5 founder mistakes I made

... so you don't have to

FRICH

T-MOBILE FOR BUSINESS

What's in here?

- We signed eight clients in one month and everything broke
- I waited too long to build my personal brand
- I tried to do everything myself instead of hiring specialists
- I confused being busy with making progress
- I listened too much to investors and not enough to customers

1️⃣

We signed eight clients in one month and everything broke

In one month, we scaled from working with only a handful of advertisers to closing eight new contracts in a month.

For an investor update, it looked like incredible momentum. Behind the scenes – it was total chaos.

Every client wanted different deliverables, tracking links, revisions, approvals, and reporting. Some requested endless rounds of edits because we hadn't clearly defined what was included. Our team spent more time reacting than executing, and I found myself answering operational questions all day instead of actually growing the business.

Looking back, I would've invested much earlier in operational infrastructure. Standardized processes, project management, clear client workflows. It's not the most glamorous side of entrepreneurship, but it's often the difference between growth that scales and growth that creates chaos.

2️⃣

I waited too long to build my personal brand

For years, I thought I had to "earn" the right to post online and position myself as an expert.

I kept telling myself I'd start sharing more once we'd raised more money, hit bigger milestones, or felt more established.

I was completely wrong.

I remember the first post that changed how I thought about it. I shared a list of startup grants that most founders don't know about. It got over 10,000 comments. That was the moment I realized people aren't waiting for you to be successful to pay attention. They're paying attention to whoever is being useful right now.

After that, LinkedIn became the channel that opened the most doors for us. I used my personal brand to reach out directly to dream brand partners we never would have gotten through a cold email. One of them was Headspace, a brand that had always been a dream for us – they agreed to jump on a call because they had seen our content on LinkedIn.

If I could start over, I'd begin documenting the journey from day one. Not because everything felt figured out, but because people want to see every step of the journey.

Building your personal brand is part of the job when you're a founder. I just wish I'd started sooner.

3️⃣

I tried to do everything myself instead of hiring specialists

I knew something had to change when I looked at how I was actually spending my days. I was going back and forth with clients on tracking links. Reviewing edits on content. Chasing approvals. Managing deliverables line by line. And at some point I realized two things at once: I had no time left for anything else, and I wasn't even good at it.

Instead of trying to power through, we brought in a fractional operations leader. On day one, he asked to be cc'd on everything. Within a week, he was already building out standardized processes for every client workflow we had. The stuff I'd been scrambling to manage for months, he systematized in days.

For a relatively small monthly investment, he reduced bottlenecks and freed me to focus on the work only I could do as the CEO. I should have done it six months earlier.

Same thing with our internet setup. We were a small team working across time zones, and for way too long we were running off personal hotspots and home wifi. It didn't feel like a problem until we had back-to-back client calls dropping and files taking forever to sync during the busiest weeks. We switched to T-Mobile for Business Internet and it was one of those unsexy operational upgrades that immediately removed a daily friction point. I'd set it up on day one if I were starting over.

The lesson for me was that the boring infrastructure decisions are the ones that actually let you move fast.

4️⃣

I confused being busy with making progress

As a founder, there's always another Slack message, another meeting, another introduction, another "quick question".

For a long time, my days felt productive because they were full of calls. In reality, I was spending too much time on things that didn't move the company forward.

What changed everything was something simple. Every Monday, my co-founder and I started setting three goals for the week. Three things that would actually move the needle.

It forced us to be honest about what mattered. Building out a new target list for brand sponsors and reaching out to them? That moves the needle. Catch-up chats with investors, coffee with other founders, ticking off old emails? Those feel productive but aren't really doing much for the business.

Everything feels urgent when you're building a startup. Very little actually matters that week.

5️⃣

I listened too much to investors and not enough to customers

This was probably my most expensive mistake.

At one point, investors encouraged us to shift toward selling to financial institutions because B2B was the trend.

So we did.

We spent months attending conferences, building partnerships, and trying to become the company we thought investors wanted to fund.
The problem? It wasn't the company we were excited to build.

Our mission has always been helping Gen Z build better financial lives. The further we moved away from our users, the less energized our team became.

Looking back, I think we lost close to a year chasing a direction that looked attractive on paper but wasn't authentic to who we were.

Investors can offer useful perspectives. But your customers are the ones who decide whether your company survives. It’s okay to listen carefully to investors but you have to obsess over your users.

you've got this!

you've got this!