, its team, and all numbers are invented for illustration. They are not benchmarks.

HOW IT MAKES MONEY

Monthly and annual subscriptions with a 7-day free trial. The paywall appears when a user adds their third plant.

CORE LOOP IN ONE SENTENCE

A new plant owner comes to keep a plant alive, gets a care schedule, and returns when a watering reminder fires.

STAGE	WHAT WE SEE	WHAT WE BELIEVE	EVIDENCE
Discovery	Most installs come from store search for plant identification. Reviews talk about care and reminders, not identification.	The store page sells identification. People stay for care.	S
First value	Most new users add one plant and see its care schedule in session one. Notification permission is requested on screen one, before any plant exists. In 10 recordings, 7 people declined.	Declining here quietly kills the loop.	S
Payment	Few users add a third plant, so few ever see the paywall. Timing has never been tested.	Paywall timing matters, but it is downstream of the real problem.	S M
Repeat use	Users with reminders on return in week two far more often than users without. No email follow-up exists.	Reminders are the real product. They are the return trigger.	S

THE ONE BOTTLENECK

Repeat use, caused inside first value. Users reach value, then leave with an open loop. Nothing tells them when to come back, because the reminder was requested before it meant anything.

Why this one: the evidence is seen, not guessed. It starves payment, since users who never return never reach plant three. It can change in two weeks without a new feature.

Not now: paywall redesign, disease detection, dark mode.

EXPERIMENT CARD		OWNER: PRODUCT LEAD
The change	Ask for notifications right after the first care schedule appears, and show the date of the first reminder in the prompt.	
Who sees it	All new users on iOS and Android.	
We expect	More new users turn on reminders and come back in week two.	
We measure	Reminder opt-in, week-two return, and third plant added, for new users, from the analytics funnel.	
Review date	Four weeks after release, so at least two weekly cohorts have lived through week two.	
Keep it if	Opt-in and week-two return are clearly up and nothing else got worse. Otherwise revert and write down what we learned.	
Hold still	No paywall or onboarding changes while it runs. If two things move at once, we won't know which one worked.	

One bottleneck. *One experiment.*

HOW TO CHOOSE

- 01 Choose the leak with the strongest evidence, not the loudest opinion.
- 02 If an early leak starves every stage after it, fix that one first.
- 03 Choose something you can change and measure within a few weeks.
- 04 If a stage is mostly **M**, your first experiment is getting the evidence.
- 05 Give it time. Set the review date far enough out for real usage to show up.

STAGE	BIGGEST LEAK WE CAN SEE	S / O / M	FIXABLE IN WEEKS?
Discovery			
First value			
Payment			
Repeat use			

Our one bottleneck

Why this one, and what we are not fixing yet

EXPERIMENT CARD		OWNER: _____
The change One thing, plainly described		
Who sees it		
We expect		
We measure And where the number lives		
Review date Long enough for real usage		
Keep it if		
Hold still What won't change meanwhile		

Want a second set of eyes on your loop? Vermillion takes engineering ownership of live mobile apps, and every engagement starts with the question on page 2. A 15-minute call is enough to tell whether we can help.

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