VSC Ventures – Deeptech Founder Playbook (Draft v1)

Date: August 10, 2025\ **Audience:** Internal (Partnership, Platform, Marketing)\ **Scope:** U.S. deeptech & industrial tech founders (robotics, advanced manufacturing, autonomy, energy/industrial decarb, semis/compute, industrial AI)

---

0) Executive Summary

- **Goal:** Make VSC Ventures the first call for deep/industrial tech founders by showing (1) we understand the shop-floor reality and standards, (2) we have access to decision-makers and regulators, and (3) we can help them scale FOAK→MOAK through narrative, policy, and distribution.
- **How:** Build a repeatable online-first system that (a) publishes practical, non-generic content, (b) collaborates with trusted community leaders, and (c) shows real access (regulators, standards bodies, and buyers).
- **Outputs:** Co-bylines, AMAs, virtual firesides, technical briefs, DFM guides, regulatory office hours, and targeted newsletters—then syndicate across niche channels where these founders actually hang out.

---

1) VSC Ventures in One Page

- **Positioning:** "Storytelling is our superpower." VSC is a venture firm born from 22+ years of company-building PR + comms; we combine capital with distribution to help technical founders break through noise and win customers/talent.
- **Stats (site-facing):** 20+ companies; \$250K+ typical first check; supported \~900 startups historically as a team; 3 IPOs; 22 unicorns; 60+ exits.
- **What we do for deeptech:**
- Translate complex tech into buyer-safe narratives (safety, throughput, unit economics).
- Open doors to **standards bodies** ([IEEE](#)/[SAE](#)/[A3](#)/[UL](#)), **procurement** ([DIU](#)/[DOE](#)), and **industrial buyers**.
- Help shape FOAK case studies, validation with pilot customers, and **regulatory readiness** content.
- **Sweet spot:** Hands-on technical founders with real-world pilots, early revenue/LoIs, or validated lab work transitioning to production.

Note: external statistics are paraphrased from VSC's public site language and should be refreshed before publishing externally.

---

2) What We Saw in VSC's Founder/Startup Patterns

High-level signals across portfolio snapshot + research (emphasis on deep/industrial tech):

- **Technical founder dominance:** Majority led by engineering-heavy CEOs/CTOs (robotics/vision/AI/hardware).
- **Applied science + ops:** Founders convert research or domain practice into productized systems (e.g., biomarkers → clinical endpoints; sensors → industrial autonomy; IoT → network effects).
- **Regulatory & standards literacy:** Many operate where **FDA****/********EPA****/********FCC****/********FAA****/********NRC** or **UL****/********SAE****/********IEEE** matter; the strongest teams engage early (preemptive safety cases, conformity roadmaps).
- **Pilot-led GTM:** FOAK deployments with clear KPIs precede scale; the best teams publish objective results (throughput, scrap, MTBF, CO_2e impact, OEE).
- **Industrial cred over social clout:** Low vanity social; high credibility in forums, standards WGs, and technical newsletters.
- **Partner-driven distribution:** Sales via channel/OEMs, GCs, EPCs, or enterprise alliances; content that helps buyers de-risk (compliance, lifecycle cost) outperforms product hype.

Non-obvious pattern insights:

- **"Point-of-purchase influence."** Founders live where they source parts and reference designs (Digi-Key/Mouser/McMaster-Carr/MISUMI/Protolabs). Educational content there converts better than generic blog posts.
- **"Standards-as-marketing."** Early participation (ROS 2/SAE committees/UL pre-cert) serves as both product diligence and credible PR.
- **"Regulator proximity ≠ approval, but reduces ambiguity."** Private AMAs with policy shapers improve founder decision velocity (timelines, labeling, testing paths), signaling VSC's access.
- **"Ops narrative beats tech narrative."** Buyers respond to safety, uptime, warranty, and labor integration more than model accuracy or cool hardware.

---

3) Ideal Founder Profile (IFP)

Core traits

- Builder-first: 5–10+ years in relevant engineering domains (robotics, EE/ME, controls, materials, semis, power).
- Standards-aware: Familiar with IEC/UL/SAE/IEEE, OSHA/NFPA; can frame a **compliance plan**.
- Data credible: Publishes benchmarks (OEE, MTBF, accuracy, cycle time, CO_2e), not anecdotes.
- Buyer fluent: Can talk in **throughput, return-to-service, warranty, TCO**; speaks plant manager language.
- Community contributor: Visible in discipline-specific forums (ROS Discourse, EEVblog Forum, Control.com), not just on social media.
- Ethical safety bias: Designs with fail-safe modes, validation, and traceability.

Screening signals

- Evidence of **pilot discipline** (SOWs, safety cases, site acceptance tests).
- Referenceable **industry champions** (plant ops, safety officers, QA).
- Early **standards engagement** or pre-cert testing.

Red flags

- "Research forever" without DFM/DFX.
- No plan for **service/maintenance** or warranty obligations.
- Avoids regulatory conversations or shrugs off standards.

---

4) Ideal Startup Profile (ISP)

- **Stage:** Post-prototype, pre-scale; ≥1 paid pilot (or LOI with defined success metrics).
- **Revenue:** Not a hard threshold, but signals like annualized pilot revenue ≥\$250–500k or gross margin path ≥40% on hardware+software.
- **Moat:** Hard-to-copy integration (sensors + models + process change), data network effects, or certification positioning.
- **Roadmap:** FOAK→MOAK plan (supply chain, service model, quality system, certification timeline).
- **Buying motion:** Channel/OEM or enterprise workflows already identified (EPCs, GCs, systems integrators).
- **Risk handling:** Clear HAZOP/FMEA, cyber & safety plan, support SLAs, and spare strategy.

---

5) Interest Map — What These Founders Read/Attend/Care About (online-first)

Technical/ops: DFM/DFX, test & validation, safety/certification, standards updates, PLC/SCADA integrations, reliability engineering, supply-chain resilience, FOAK financing.

Policy/funding: NSF TIP, DOE ARPA-E / LPO, DIU, IRA/45Q/48C tax credits, state industrial grants, EPA / FAA / FCC / FDA / NRC updates.

Buyer-side: Case studies with plant managers, RFP checklists, warranty/MTBF, retrofit economics, uptime & labor impact.

Communities: ROS Discourse, Control.com / PLCTalk, EEVblog, Hardware Meetup streams (Substack), Greentown / Activate / HAX webinars, Manufacturing USA institute webinars, NVIDIA GTC on-demand.

---

6) Where We'll Find More Founders Like This

(People/owners listed to signal access; use for co-bylines, AMAs, or virtual firesides.)

6.1 Communities & Forums (online)

- **ROS Discourse** / **Open Robotics** — moderators & WG leads across ROS 2 ecosystems.
- **Work on Climate** (Slack) — founders/operators; MCJ-adjacent leaders.
- **EEVblog Forum** — electronics veterans; moderators include Dave Jones.
- **Control.com** / **PLCTalk** — industrial controls engineers & SIs.
- **Hackaday.io** — project leads & editors for featured builds.
- **The Robot Report** (editorial + RBR50).
- **IEEE Spectrum – Robotics** (editors/writers).
- **Hardware Meetup (SF & national)** — streamable events (newsletter/Substack).
- **Digi-Key TechForum** / **Mouser Technical Resources**.
- **NVIDIA Developer Forums – Omniverse** / **Isaac** + **GTC on-demand**.

6.2 Incubators/Fellowships/Programs (virtual)

- **Activate** (fellows + events).
- **Greentown Labs** (virtual pitch days).
- **The Engine** (MIT) (tough-tech summits/publications).
- **HAX** (SOSV) (hardware cohorts + online showcases).
- **Manufacturing USA institutes** — **MxD**, **America Makes**, **NextFlex**, **AIM Photonics** webinars.
- **Newlab** (mobility/climate virtual content).
- **NSF I-Corps** (national + regional hubs; monthly webinars).
- **Cornell Tech Runway** (postdoc founders; Runway events).
- **MIT ILP** online (industry-facing research briefings).
- **DIU** virtual office hours (dual-use founders).

6.3 Newsletters/Pods (co-bylines possible)

- **Scope of Work** (Spencer Wright) — manufacturing.
- **Construction Physics** (Brian Potter) — industrial methods.
- **Canary Media** & **Catalyst (podcast)** (Shayle Kann) — decarb economics.
- **The Robot Report** (newsletters).
- **IEEE Spectrum – Robotics**.
- **CTVC** (Sightline Climate) — climate/infra dealflow.
- **Hardware to Save a Planet** (pod).
- **NVIDIA GTC – replays** (industrial AI).
- **Hackaday** editorial.
- **Digi-Key TechForum** feature slots.

6.4 "Point-of-purchase" channels (quiet but high-signal)

- **Digi-Key** / **Mouser** (reference designs, app notes).
- **McMaster-Carr** (spec primers).
- **MISUMI USA** (motion components blog).
- **Protolabs** (DFM library + webinars).
- **SparkFun** / **Adafruit Learn** (prototyping community posts).
- **KiCad** library updates (design notes).
- **Practical Machinist** (fabrication tips, shop owners).

- **ChiefDelphi** (robotics build season learnings).
- **America Makes** supplier ecosystem (3DP).
- **ArduPilot Discourse** (autonomy stacks).

---

7) Regulatory & Standards Access Map

Purpose: host "office hours"/firesides to help founders navigate rules; signal our ability to convene credible voices. Roles/persons **as of Aug 10, 2025** (titles change—verify before outreach).

- **NSF — TIP Directorate**: *Erwin Gianchandani*, Assistant Director. Programs: translation, regional engines, TTP.
- **NIST**: *Acting Director: Chuck Romine*; **ANSI**: *Laurie E. Locascio* (President & CEO).
- **FCC**: *Brendan Carr*, Chair. Spectrum/device rules relevant to robotics/IoT.
- **FDA — CDRH** (Devices): *Michelle E. Tarver, MD, PhD*, Director. Medical/adjacent robotics & imaging.
- **EPA — Office of Air & Radiation** (OAR): *Aaron L. Szabo*, Assistant Administrator. Industrial emissions rules.
- **DOE — ARPA-E**: program directors (e.g., storage, power, materials) available for summits/webinars.
- **DOE — LPO**: *Jigar Shah* (former Director, 2021–Jan 2025) — still influential voice for FOAK/MOAK finance.
- **FAA — UAS Integration**: *Jay Merkle* (longtime executive leader; now industry/regulatory roles) — BVLOS, ops over people.
- **NRC**: *David A. Wright*, Chair — reactor licensing & advanced nuclear context.
- **Standards Bodies**: **A3** (automation) / **SAE** / **IEEE** / **UL Solutions** / **NFPA** — invite technical committee leaders for targeted sessions.

Programming ideas:

- "**Reg Office Hours**" mini-series (FDA devices; FCC spectrum; EPA OAR for industrial decarb; FAA UAS).
- "**Standards to Scale**" with A3/SAE/UL editors: conformity checklists founders can apply immediately.
- "**FOAK to MOAK**" with DOE ARPA-E/LPO voices on capital stacking.

---

8) Content Strategy (signals → pillars → assets)

Signals to transmit

1. **We understand the industry.** (DFM/DFX, safety, uptime, service, integration)
2. **We have access.** (regulators, standards, procurement, buyers)
3. **We can help you scale.** (FOAK→MOAK playbooks, channel partners, co-marketing)

Content pillars

- **Ops & Safety:** SATs, HAZOP/FMEA, warranty math, cyber/OT segmentation.
- **Standards & Compliance:** UL/SAE/IEEE maps, labeling, traceability, validation.

- **Industrial GTM:** pilots → scale, channel/OEM strategy, service SLAs, spare logistics.
- **Policy & Capital:** IRA/DOE, DIU, SBIR/STTR, regional grants; FOAK/MOAK finance.
- **Casework:** teardown case studies with quantified deltas (OEE, MTBF, CO2e, labor metrics).

Hero series (remote-executable)

- **"Design for Scale"** — a 6-part DFM/DFX series, co-bylined with Protolabs/MISUMI editors.
- **"Standards-as-a-Strategy"** — live sessions + field guides with A3/SAE/UL/IEEE editors.
- **"Reg Office Hours"** — 45-min AMAs with FDA/FCC/EPA/FAA/NRC experts.
- **"Inside the Pilot"** — founders + plant managers unpack an SAT and what really mattered.
- **"FOAK→MOAK"** — with DOE/LPO vets on capital stacks, warranties, and EPC relationships.

General channels (top-of-funnel)

- LinkedIn/Twitter summaries of each hero asset with diagrams & 1-page checklists.
- Cross-post short clips to YouTube/Pod feed (searchable long tail).
- Owned newsletter (monthly): "Industrial Notes" — crisp, operator-first.

Niche distribution (high-intent)

- Post full explainers to **Digi-Key****/********Mouser****/********Protolabs** resource centers.
- Submit co-bylines to **Scope of Work** / **Construction Physics** / **IEEE Spectrum** / **The Robot Report**.
- Host AMAs in **Work on Climate** Slack, **ROS Discourse** WG sessions, **Control.com**.
- Stream firesides with **Greentown****/********Activate****/********HAX****/********Manufacturing USA** channels.
- Cut technical clips for **NVIDIA Developer/Omniverse** forums & **GTC libraries**.

---

9) Distribution Roster (people to contact)

Keep sentences short here. Use this as a working outreach list.

Communities/Editors

- Spencer Wright — Scope of Work (editor).
- Brian Potter — Construction Physics (author).
- The Robot Report — editorial team (RBR50).
- IEEE Spectrum – Robotics — section editors.
- Work on Climate — Slack admins.
- Hardware Meetup (SF) — newsletter.
- Digi-Key TechForum — community editors.
- Mouser Technical Resources — editors.
- Protolabs — content & webinars team.
- MISUMI USA — blog/editorial team.

Programs

- [Activate](#) — programming/events leads.
- [Greentown Labs](#) — events/comms.
- [The Engine](#) (MIT) — community/events.
- [HAX](#) (SOSV) — program leads.
- Manufacturing USA — [MxD](#), [America Makes](#), [NextFlex](#), [AIM Photonics](#) (webinar coordinators).
- [Newlab](#) — content/events.
- [NSF I-Corps](#) — hub coordinators.
- [Cornell Tech Runway](#) — program director (F. Gómez-Baquero).
- [MIT ILP](#) — member programs.
- [DIU](#) — outreach/office hours.

Regulators/Standards

- NSF TIP — [site](#) — Erwin Gianchandani.
- NIST — [site](#) (Acting: Chuck Romine).
- ANSI — [site](#) — Laurie Locascio.
- FCC — [site](#) — Brendan Carr (Chair).
- FDA CDRH — [site](#) — Michelle E. Tarver.
- EPA OAR — [site](#) — Aaron L. Szabo.
- DOE ARPA-E — [site](#).
- DOE LPO — [site](#) — Jigar Shah (former).
- FAA UAS — [site](#) — Jay Merkle (ex-ED; now industry).
- NRC — [site](#) — David A. Wright (Chair).
- A3/SAE/IEEE/UL/NFPA — [A3](#) / [SAE](#) / [IEEE](#) / [UL](#) / [NFPA](#).

---

10) Next Steps (90-day plan)

Week 0–2

- Lock 3 **co-byline** partners ([Scope of Work](#), [Protolabs](#), [The Robot Report](#)).
- Book 2 **Reg Office Hours** ([FDA CDRH](#); [FCC spectrum](#) for robotics/IoT).
- Confirm 2 **program collaborations** ([Greentown](#) pitch day panel; [Activate](#) fireside).

Week 3–6

- Publish **Design for Scale #1** (DFM/DFX) + short video.
- Run **Office Hours #1**; capture Q&A; ship 1-pager.
- Guest post on **[Digi-Key](#)**/******[Mouser](#) with an application brief.

Week 7–10

- Publish **Standards-as-a-Strategy #1** with UL/A3 editor.
- AMA in **[Work on Climate](#)** Slack + **[ROS](#)** WG session.
- Launch **Industrial Notes** newsletter (issue #1).

Week 11–13

- **FOAK→MOAK** webinar with DOE/LPO voices.
- Publish **Inside the Pilot #1** (case study with metrics; anonymize if needed).
- Retro: measure reach → double down on channels that drove inbound.

Owners & measurement

- **Owner:** Platform/Marketing lead (distribution), GP sponsor (regulator outreach).
- **KPIs:** # of qualified founder intros; invites from programs; # of standards/committee engagements; newsletter subs; webinar attendance; inbound pilots from buyers.

---

11) Full-Funnel Content Strategy (Three Layers)

Objective: Move founders from broad awareness → qualified interest → deep engagement with VSC in the niche channels they trust. Everything is online-first.

Signals threaded through all layers: - *We understand the industry.*
- *We have access to decision-makers & standards.*
- *We can help you scale FOAK→MOAK.*

Layer A — Mass Reach (non-technical)

Channels: LinkedIn, Twitter/X, short video, public podcast feed.
Audience mindstate: "I'm curious about building in hardtech; teach me without jargon."
Cadence: 3–4 posts/week + 1 podcast/fortnight.
Formats: - Founder stories (people + ops outcomes, not tech specs).
- Simple visuals: before/after throughput, labor impact, uptime.
- Non-jargony explainers on regulation (what it means, not legalese).
- Opinions on market structure, procurement realities, and success/failure patterns.
Primary CTA → Layer B: Subscribe to **Industrial Notes** (newsletter) or "Founder Story Selling" mini-series; download 1-page checklists.

Layer B — Mid Funnel (story selling for technical founders)

Channels: Industrial Notes newsletter; VC-to-VC interview podcast episodes repurposed as long-form newsletters; gated PDFs.
Audience mindstate: "I'm building; help me communicate and navigate."
Cadence: 2 issues/month + 1 repurposed VC interview/month.
Formats: - Step-by-step guides: "How to write a buyer-safe case study," "Pilot SOW anatomy," "Standards roadmap, simplified."
- VC roundtables turned into transcripts + diagrams; pull-quotes for social snippets.
- Founder playbooks: pricing, warranty math, service model, channels/OEMs.
Primary CTA → Layer C: Join niche AMAs/firesides (ROS WG, Control.com, Work on Climate), apply for **Reg Office Hours**, or pitch a **co-byline** with us.

Layer C — Deep Funnel (IFP/ISP-specific, highly technical)

Channels & partners: Co-bylines and events with **Scope of Work**, **Construction Physics**, **IEEE Spectrum**, **The Robot Report**; webinars with **Greentown** / **Activate** / **HAX** / **Manufacturing USA**; posts at **Digi-Key** / **Mouser** / **Protolabs**; AMAs in **ROS Discourse**, **Control.com**, **Work on Climate**.
Audience mindstate: "I need operator-grade, standards-aware guidance."
Cadence: 1–2 deep assets/month (co-byline, guide, or AMA).
Formats: - Co-authored technical briefs (DFM/DFX, safety cases, industrial GTM).
- "Standards-as-a-Strategy" series with committee members (A3/SAE/UL/IEEE).
- **Reg Office Hours** (FDA/FCC/EPA/FAA/NRC) and publish anonymized Q&A.
- State-of-industry (e.g., "Industrial Vision 2026" with real deployment KPIs).
Primary CTA → BD: Book intro with VSC platform team; share pilot SOW; request standards review; discuss FOAK→MOAK plan.

Measurement (per 90 days): Top→Mid conversion (newsletter subs, PDF downloads); Mid→Deep (AMA signups, co-byline requests); Deep→BD (first calls, pilots, partner intros). Attribute via UTMs on every link.

---

12) Example Content Drafts (v1 snippets)

12.1 Layer A (Mass Reach) — Non-technical

LinkedIn post (150 words):
Headline: Hardtech wins aren't about hype—they're about uptime.
Body: The best deeptech founders we back don't lead with model accuracy. They lead with operator realities: safety, throughput, warranty, labor integration. A recent pilot we observed cut unplanned downtime by 23% —not by adding a flashy feature, but by tightening service loops and documenting failure modes. If you're building in robots, advanced manufacturing, or industrial AI, here's a rule of thumb: **tell the ops story first**. Buyers don't purchase "AI"; they purchase fewer stoppages, faster changeovers, safer cells. Over the next few weeks, we're sharing field-tested checklists (DFM/DFX, SATs, standards maps) from our Industrial Notes series.
CTA: Subscribe to *Industrial Notes* for the first checklist: "Site Acceptance Tests, demystified."

Twitter/X thread (5 posts):
1/ Hardtech buyers don't buy "AI." They buy **uptime**.
2/ The best founders we meet talk SATs, warranty, service SLAs—not just accuracy.
3/ FOAK→MOAK isn't a launch. It's a checklist: DFM/DFX → QA → spares → training.
4/ Standards are a growth tactic. UL/SAE/IEEE = faster approvals & trust.
5/ Want our 1-pager on SATs? Reply "SAT" + follow for the download.

Podcast cold-open (90 sec):
"This is *Industrial Notes*, where we talk with plant managers, standards leaders, and founders about scaling real systems. Today: turning a pilot's Site Acceptance Test into your best sales tool—without mentioning 'AI' once."

12.2 Layer B (Mid Funnel) — Story selling for technical founders

Newsletter outline (Issue #07):
- *Subject:* The SAT That Sold the Deal.
- *Open:* A 200-word story: the moment a plant manager signed after seeing a 12-minute restart demo.
- *Section 1 (Guide):* **How to write a buyer-safe case study** (problem, safety, uptime, warranty, training, changeover; include a 7-point template + example lines).
- *Section 2 (VC→VC Interview → long-form):* **Pricing industrial warranties** — edited transcript with a partner at an industrial-focused VC; add two graphs (warranty reserve math; MTBF → SLA pricing).
- *Section 3 (Checklist):* **Pilot SOW anatomy** (scope, safety, SAT criteria, data rights, spares, acceptance timeline).
- *CTA:* Join next **Reg Office Hours: FCC spectrum for robotics** (link) or propose a **co-byline**.

Podcast → Newsletter repurpose (excerpt):
Pull-quote: "We stopped talking accuracy and started talking **return-to-service** time."
Diagram: Simple flow from alarm → triage → swap → restart; annotated with SLA minutes.
Link: Full audio + transcript.

12.3 Layer C (Deep Funnel) — IFP/ISP-specific

Co-byline abstract (with Protolabs):
Title: Design for Scale #1 — The Three DFM decisions that halve field failures.
Thesis: Field failures are rarely about algorithms; they're about connectors, thermal margins, and ingress. We show how three early DFM choices reduced RMAs by 48% across two industrial SKUs.
Sections: (1) Failure taxonomy; (2) Connector & strain relief choices; (3) Thermal design & derating; (4) IP ratings & test fixtures; (5) Warranty math.
Download: 7-step DFM checklist PDF.
Distribution: **Protolabs** library + **Digi-Key TechForum** feature + our site.

Standards-as-a-Strategy (with A3/UL editor):
- *Format:* 45-min webinar + field guide.
- *Focus:* Building your **conformity dossier** early (labels, traceability, manuals, training).
- *Output:* Publish anonymized Q&A and a 1-page "Conformity Map for Industrial Robots."

Reg Office Hours invite (email copy):
Subject: Office Hours — FCC spectrum for industrial robotics (limited slots)
Body: "We're hosting a 45-minute small-group session with an FCC spectrum expert on device certification & private LTE/5G in plants. Bring your questions on Part 15 vs. licensed, labeling, and test plans. First come, first served."

ROS WG AMA (run-of-show):
- 00:00–05:00 — Host intro: 'Operator-grade ROS 2: safety & SATs'
- 05:00–25:00 — Case study interview (founder + plant manager)
- 25:00–45:00 — Live Q&A (bag-of-issues: watchdogs, heartbeat, e-stops, logs)
- 45:00–50:00 — CTA: co-bylines + Office Hours sign-up

13) Appendices

- **A. Asset templates:** 1-pager case study, AMA run-of-show, office-hours FAQ, standards checklist.
- **B. Outreach scripts:** cold intro to editors; program collaboration email; regulator AMA invite.
- **C. Source register:** living link list to each community/program/agency page (update quarterly).