THE OPERATOR'S EDGE

A founder's playbook, idea to exit.

18 articles. 5 phases. Every hard-won lesson from building, scaling & exiting.

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Business Model Reference Guide

The Operator's Edge · Phase 2: Startup & Launch

Use this reference to identify your primary business model before mapping your compliance, licensing, insurance, and regulatory requirements. Each model carries a distinct regulatory footprint. Starting with the right model classification makes everything downstream faster and more accurate.

#	Business Model	Thought Leader	Sales Methodology & Approach
1	**E-Commerce**	**Jeff Bezos** *Founder of Amazon — revolutionized e-commerce and online retail strategy.*	**AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action)** Formulated by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in the late 19th century. Guides customers through the funnel from awareness to purchase decision.
2	**Retail**	**Phil Knight** *Founder of Nike — pioneered innovative retail and brand marketing approaches that redefined how products and identity intersect.*	**SPIN Selling (Situation, Problem, Implication, Need-Payoff)** Developed by Neil Rackham, author of SPIN Selling. Based on extensive field research into what separates effective B2B and retail sales conversations from ineffective ones.
3	**Local Services**	**Marcus Sheridan** *Author of They Ask, You Answer — focuses on content-driven marketing strategies built for service-based businesses.*	**Solution Selling** Introduced by Michael Bosworth in the 1980s. Centers on the salesperson becoming a trusted advisor who solves problems rather than pushes products.
4	**Software as a Service (SaaS)**	**Jason Lemkin** *Leading voice in the SaaS community — deep operational insight into SaaS business models, metrics, and sales motion.*	**Challenger Sale Model** Developed by Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson at CEB (now Gartner). Teaches salespeople to challenge customer assumptions and reframe how they think about their problems.
5	**Subscription Services**	**Robbie Kellman Baxter** *Author of The Membership Economy — the defining authority on subscription-based business models and recurring revenue strategy.*	**Value-Based Selling** Advanced by Michael J. Bosworth and John R. Holland in CustomerCentric Selling. Emphasizes selling the value of an outcome, not the features of a product.
6	**Freemium Models**	**Fred Wilson** *Venture capitalist with deep investment in successful freemium companies — offers a capital-*	**Inbound Selling** Pioneered by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, founders of HubSpot. Attracts customers through relevant content and earned trust rather than outbound interruption.

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		perspective view on conversion economics.	
7	**Franchising**	**Ray Kroc** *Architect of McDonald's global franchise expansion — his operational playbook remains the foundational reference for franchise scale.*	**Relationship Selling** Rooted in Dale Carnegie's principles from How to Win Friends and Influence People. Prioritizes trust, rapport, and long-term value over transactional close rates.
8	**Consulting**	**David Maister** *Author of The Trusted Advisor — the definitive voice on managing professional service firms and client relationships at scale.*	**Miller Heiman Strategic Selling** Developed by Robert B. Miller and Stephen E. Heiman. Provides a structured framework for navigating complex, multi-stakeholder B2B sales processes.
9	**On-Demand Services**	**Travis Kalanick** *Co-founder of Uber — instrumental in proving and scaling the on-demand service model across global markets.*	**Needs-Based Selling** Rooted in Harvard Business School marketing principles. Focuses entirely on identifying and addressing specific customer needs rather than leading with product features.
10	**Affiliate Marketing**	**Pat Flynn** *Founder of Smart Passive Income — widely regarded as one of the most transparent practitioners of affiliate marketing strategy.*	**Content Marketing** Led by Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute. Builds audience trust through valuable content, which is the engine that drives affiliate conversion.
11	**Content Creation & Monetization**	**Gary Vaynerchuk** *Digital marketing and content pioneer — his strategies for leveraging content to build business are among the most widely studied in the field.*	**Social Selling** Championed by Jill Rowley. Uses social networks to build relationships with prospects and guide them toward purchase through authentic engagement rather than cold outreach.
12	**Marketplace**	**Pierre Omidyar** *Founder of eBay — pioneered the scalable online marketplace model that connected buyers and sellers at global scale.*	**Network Effect Sales Strategy** Articulated by Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn. Each new participant increases value for existing users — the sales motion is designed to accelerate that compounding.