

First Sale

Contents

1. Choosing the Thing
 - The trap of the obvious idea
 - A test
 2. Pricing Without Flinching
 - A pricing heuristic
 - What to do when you flinch
 - A note on launch discounts
 3. The Minimum Store
 - Why most stores have all this extra stuff
 - What “talking to people” looks like
 - A practical store stack for v1
 4. The Launch (And What To Do When It Is Quiet)
 - What to do during the quiet
 - Two-week rule
 5. Talking To Your First Ten Customers
 - How to get their reactions
 - What to do with the answers
 - The first ten will probably remain customers for years
 6. Appendix: Templates, Checklists, Swipe Copy
 - Pre-launch checklist (two weeks before)
 - Launch-day checklist
 - Swipe: the “I made a thing” personal note
 - Swipe: the three-day check-in to a new customer
 - Swipe: the launch announcement post (one paragraph)
 - Reading list for after your first launch
- Afterword
License

First Sale

A practical guide to selling your first digital product

— Anya Ramos

Contents

1. [Choosing the Thing](#)
 2. [Pricing Without Flinching](#)
 3. [The Minimum Store](#)
 4. [The Launch \(And What To Do When It Is Quiet\)](#)
 5. [Talking To Your First Ten Customers](#)
 6. [Appendix: Templates, Checklists, Swipe Copy](#)
-

1. Choosing the Thing

The biggest single decision you will make about your first product is what it is. Not how it is priced. Not how it is marketed. What it is.

Most first-time sellers get this wrong. They pick the most ambitious thing they can imagine making, on the theory that bigger is better. They start writing a 300-page book, or building a 50-screen SaaS product, or designing a 12-week course with 40 modules. Six months later they have a half-finished thing, no customers, and a slowly compounding belief that they are bad at this. They are not bad at this. They picked the wrong thing.

The right first thing has three properties:

1. **It is small.** Small enough that you can complete it in two to six weeks of side-time. If you cannot ship in that window, you will not ship at all.
2. **It solves a specific problem for a specific person.** Not “improve productivity” but “give a freelance designer a clean way to send a project brief to a new client.” The specific version is sellable. The vague version is not.
3. **It costs you something to make.** Not money. Effort. Real expertise applied to a real problem. If your product can be replicated in an afternoon by anyone with a ChatGPT account, it will be, and you will not get paid for it. Your first product is also your introduction to the world. Make it something you would be proud to be known for.

The trap of the obvious idea

You will almost certainly start with the most obvious idea in your field. The Notion productivity template. The ebook about how to learn to code. The course about freelance writing. There is nothing wrong with these as categories, but the obvious idea has obvious competition, and competing against the obvious version of yourself is hard.

The fix is to make the same idea, but specific. Not “Notion productivity template” but “Notion template for solo software consultants tracking three to five concurrent client projects.” Not “ebook about how to learn to code” but “ebook for career-changers in their thirties who have learned the syntax but cannot finish a project.” Not “course about freelance writing” but “course for in-house writers transitioning to freelance, focused specifically on the first six clients and how to get them.”

The specific versions are smaller, harder to make well, and easier to sell. The obvious versions are larger, easier to make poorly, and almost impossible to sell.

A test

If you cannot finish this sentence in plain language, you do not have a product yet:

“This is for [specific kind of person] who is dealing with [specific problem], and it gives them [specific outcome] by [specific mechanism].”

Example for the book in your hand:

“This is for someone about to put a digital product up for sale online, who is overwhelmed by all the conflicting advice, and it gives them a clear sequence of decisions to make with concrete recommendations, by walking through the five stages of the first sale.”

If your sentence is fuzzy, your product is fuzzy, and your sales will be fuzzy. Sharpen the sentence. The product will follow.

2. Pricing Without Flinching

I have priced my first three products. The first one I priced at \$7. The second at \$19. The third at \$49. The first two were too cheap. The third was almost right.

The honest pricing truth that nobody likes to hear is this: your customers do not know what your product is worth. They have no anchor. The only signal they have to its value is the price you put on it. If you price it cheap, they will assume it is cheap. If you price it expensive, they will assume it is expensive. This is not always desirable behavior, but it is consistent behavior.

The other honest truth is that the cost to you of making a digital product is, essentially, fixed. The marginal cost of one more sale is near zero. The pricing problem is not a margin problem. It is a *positioning* problem. You are deciding what kind of product this is, not what the unit economics are.

A pricing heuristic

For your first product, the heuristic I would suggest is this:

- If it solves a small, contained problem and takes someone 10-30 minutes to use, price it \$7 to \$19.
- If it solves a meaningful problem and represents a few hours of someone's life, price it \$29 to \$79.
- If it solves a significant problem in a specific niche, and the customer would otherwise pay a professional hundreds of dollars to solve it, price it \$99 to \$299.

These are not laws of physics. They are starting points. The right price for your product is the highest price you can charge that still feels honest. That feeling, even if you cannot articulate why, is usually correct.

What to do when you flinch

Most first-time sellers price too low because they flinch. The flinch comes from imagining a customer reaching the price and being offended by it. This almost never happens. What actually happens is that customers reach the price and either decide it is worth it for them, or quietly close the tab. They do not write you angry emails about your pricing. They do not lose respect for you. They just buy or do not buy.

The flinch is a story you are telling yourself about an audience you have not met. The fix for the flinch is to ask three people in your target audience what they think the product is worth before they see the price. You will be surprised how often the number they give is higher than the one you flinched at.

A note on launch discounts

You will be tempted to discount your first product on launch. Resist this. A launch discount trains your earliest, most enthusiastic customers to expect future discounts. It teaches them that the "real" price is the discounted one and the listed price is fictional. It also signals that you do not believe in the price yourself, which they will pick up on.

If you must do something special for launch, give early customers a bonus instead of a discount. A bonus chapter. A 30-minute Zoom call. Access to a private Discord. These all signal value without undercutting price. The customer is happier. The brand is stronger.

3. The Minimum Store

The store you should launch with is much smaller than you think. The list of "essential" features that most launch guides recommend is, in practice, theatrical: features you read about, agree are essential, build, and then watch customers ignore.

The minimum viable store consists of:

- A homepage with the product clearly featured
- A product page with description, price, and a Buy button
- A checkout that takes payment
- A delivery mechanism that gives the customer the file
- An email receipt
- An About page that says who you are
- A contact way that reaches you

That is the entire store. You do not need a blog at launch. You do not need a newsletter. You do not need testimonials (you have no customers yet). You do not need a mission statement. You do not need a comparison table. You do not need to integrate with a help-desk app. You do not need analytics dashboards. You do not need an affiliate program. You do not need a referral system. You do not need any of it. You need a thing people can buy and a way for them to receive it.

Why most stores have all this extra stuff

Most stores have all this extra stuff for one of three reasons. Either (1) they have been running for years and accumulated it organically, (2) they were built by an agency that needed to justify a higher invoice, or (3) the founder was procrastinating launch and built features instead of customers.

The third one is the trap to avoid. If you find yourself building a referral system before you have any customers, you are procrastinating. The referral system is hypothetically useful but actually irrelevant. The actual blocker is that nobody knows your product exists. Building features will not solve that. Talking to people will.

What “talking to people” looks like

Talking to people, for the purposes of launching your first product, means:

- Telling everyone in your professional network that you are about to launch a thing
- Posting about it in the communities where your target audience already lives (subreddits, Discord servers, Slack groups, niche newsletters)
- Sending it directly to ten people you think would benefit from it, with a personal note
- Following up with anyone who replied
- Replying to every comment, every email, every question, in the first two weeks

Notice what is not on this list: posting on Twitter to your existing followers and waiting. Most first-time sellers think launching is about announcement. It is about distribution. Announcement is one message. Distribution is one hundred messages over several weeks.

A practical store stack for v1

If you are starting from scratch, here is what I would recommend for the technical setup, because the choice paralysis here can eat months:

- **Storefront:** Shopify Basic plan, or Gumroad, or Lemon Squeezy. All three handle payment, delivery, receipts, and tax. Pick whichever you find least confusing and move on.
- **Domain:** Buy a .com or .shop for your brand. \$15/year. Connect it to your storefront. This takes 20 minutes once and never needs to be touched again.
- **Email:** A simple Gmail with the domain works. Add a forwarding rule so you do not miss customer messages.
- **Payment:** Whatever your storefront provides. Do not try to set up your own payment processor.
- **Analytics:** None for v1. You will not have enough traffic to learn anything. Add later.

That is the entire technical stack. You can have it running in an afternoon. Anything more elaborate is, at your stage, procrastination.

4. The Launch (And What To Do When It Is Quiet)

You will spend weeks or months building up to launch day. You will picture launch day in your head. You will imagine the rush of sales, the supportive comments, the validation. Most of this will not happen. Launch day is almost always quieter than the version you imagined.

Here is what actually happens on a typical first launch:

- You publish the product. You feel a brief rush of relief.
- You post the announcement. You watch the first hour. A few people see it. Two of them react. One of them buys. (One sale. You are a small business owner now.)
- You spend the rest of the day refreshing the dashboard. By the end of the day you have, on average, three to five sales from your direct network. Mostly people you know.
- The next day, no new sales. Or one. The day after, none. You start to worry that the product is a failure.
- A week in, you have between five and twenty sales, depending on the size of your network. You have made between \$50 and \$400. By any reasonable standard this is