

THE FOUNDER'S ENGINE

Startup Toolkit

User Manual & Onboarding Guide

Field: Startup Fundamentals · Bonus Knife · \ Offline.Ltd

10 TOOLS	2 BONUS FEATURES	✓ 100% OFFLINE	∞ FREE UPDATES
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This manual covers every tool, every field, and every feature of The Founder's Engine — ten interconnected startup tools that encode the Build → Measure → Learn loop as a practical offline workflow. From your Lean Canvas to your Investor Update, everything feeds into everything else.

Version 2.0 · For use with The_Founders_Engine_v2.html

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1. Getting Started

The Founder's Engine is a single HTML file. No installation, no accounts, no internet required. Open the file in any modern browser to begin.

System Requirements

BROWSER	VERSION	NOTES
Google Chrome	90+	Recommended — best performance
Mozilla Firefox	88+	Fully supported
Safari	14+	Fully supported on macOS and iOS
Microsoft Edge	90+	Chromium-based, fully supported

How to Open

Double-click `The_Founders_Engine_v2.html` or drag it into your browser window. The welcome screen will appear with a quick orientation.



PRO TIP

Email the HTML file to yourself so you always have it on any device. It works on phones, tablets, and laptops — anywhere you have a browser.

The Welcome Screen

On first launch, a modal introduces the ten tools, the data flow between them, and the two bonus features: The Knife Speaks (insight engine) and Parallel Realities (scenario forking). Click **"Got it — let's build"** to dismiss. The modal will not reappear once dismissed.

2. Interface Overview

The knife follows a consistent layout: header bar at the top, tab bar below it, a scenario bar for parallel realities, the main content area, and a disclaimer bar at the bottom.

The Header

Displays the brand mark (red backslash \), the product name, the field category (Startup Fundamentals), and the knife number. The left border is accented in the knife's field colour (green).

The Tab Bar

Ten tool tabs on the left, two system tabs on the right. Tool tabs show by name. System tabs are prefixed with icons: ■ Files and ? Help. The active tab is underlined in red for tools or steel-grey for system tabs. An amber dot appears on the Files tab when unsaved changes exist.

The Scenario Bar

Below the tab bar, the scenario bar shows your active scenarios as chips. The active scenario is highlighted in purple. Use + New Scenario to fork, and Compare ■ to view scenarios side-by-side. See Section 15 for full details.

The Content Area

The main working space. Each tool panel has a title, a ? Help link to its documentation, a divider line, and the tool's inputs and outputs. Tooltips appear on hover for fields marked with a (?) icon.

The Disclaimer Bar

A fixed footer reminding users that financial projections are estimates, not advice. Links to the full disclaimer in the Help tab. Shows the version number on the right.

3. Saving & File Management

Your data is stored in your browser's localStorage. It persists between sessions but lives only in that browser on that device. Exporting state files is your backup strategy.

Auto-Save

Every change triggers an automatic save to localStorage after a 400ms debounce. An amber dot appears on the ■ Files tab when changes have not yet been exported. After 15 minutes of unsaved work, a toast notification reminds you to export.

Exporting State

1. Click the ■ Files tab.
2. Click **Export All** ↓.
3. A JSON file downloads with the naming pattern `founder.knife.state_YYYY-MM-DD.json`.
4. The amber unsaved dot disappears and the last-exported timestamp updates.

Importing State

1. Click the ■ Files tab.
2. Click **Import All** ↑.
3. Select a previously exported JSON file.
4. All ten tools are restored to the imported state.



CAUTION

Importing overwrites all current data in all ten tools. Export your current state first if you want to preserve it.

Per-Tool Export

Each tool can be exported or imported individually from the Files tab. This is useful for sharing a single tool's data without affecting the rest.

Clearing All Data

The **Clear All Data** button in the Files tab permanently deletes all saved state. A confirmation dialog appears first. This cannot be undone.



PRO TIP

Name your exports by milestone or date: `state_pre-pivot.json`, `state_post-launch.json`. Your export history becomes your startup decision log.

4. Lean Canvas

Tab: Canvas · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 1

The classic 9-box lean startup canvas adapted from Ash Maurya's framework. Each cell feeds data into other tools: Problems feed Personas, UVP feeds Landing Copy, Key Metrics feed the Dashboard, Revenue Streams feed Pricing, and Cost Structure feeds Burn Rate.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Problem	Top 1–3 problems you're solving. Feeds into Personas and Landing Copy.
Solution	Top 3 features or capabilities that address the problems.
Key Metrics	The key activities you measure. Seeds the Metrics Dashboard.
Unique Value Prop	A single, clear, compelling message. Feeds into Landing Copy headline.
Unfair Advantage	Something that can't be easily copied or bought.
Channels	Path to your customers (acquisition channels).
Customer Segments	Your target customers. Feeds into Personas.
Cost Structure	Customer acquisition, hosting, payroll, etc. Feeds Burn Rate.
Revenue Streams	Revenue model, pricing, lifetime value. Feeds Pricing Modeler.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Canvas Grid	Visual 9-box canvas with live cross-references to other tools.
Snapshots	Versioned snapshots you can compare and restore.

Use Cases

Fill this out first — everything else flows from here. Revisit weekly as you learn from experiments. Use snapshots to track how your thinking evolves over time.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
UVP is too vague	Use the formula: 'I help [segment] do [outcome] without [pain]'. Keep it to one sentence.

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Too many problems listed	Pick the top 1–3 that your solution actually addresses. Others are distractions.
Channels left empty	If you don't know your channel, you don't have a business model yet. This is your most urgent experiment.

**PRO TIP**

The Canvas is a living document, not a one-time exercise. Snapshot before every major decision, and compare versions to see how your thinking shifted.

5. Audience Personas

Tab: Personas · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 2

Define 2–4 customer personas with demographics, pain points, goals, objections, channels, willingness to pay, and a representative quote. Problems and Segments from your Lean Canvas appear as reference at the top.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Name	Persona name (e.g. 'The Solo Founder', 'Enterprise Buyer').
Demographics	Age, role, income, company size.
Pain Points	What hurts? Auto-seeded from Canvas Problems.
Goals	What are they trying to achieve?
Objections	Why they would say no to your product.
Where They Hang Out	Channels where you can reach them (Twitter, Reddit, conferences).
Willingness to Pay	Price range or budget context.
Quote	What they'd literally say about the problem.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Persona Cards	Structured cards for each persona with all fields.
Canvas Reference	Problems and Segments pulled from your Lean Canvas.

Use Cases

Define personas before writing landing copy or designing pricing tiers. The Willingness to Pay field feeds into Pricing insights. Objections inform your experiment hypotheses.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Personas feel generic	Interview real people. Use actual quotes, not hypothetical ones.
Too many personas	Start with 2. If you can't describe 2 in detail, you don't know your market.

6. Experiment Tracker

Tab: Experiments · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 3

Log experiments with a hypothesis, method, success criteria, status, result, and learnings. Each experiment tracks the scientific method for startups: state what you believe, how you'll test it, and what you learned.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Hypothesis	Structured as: 'We believe [persona] will [action] because [reason]'.
Method	Dropdown: survey, landing page, prototype, interview, or ad test.
Success Criteria	Measurable threshold (e.g. '≥30% CTR', '≥8/10 would pay').
Status	Planned → Running → Analyzing → Decided.
Result	Validated ✓, Invalidated ✗, or Inconclusive.
Learning	What you learned — feeds into Investor Updates.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Summary Stats	Total experiments, running, validated, and invalidated counts.
Experiment Cards	One card per experiment with full details.

Use Cases

Every canvas assumption should become an experiment. Run cheap, fast tests before building. Validated and invalidated experiments automatically appear in your Investor Update.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Not enough experiments	Aim for 1–2 experiments per week. If you're not testing, you're guessing.
Success criteria too vague	Use numbers. '≥10 signups in 48 hours' beats 'good response'.



PRO TIP

The killer loop: Canvas assumptions → Experiment Tracker → Metrics Dashboard → Canvas updates → repeat. This is Build → Measure → Learn, encoded as tools.

7. Landing Page Copywriter

Tab: Landing Copy · Shortcut: Ctrl/⬛ + 4

A structured copywriting framework that pulls your UVP, Problems, and Solution from the Lean Canvas. Build a headline, subhead, problem statement, solution, features-to-benefits table, and CTA. Preview as a rough landing page and export as deployable HTML.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Headline	Your UVP, auto-seeded from Canvas. This is your H1.
Subhead	Expands on the promise — the 'so what?' line.
Problem Statement	The pain your audience feels. Auto-seeded from Canvas Problems.
Solution Description	How you solve it. Auto-seeded from Canvas Solution.
Features → Benefits	Three-column table: Feature, 'So that...', 'Which means...'
CTA Text	Call-to-action button text (default: 'Get Started Free').

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Live Preview	Rendered landing page preview in the browser.
Export as HTML	Downloadable, deployable landing page HTML file.
Copy as Text	Plain-text version for emails or docs.

Use Cases

Use this to create your first landing page for an ad test experiment or to test messaging with real users. The features-to-benefits framework forces you to think beyond features.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Headline feels generic	Use the 'I help [segment] do [outcome] without [pain]' formula.
Benefits column empty	Ask 'so what?' until you reach an emotion. Features are what you built; benefits are what the customer gets.

8. Pricing Modeler

Tab: Pricing · Shortcut: Ctrl/⬛ + 5

Define pricing tiers with price, billing cycle, estimated customers, and features. Model scenarios with churn and growth rates. See projected MRR/ARR over 12 months with a sparkline chart and break-even calculation using your Burn Rate data.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Tier Name	Name for the pricing tier (e.g. 'Starter', 'Pro', 'Enterprise').
Price	Price per billing cycle.
Cycle	Monthly, Annual, or One-time.
Est. Customers	Estimated number of customers at this tier.
Features	Included features for this tier.
Churn Rate (%/mo)	Monthly customer churn percentage.
Growth Rate (%/mo)	Monthly customer growth percentage.
Currency	Currency symbol (default: \$).

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
MRR (Now)	Current monthly recurring revenue based on tiers and customers.
ARR	Annualized recurring revenue.
MRR @ 6mo / 12mo	Projected MRR accounting for growth and churn.
Break-Even	Month when projected MRR exceeds your gross burn rate.
12-Month Chart	Sparkline showing MRR trajectory over 12 months.

Use Cases

Test pricing hypotheses before launch. Compare scenarios: what if churn is 8% instead of 5%? The break-even calculation uses your Burn Rate data to show when revenue covers costs.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Break-even shows N/A	Add costs in the Burn Rate tab first. Break-even requires burn data.
MRR looks too high	Check estimated customers — are they realistic for month 1?

**PRO TIP**

Create separate scenarios using Parallel Realities: a 'Conservative' with high churn and low growth, and a 'Bull Case' with optimistic numbers. Compare them side-by-side.

9. Revenue Tracker

Tab: Revenue · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 6

Log actual revenue events with date, amount, source/customer, and type (recurring or one-time). Track active subscriptions vs churned. MRR feeds into Burn Rate, Runway Clock, and Investor Update.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Date	Date of the revenue event.
Amount	Revenue amount.
Source / Customer	Where the revenue came from.
Type	Recurring or One-time.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Total Revenue	Sum of all logged revenue events.
MRR (Active)	Sum of all active (non-churned) recurring revenue.
Active Subs	Count of active recurring subscriptions.
Churned	Count of churned recurring subscriptions.
Revenue Log	Sortable table of all revenue events with churn toggle.

Use Cases

Log your first dollar. Even pre-revenue, logging a \$1 test transaction changes the psychology. Mark subscriptions as churned to track retention over time.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
MRR seems wrong	Only recurring events that are not churned count toward MRR. One-time events are excluded.
Revenue not appearing in Runway	Runway uses MRR (active recurring only). One-time revenue is not subtracted from burn.

10. Burn Rate Calculator

Tab: Burn Rate · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 7

List monthly recurring costs and one-time costs (amortised over 12 months). Calculates gross burn, subtracts MRR from Revenue Tracker to show net burn. Feeds directly into Runway Clock and Investor Update.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Cost Name	Name of the cost item.
Category	Hosting, Software, Payroll, Marketing, Legal, or Other.
Amount	Monthly amount for recurring costs; total for one-time costs.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Gross Burn	Total monthly costs (recurring + amortised one-time).
Revenue (MRR)	Active MRR from Revenue Tracker.
Net Burn	Gross burn minus MRR. This is what Runway uses.
Category Breakdown	Cost cards grouped by category.

Use Cases

Track every cost, even small ones. The categories help you identify where cuts are possible. Net burn is the number that determines your survival timeline.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
One-time costs look too high	They are amortised over 12 months. A \$12,000 one-time cost shows as \$1,000/month.
Revenue shows \$0	Add revenue events in the Revenue Tracker tab first.

11. Runway Clock

Tab: Runway · Shortcut: Ctrl/⬛ + 8

The existential widget. Cash on hand divided by net burn equals months of runway. Colour-coded: green (>12 months), amber (6–12), red (<6), pulsing red (<3). Shows what revenue you need to reach default-alive status.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Cash on Hand	Total available cash. This is the numerator of the runway equation.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Months of Runway	Large number display, colour-coded by urgency.
Cash on Hand	Your input, displayed in the stats grid.
Net Burn / Mo	From Burn Rate Calculator.
Gross Burn / Mo	From Burn Rate Calculator.
MRR	From Revenue Tracker.
Default Alive Target	Revenue needed to make net burn zero.

Use Cases

Check this every week. If runway is below 6 months, you should be fundraising or cutting costs. The default-alive calculation tells you exactly how much more MRR you need.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Shows infinity (∞)	Revenue covers or exceeds burn. You are default alive — this is good.
Shows 0 or very low	Check that Cash on Hand is entered correctly. Also verify Burn Rate costs.



PRO TIP

When runway drops below 6 months, fundraising should be your primary activity. Most raises take 3–6 months — don't wait until it's too late.

12. Metrics Dashboard

Tab: Metrics · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 9

Define key metrics, enter data points over time, and track trends with sparkline charts. Metrics can be seeded from your Canvas's Key Metrics field. Shows latest value, delta, and trend direction.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Metric Name	The name of the metric (e.g. 'Signups', 'Activation Rate', 'NPS').
Data Points	Comma-separated values, newest last. Add individual values with the + Add button.

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Sparkline Chart	Mini chart showing the metric's trajectory.
Latest Value	Most recent data point.
Delta (Δ)	Change between last two data points, with percentage.
Trend	■ Up, ■ Down, or ■ Mixed based on last 3 points.

Use Cases

Track your AARRR pirate metrics (Acquisition, Activation, Retention, Revenue, Referral) or any custom KPI. Metrics with trends feed into Investor Updates.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
No chart showing	You need at least 2 data points to see a sparkline.
Seeding doesn't work	Key Metrics must be filled in on your Lean Canvas first.

13. Investor Update Generator

Tab: Investor Update · Shortcut: Ctrl/⌘ + 0

Auto-generates a monthly investor update by pulling headline numbers (MRR, Runway, Net Burn), validated/invalidated experiments, and key metrics from across all tools. Add wins, challenges, and asks manually. Export as text, Markdown, or save to history.

Inputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Month / Period	The month this update covers (e.g. 'March 2026').
Wins	One win per line. Good news first.
Challenges	One challenge per line. Be honest — investors value transparency.
Asks	What you need help with (intros, advice, hires).

Outputs

FIELD	DESCRIPTION
Headline Numbers	MRR, Runway months, Net Burn — auto-populated.
Validated / Invalidated	Experiments with learnings, auto-populated.
Key Metrics	Latest values and deltas from Metrics Dashboard.
Update Preview	Formatted preview combining all sections.
Copy to Clipboard	Plain-text version for email.
Export Markdown	Downloadable .md file.
Update History	Saved updates for tracking your narrative arc over time.

Use Cases

Send monthly updates to investors, advisors, and your team. Save each update to history to track how your narrative evolves. Consistency builds trust.

Common Difficulties

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
Numbers show \$0	Fill in Revenue, Burn Rate, and Runway tabs first. The update auto-pulls from all tools.

PROBLEM	CAUSE & SOLUTION
No experiments showing	Mark experiments as Validated or Invalidated with a Learning filled in.

**PRO TIP**

Even if you don't have investors yet, write monthly updates for yourself. It forces honest reflection and creates a record of your journey.

14. The Knife Speaks — Insight Engine

A floating insight engine that analyses your data across all ten tools and surfaces contradictions, risks, opportunities, milestones, and action items. Access it by clicking the purple orb (■) in the bottom-left corner of the screen.

How It Works

The engine runs automatically whenever your data changes (with a 2-second debounce). It examines over a dozen cross-tool patterns, including:

INSIGHT TYPE	WHAT IT DETECTS
Risk	Low runway, churn exceeding growth, missing experiment coverage.
Contradiction	Persona objections matching your UVP, pricing exceeding WTP.
Opportunity	Default-alive projections, landing copy divergence from Canvas.
Milestone	Startup readiness score (A–F grade), default-alive timeline.
Action	Empty tools, stale investor updates, incomplete canvas.

The Startup Readiness Score

The first insight is always a health score grading your startup readiness from A ($\geq 80\%$) to F ($< 20\%$). It weighs canvas completeness, persona detail, experiment count, validated learnings, revenue, burn tracking, runway awareness, and metric trends.



PRO TIP

The insights are not AI-generated text — they are deterministic rules applied to your actual data. They surface patterns you might miss when you're deep in one tool. Check the orb regularly.

15. Parallel Realities — Scenario Forking

Fork named scenarios to model parallel futures: Bull Case, Bear Case, Post-Fundraise, Pivot A vs Pivot B. Each scenario holds a complete independent copy of all ten tools' state.

Creating a Scenario

Click + **New Scenario** in the scenario bar. Name it. The new scenario is forked from your current state — all data is cloned. Changes in one scenario do not affect others.

Switching Scenarios

Click any scenario chip to switch. The knife saves your current scenario's state, then loads the selected scenario. All tools update immediately.

Comparing Scenarios

Click **Compare** ■ to open a side-by-side comparison grid. It compares key financial metrics across all scenarios: MRR (actual and modeled), ARR, gross/net burn, cash, runway, break-even, growth/churn rates, and experiment counts. Better values are highlighted in green, worse in red.



CAUTION

Deleting a scenario is permanent. You cannot undo it. The active scenario cannot be deleted — switch to another scenario first.

16. Keyboard Shortcuts

Navigate the knife quickly with these keyboard shortcuts. On macOS, use **⌘** instead of Ctrl.

Ctrl/⌘ + 1	Switch to Lean Canvas
Ctrl/⌘ + 2	Switch to Personas
Ctrl/⌘ + 3	Switch to Experiments
Ctrl/⌘ + 4	Switch to Landing Copy
Ctrl/⌘ + 5	Switch to Pricing
Ctrl/⌘ + 6	Switch to Revenue
Ctrl/⌘ + 7	Switch to Burn Rate
Ctrl/⌘ + 8	Switch to Runway
Ctrl/⌘ + 9	Switch to Metrics
Ctrl/⌘ + 0	Switch to Investor Update
Ctrl/⌘ + S	Export all state
Escape	Close any open modal, panel, or overlay

17. Troubleshooting

Blank Page or Script Error

Ensure JavaScript is enabled in your browser. The knife requires JavaScript for all functionality. If using a browser extension that blocks scripts, whitelist the file.

Data Disappeared After Clearing Browser Data

All data is stored in localStorage. Clearing browser data, cookies, or site data will remove it. Always export your state file before clearing browser data.

Charts Not Rendering

The sparkline charts use the HTML5 Canvas element. If they appear blank, try resizing the browser window or switching to a different tab and back. Some browser zoom levels can cause rendering issues.

Import Fails With 'Wrong Knife'

The import function checks that the file's 'knife' field matches 'founder'. If you're trying to import a file from a different knife or a manually edited file, ensure the 'knife' field is exactly correct.

Tabs Hard to Reach on Mobile

The tab bar scrolls horizontally on narrow screens. Swipe left to reveal additional tabs. The system tabs (■ Files and ? Help) are always at the far right.

Insight Orb Not Showing Insights

The insight engine needs data to work with. Fill in at least 3 Canvas cells and add some data to other tools before expecting insights. The engine runs with a 2-second debounce after changes.

18. Accuracy & Limitations

The Founder's Engine is a planning and tracking tool, not accounting software. All financial projections are simplified models.

TOOL	MODEL TYPE	LIMITATIONS
Pricing Modeler	Linear growth/churn	Assumes constant rates. Real growth is rarely linear.
Burn Rate	Simple summation	Amortises one-time costs evenly. Does not account for variable costs.
Runway Clock	Cash ÷ Net Burn	Assumes constant burn. Does not model seasonal variation or step changes.
Revenue Tracker	Event log	MRR counts all non-churned recurring events regardless of date.
Insight Engine	Rule-based heuristics	Not AI — pattern matching on your data. May miss nuanced situations.
Metrics Dashboard	User-entered data	Only as accurate as what you enter. No automated data feeds.

CAUTION

Financial projections in this tool are estimates for planning purposes only. They are not accounting, legal, or investment advice. Always verify critical numbers with a qualified professional before making financial decisions.

19. Glossary

ARR	Annual Recurring Revenue. $MRR \times 12$.
Burn Rate	The rate at which a company spends cash. Gross burn is total costs; net burn subtracts revenue.
Canvas	Short for Lean Canvas — a one-page business model framework by Ash Maurya.
Churn	The rate at which customers cancel or stop paying. Usually expressed as a monthly percentage.
CTA	Call to Action. The button or link you want a visitor to click (e.g. 'Get Started Free').
Default Alive	A state where your revenue growth trajectory will exceed your burn rate before cash runs out. Term coined by Paul Graham.
Growth Rate	Monthly percentage increase in customers or revenue.
Hypothesis	A testable prediction. In startups: 'We believe [persona] will [action] because [reason]'.
Lean Canvas	A 9-box one-page business model adapted by Ash Maurya from the Business Model Canvas.
localStorage	Browser-based storage that persists between sessions. The knife stores all data here.
MRR	Monthly Recurring Revenue. The sum of all active recurring subscriptions per month.
Net Burn	Gross burn minus revenue. The actual cash consumed per month.
Persona	A semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on research and data.
Pivot	A structured change in strategy without changing the overall vision.
Runway	The number of months before cash runs out at the current net burn rate.
Scenario	A named fork of your entire knife state. Used to model parallel assumptions.
State File	A JSON export of all tool data. Used for backup and portability.
UVP	Unique Value Proposition. A single, clear, compelling message that explains why you're different.
Validation	Evidence that a hypothesis is correct. In experiments: meeting the success criteria.
WTP	Willingness to Pay. The maximum a customer persona will pay for your product.

THE FOUNDER'S ENGINE

Bonus Knife · swissknife.life

Build → Measure → Learn.

Version 2.0 · For use with The_Founders_Engine_v2.html