






# Smoke Test VARIATIONS

This is a definitive list of modern, alternative 'Smoke Test' techniques.

Each of the techniques below have a similar goal - to help you test early signs of desirability fast and with limited cost.

| COST  |             | RUN TIME  |            |
|-------|-------------|---|------------|
| £     | <£250       |  | 1-3 hours  |
| ££    | <£500       |  | 1-3 days   |
| £££   | <£500-1000  |  | 1-3 weeks  |
| ££££  | <£1000-5000 |  | 4-8 weeks  |
| £££££ | <£5000+     |  | 1-3 months |

## BASIC 'COMING SOON' PAGE

A basic one page website (landing page) clearly stating the value proposition, benefits and call to action with an email capture form.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL |
|------------|---|------|---|----------------|
| ~1 day     |  | £    |  | All            |

### MEASURE

- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Bounce rate
- Session time
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Quick and cheap to create
- Easy to update as you learn more
- Ability to acquire email addresses

### DISADVANTAGES

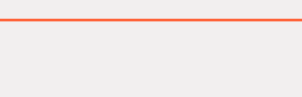
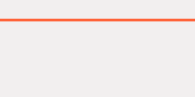
- Low level of validation
- No guarantee they will buy at launch

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Landing page examples](#)

## - VARIATION #1 'PRICING' PAGE

Create a pricing page for your product or service and track the number of clicks on the CTA to measure which plan is getting the most clicks. Once clicked show a coming soon page and allow users to leave their email address to be notified when you launch.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH  | COST | RUN TIME   | BUSINESS MODEL |
|------------|--|------|--|----------------|
| ~1-2 days  |  | £    |  | All            |

### MEASURE

- Number of clicks on each pricing tier
- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Bounce rate
- Session time
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Quick and cheap to create
- Easy to update as you learn more
- Ability to acquire email addresses
- Early understanding of pricing validation

### DISADVANTAGES

- No guarantee they will buy at launch
- Hard to commit to features at this stage for each pricing tier as you are most likely still validating them. They might be different when you launch - therefore this should be factored in.

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Buffer example](#)

## - VARIATION #2 'HIGH BAR' TECHNIQUE

Add in an additional step to your registration flow to understand how much they want access to your product or service. Ask your new subscribers to perform a task. For example, get them to complete a form (just a couple of questions) to test their motivation and get insight into who they are, what their expectations and frustration are, how they do x etc.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL |
|------------|---|------|---|----------------|
| ~1 day     |  | £    |  | All            |

### MEASURE

- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Types of people interested
- Patterns in pains and frustrations
- Bounce rate
- Average shares per person
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Gauge intent by asking them to complete an additional action. Shows they are interested and aren't simply signing up
- Quick and cheap to create
- Easy to update as you learn more
- Ability to acquire email addresses
- Understand more about your target audience
- Segment your audience based on responses and invite in others once you have satisfied your initial beta group.

### DISADVANTAGES

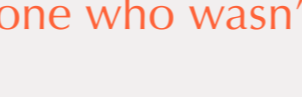
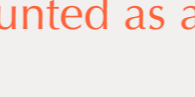
- Adding an additional step can deter people and you might experience a lower conversion rate

### HELPFUL LINKS

[MyMind example](#)  
[Levels Health](#)  
[Hey](#)  
[Mighty.App](#)

## - VARIATION #3 'BROKEN PROMISE' TEST

Secret/exclusive 'coming soon' beta. By telling your new subscribers they are part of an exclusive group of users, you can measure if they share it with others. This approach allows you to test the virality of your product. Create a dedicated web page with a call-to-action. On the 'thank you' page or in follow-up communication, the copy explicitly asks the registrant NOT to share the idea with others. After some time passes, you compare the original list of people you contacted with the actual list of signups. Anyone who wasn't in your original list is counted as a referral.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL                  |
|------------|---|------|---|---------------------------------|
| ~2-3 days  |  | £    |  | SaaS, digital product, hardware |

### MEASURE

- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Number of shares
- Average shares per person
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Easy to update as you learn more
- Ability to acquire email addresses
- Test the virality of your product before you launch
- Understand the desirability - people sharing is a strong sign

### DISADVANTAGES

- You need to have a very compelling product in order to encourage people to share it.
- Requires more time to implement correctly in order to track UTM codes so you know if people have shared the url.
- Some plugin tools can be expensive. See 'Helpful links/examples'.

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Dropbox example](#)

## - VARIATION #4 'EXPLAINER' VIDEO

Add a video to your landing page, explaining your proposed product or service in more detail. You can include recorded prototypes or mockups to give the viewer an idea of what your future product or service will look like and its proposed features. Consider creating multiple videos on different landing pages, tailored to your audience types (personas) and run targeted ads towards the page to determine which converts best.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL |
|------------|---|------|---|----------------|
| ~4-5 days  |  | £    |  | All            |

### MEASURE

- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Number of impressions
- Conversions based on traffic source
- Number of shares

### ADVANTAGES

- Easy to update as you learn more
- Ability to acquire email addresses
- Provides people with a better understanding of what your product or service is - what it looks like, features. Looks real.

### DISADVANTAGES

- Tricky to make a good explainer video
- Can take time depending on the quality of the video
- Additional expense should be factored in

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Dropbox example](#)

## INVITE-ONLY / WAITING LIST

This is similar to the coming soon page but with a slight difference, as you can add in referral systems to create virality. Each person is provided a number in the queue and if they want to move up to list to be the first to get access to the product they need to refer X number of people by providing their email address.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL                  |
|------------|---|------|---|---------------------------------|
| ~3-4 days  |  | £    |  | SaaS, digital product, hardware |

### MEASURE

- Conversion rate (email signups)
- Bounce rate
- Average referrals per person
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Can create a viral growth effect
- Out of the box referral solutions available to speed setup process
- Inexpensive to create
- Can reduce spend on marketing short term
- Referrals can provide further evidence to validation

### DISADVANTAGES

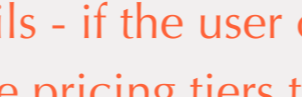
- Tricky to pull off successfully
- No guarantee they will buy at launch

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Robinhood example](#)  
[Kickofflabs](#)  
[UpViral](#)  
[KingSumo](#)  
[ViralLoops](#)

## PRE-ORDER FORM (MOCK SALE)

Create a mockup of a product(s) on a website. The user selects the item they wish to purchase and provides their details - if the user completes and submits the form it's a positive sign of desirability. If you have multiple pricing tiers then make them select the pricing tier - or if it's a physical product ask for the spec and the quantity. Tell the user they will be notified when it's ready and payment will be taken at that point.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME | BUSINESS MODEL                          |
|------------|---|------|----------|---|
| ~2-4 days  |  | £    | -        | e-commerce, Digital good, B2B, Services |

### MEASURE

- Number of pre-order forms submitted
- Click through rate
- Views of pricing options
- Email addresses provided
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

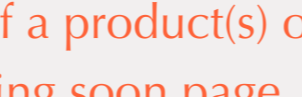

- There is no pressure to ship the item because no money has been exchanged.
- Positive sign of desirability when form has been submitted
- Quick and cheap to create
- If physical product - you will know how many to create/manufacture in your first run

### DISADVANTAGES

- Not a sure sign they will actually follow through and pay when the time comes.

## 'FAKE DOOR' TEST

Create a mockup of a product(s) on a website. When the user clicks the buy CTA for the product, they are taken to a coming soon page. Email address should be captured to follow up with the user when the product is ready to launch.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL                 |
|------------|---|------|---|--------------------------------|
| ~2-4 days  |  | ££   |  | e-commerce, digital good, SaaS |

### MEASURE

- The number of clicks on the 'buy now' or 'add to basket' CTA.
- Conversions based on traffic source
- Number of email addresses provided

### ADVANTAGES

- Reasonable sign of buying intent.
- Reasonably quick and cheap to create
- No logistics or money exchanging hands

### DISADVANTAGES

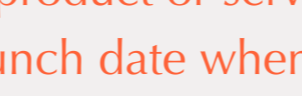
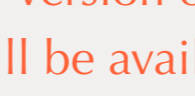
- Still no guarantee they would actually complete the transaction after the item is added to the basket. The typical shopping cart abandonment rate for online retailers is 67.91%.
- Can be frustrating to users

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Fake door test info](#)

## PRE-SALE

Offer a product or service at a discounted rate for a limited time before you launch. Users pay in advance for the product or service and either get an early version of the product or are given an approximate launch date when the product or service will be available. As the name says most folk tend to offer the product/service for a discounted price for a limited amount of time. Typically a few weeks.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL                           |
|------------|---|------|---|--|
| ~1-2 weeks |  | £££  |  | e-commerce, digital good, SaaS, Services |

### MEASURE

- Number of paid conversions
- Conversion rate
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Allows you gauge interest before creating the product or service in some instances.
- The up-front payments act as a form of validation
- The up-front payments can fund the creation of your product or service in advance.

### DISADVANTAGES

- You are taking payment up-front in some cases for a product which is yet to be created or fully defined. You need to ensure you can deliver that product or service in advance
- If you don't get enough paid conversions you will need to issue refunds
- Can be seen as a grey hate validation technique
- Takes longer to set up due to payment processing, shipping, customer support etc.

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Bone Broth example](#)  
[Knoxlabs example](#)

## POCKET PROTOTYPE

This smoke test applies to physical goods or products with hardware components — at a minimum, a mobile phone. It entails interviewing a prospect or customer, then physically pulling a prototype out of our pocket and using the prototype to drive further discussion and exploration.

| SETUP TIME | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL       |
|------------|---|------|---|----------------------|
| ~1-2 weeks |  | £    |  | App or physical good |

### MEASURE

- Quantify how likely the participant would use such a product
- Number of verbal agreements

### ADVANTAGES

- Allows you to get quick feedback by providing a visual artifact
- Quick and cheap approach as it's built using prototyping software
- You can make changes in minutes based on feedback and re-test

### DISADVANTAGES

- Verbal agreements are not strong indicators of purchase intent
- Need some design experience albeit not a lot

## - VARIATION #1 CROWDFUNDING

Crowdfunding is an alternative example of a pre-sale strategy - more specifically for a physical good. This approach allows you to set a pledge amount you need in order to fund the production of the good. If you meet the pledge goal the money will be released and you can start producing the product.

| SETUP TIME  | VALIDATION STRENGTH   | COST  | RUN TIME  | BUSINESS MODEL |
|-------------|---|-------|---|----------------|
| ~2-3 months |  | £££££ |  | Physical goods |

### MEASURE

- Number of pledges
- Average pledge amount
- % of goal complete
- Social shares
- Conversions based on traffic source

### ADVANTAGES

- Allows you to receive funding to create your product before investing time and money into creating the product before you know if anyone would buy it
- Provides great exposure, SEO and traffic to your site
- Save time and money creating the product before testing desirability

### DISADVANTAGES

- You need to ensure you can manufacture the product or at least create the product before asking for the pledge amount
- Expensive to pull off. The digital assets required can cost a lot. Designed mockups, renders and the digital explainer video.

### HELPFUL LINKS

[Indiegogo](#)  
[Kickstarter](#)