

The Filter: scorecard

Judge any opportunity in ten minutes. Score in writing, in gate order. Unwritten scores drift upward by gate four, because by then you have already decided.

Opportunity: _____

GATE 1 Is someone already paying for something like this?

SCORE

Counts: listings with growing review counts, job postings, competitors old enough to have a support page, booked-out freelancers. Does not count: market-size reports, enthusiasm, an AI saying the market is promising, the absence of competitors.

EVIDENCE, ONE LINE:

- ☐ 3 sales evidence in under 10 min
- ☐ 2 had to dig
- ☐ 1 adjacent proof only
- ☐ 0 talk, no buyers

GATE 2 Can you reach the buyer without permission or a budget?

SCORE

Strong: a marketplace with its own search traffic, a search term with weak answers, a community you are in, a list you own, an employer who knows you. Weak: "I'll run ads", "I'll go viral", "I'll post on social", "I'll email strangers".

EVIDENCE, ONE LINE:

- ☐ 3 exact place, there tomorrow
- ☐ 2 weeks of building presence
- ☐ 1 unproven paid traffic
- ☐ 0 "I'd figure it out"

GATE 3 What do you have that most people attempting this do not?

SCORE

Real: domain knowledge from your job, an existing audience, a skill that takes months, access to a specific market, genuine speed, a language or region the proven model has not reached, hardware or data others lack. Not real: enthusiasm; being early, unless gates 1 and 2 say so.

EVIDENCE, ONE LINE:

- ☐ 3 a year to copy
- ☐ 2 months to copy
- ☐ 1 weeks to copy
- ☐ 0 none

GATE 4 Can you ship something sellable in seven days?

SCORE

Not the vision: the smallest version a stranger could pay for, or the smallest offer a stranger could accept. Ideas that fail this gate are not bad, they need a smaller first slice.

EVIDENCE, ONE LINE:

- ☐ 3 this weekend
- ☐ 2 two weeks
- ☐ 1 a month
- ☐ 0 quarters away

TOTAL, OUT OF 12

10 to 12 Start this week. The constraint is execution, not selection.

7 to 9 Workable. Fix the lowest gate, not the whole plan.

4 to 6 Do not start yet. Reshape the idea or keep looking.

0 to 3 A hobby. Fine, but do not finance it expecting a return.

Interest is not a gate, because interest without the other four is delusion. It is the tiebreaker between two ideas that both clear the bar.