

Technical note

HOW TO PRETOTYPE A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM BEFORE INVESTING IN ITS DEVELOPMENT?

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SEE-∛-LAB.







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1 Executive summary

This technical note helps giving indications to any entrepreneur wondering about actions that must be carried out terms of pretotyping before investing in the development of his collaborative platform. An investment in such a platform could reach significant amounts without being sure to obtain the expected result. That is why pretotyping seems to be unavoidable to avoid wasting time and money. This paper not only answers the question: "How to pretotype a collaborative platform?" but also to the questions: "When?" and "Why?" to do so. Indeed, pretotyping is not yet an anchored method and when it appears to an entrepreneur, the latter may question its effectiveness.

Through concrete actions that an entrepreneur will have to do to pretotype his platform, the technical note addresses the pretotyping to test the core need of the project but also the digital pretotyping to measure the interactivity of potential users with the platform.

Different pretotyping techniques will be presented and adapted to collaborative platforms.

The risks of not doing this method will be developed in order to convince that pretotyping is essential for the development of a project and even more in the case of a collaborative platform that requires a significant financial investment. However, if the founder decides to pretotype, he must adopt a behaviour conducive to the proper use of this method.

In order to help the entrepreneur in his approach, some liegeoise structures exist to help the entrepreneur in this process. Some exemples will be given.





2 <u>Scenario</u>

Today, an investment in a quality collaborative platform can reach up to $\pounds 100,000$ and the success of such a service is not always guaranteed. Traditionally, when you have an idea, you develop it, write your business plan, present it to investors and start marketing the product or service. This results in a failure rate of 75% of start-ups (Blank, 2013). As a result, new concepts about how to develop an idea have emerged. The business plan as a key starting point has left room for the Business Model Canvas, the terms "Minimum Viable Product" and "pivots" have spread and the appearance of lean start-ups allowed people to avoid some risks in their entrepreneurial initiative (Explanation of concepts see 6.7 Glossary). Another concept, the pretotyping, designed by A. Savoia, also plays an important role in this change in the way people operate.

First of all, it is important to recall the definition of pretotyping. This explanation will indicate to the entrepreneur if the pretotyping is really the element on which he wants to learn for his collaborative platform. According to A. Savoia, it's a way to: "Make sure - as quickly and as cheaply as you can - that you are building the right it before you build it right." (Savoia, ch.2, 2011). It is therefore a way to test an idea by identifying if a need exists through quick and cheap methods.

Then, what kind of projects can be included in the term: "collaborative platform"? According to different sources and experts interviewed, several definitions exist:

- "A collaborative platform is a virtual workplace that centralizes resources and tools to facilitate communication and human interaction around company projects. It is a question of accessing information, of course, but also and above all of promoting collaboration in the follow-up of projects directly via the platform. " (Human perf, 2018)
- "It is a complex business sector. Our suppliers are partly our customers and we also have our final users that are customers. So we have two segments to convince. On the one hand, the suppliers who will feed our platform and on the other hand our users. " (Simar)
- "A collaborative platform is used to bring people together around a common project. "Ex: OpenIdeo: Platform that allows a group of people at a global level to think about a challenging issue and try to find solutions. People will collaborate with each other. Others ex: 2025: The objective is to allow people to get in touch and collaborate with each other around the same need (Ooms).



In the event that the contractor's project falls within one of the previous definitions, the technical note is useful to guide the contractor towards the best choices to make in terms of types of pretotyping. This approach can also be applied at several stages of the process for different aspects of the project to test. This report will therefore help the contractor to prioritize all aspects he would like to test.

3 Development of key lessons related to the subject

3.1 Why pretotype a collaborative platform?

As mentioned above, the investment in creating a high-performance platform can be very high. Given that 80 to 90% of new products fail on the market, that four out of five start-ups lose money and that 78% of new initiatives disappear within four years of their creation, a solution to avoid being included in these statistics should not be neglected (Strategyzer, 2017). Once your target segment has been identified, it is therefore essential to understand the potential users and try to create a relevant and meaningful Business Model Canvas for your potential customers.

In addition, in the case of a collaborative platform, the investment will represent something intangible. In case the project does not take off, the platform will go to the trash and the money spent will be immediately lost unlike an investment in something tangible (machines, tools...) that can potentially be resold (Simar).

The objective of pretotyping will therefore be to create the right Product Market Fit (matching your product/service to the market) in order to achieve a useful Minimum Viable Product [MVP] in order to test the main functionalities of the platform and finally invest money in it.

3.2 When should pretotyping take place in the development of a collaborative platform? Which elements of the project should be tested first?

Several facets of a collaborative platform can be tested. These may include the logo and name of the project, the user's journey, the need of potential users for the service and many other things. A priority order must be established by the contractor during the pre-testing phase.

Before making several pretotypes, it is important for the entrepreneur to ensure that a market of sufficient size exists and to determine precisely the client he wants to target ("do not do Tintin





- 7 to 77 years old. " (Ooms)). Once these actions have been completed, pretotyping can begin. The most important step is to validate that there is a need by confronting our idea to the market. It is therefore necessary to test the vital organs, the keystone, the fundamental assumptions to the survival of the project. During this pre-testing phase, the value proposition will have to adapt and try to respond to the feedback received in the field. Then, a MVP could be created and technical aspects, relating to the functioning of the platform and the interactivity with users, will have to be tested. Finally, pretotyping may also be used in the choice of the name, slogan and logo of the project. In the case of a collaborative platform, several methods explained below are possible.

3.3 How to pretotype his collaborative platform?

3.3.1 Experts' opinions

The experts (R. Simar¹, F. Ooms²) interviewed were unanimous on this subject: "We must forget the technological aspect and go into the field! ». To test the functions of a collaborative platform, it is necessary to observe the individual behaviour of each person in relation to the value proposition presented to them but also to make them interact with each other. The digital pretotyping testing the effects of a marketing campaign on visitors' conversion rate will also be developed thanks to the advices of R. Ledent³.

Romain Simar

The fake door method (see 3.3.2 Pretotyping methods adapted to collaborative platforms) can be effective in the case of a collaborative platform because it is easy to present a test platform to potential customers and to see if they intend to go on the website. The idea is to communicate on our platform via flyers, business cards etc., to create an easy and free website and to measure the number of people going to this web page. If it turns out that a small proportion of the interlocutors have carried out this process, it will be necessary to try to understand why and adapt the value proposition

Then, when the need is validated, the user's journey is very important to observe. Indeed, if the platform meets a concrete need but is far too complex, the entrepreneur risks losing some of his customers. To do this, R. Simar proposes to invite people to a workshop and ask them to use the service. During this meeting, observation and understanding of the sticking points that occur

¹ Founder of Copy Sim et former manger of the : DoLab @VentureLab

² Innovation expert

³ Project manager @Deuse, co-founder @Les Hommes à tout faire and Business Developper @Propulse

among users will be important. Similar tests will have to be done several times in order to allow the entrepreneur to react on the feedbacks and make several beta versions before moving on to the final version (which will also have to be modified).

The key advices of Romain Simar :

- «Above all, you have to observe the negative and be able to react to it. »
- « It is important to leave your comfort zone and accept feedback from the field. »

Frederic Ooms

The first step is for a number of people to meet physically. During this meeting, the entrepreneur should be able to demonstrate his method of collaboration and adapt this digital proposal into a physical one. The objective will be for the project leader to answer these questions:

- Does the collaborative approach reach the objectives or expected results?
- How do people interact and collaborate?
- How people would like to collaborate?
- What mechanisms do people use to collaborate?

Thanks to this physical test, the entrepreneur will gradually be able to start developing mockups (see 6.7 Glossary) of the platform in paper/cardboard form. These mock-ups will have to illustrate the site's interfaces (ways of connecting, ways of interacting...). Again, these representations will be tested with an audience to see if people understand and accept the structure of the tool. The objective at this stage will not be to sell the service at any price but to understand how it is received, accepted and used. It is important to note that these interfaces do not necessarily have to be coded, they can be presented via a video animation, in PowerPoint format with animations... Once all the desired hypotheses have been validated, the creation of an MVP will allow to enter a more quantitative analysis (usage rate, conversion rate, attendance, bounce rate... (see 6.7 Glossary)).

Key advices of Frederic Ooms

- « The idea is to de-risk a good part of the project. »
- « The objective of pretotyping is to often fail to succeed quickly.»

Romain Ledent

It is certainly very important to pretotype the fundamental need of your collaborative platform, but what about the effectiveness of the investments planned in digital marketing?

SEE-⅌-LΛB.



Indeed, digital pretotyping can be used to estimate the cost of a marketing campaign and its effects. Such a pretotype will allow the entrepreneur to integrate a relevant cost per acquisition[CPA] into his financial plan (see 6.7 Glossary). The steps of a digital pretotyping are as follows:

- Create a test landing page with a significant call to action[CTA] for your target segment (see 6.7 Glossary).
- Create the personas representative of the target of the collaborative platform.
- Choose a persona for a digital marketing campaign.
- Complete the See-Think-Do-Care matrix for the development of the campaign (see point 6.7 Glossary).
- Decide on a SMART objective that the entrepreneur wants to achieve through the campaign (see point 6.7 Glossary).
- Use the media created (landing page, persona, STDC matrix and SMART objectives) to create the digital campaign.
- Let the campaign work for two weeks.
- Review the SMART objective and compare with the results collected.

In conclusion, the realization of this digital pretotyping will help the entrepreneur to measure in two weeks and at a lower cost the interaction of these target users with a showcase platform. This pretotype will also provide more precision in terms of revenues and digital costs.

3.3.2 Pretotyping methods adapted to collaborative platforms

Pretotyping is a concept that is still fresh. The majority of the methods have been defined by A. Savoia but all the means that allow a contractor to validate his idea in the field quickly and without excessive cost can be considered as pretotypes. In his book, Pretotype It, A. Savoia explains these methods (chapter 4, 2011). Those adapted to the case of a collaborative platform will be developed.

Pretotyping techniques	Adaptation for	Examples of
	collaborative platform	collaborative platforms
Mechanical Turk:	Make the target clients to	- Foot 24-7
"Replaces complex and	meet each other and have	- Speech-to-Text d'IBM
expensive computers or	them interact with the	(Savoia, 2011, ch.2)
machines with human	collaboration method and	
beings."	observe their reactions.	









Pinocchio : "Construction	/	The Palm Pilot (Savoia,		
of a very basic version of its		2011, ch.2)		
product in order to test its				
size, weight, etc. »				
Minimum Viable	Creation of a landing page	Les Hommes à tout faire:		
Product (or Strip Tease) :	offering the possibility to put	Creation of a wix page		
"Creation of a simplified	people in collaboration.	allowing people looking for		
version of its product by	Observe if the people who	manpower to contact the		
reducing it to its basic	visit the page seem interested.	founders directly.		
functions. »				
Provincial : "Testing the	Physically test your value	Foot 24-7: first carried out		
product or service in a	proposition in a defined	tests in the province of Liège		
limited area before	territory before launching the	and now extends to Leuven		
spreading. »	platform that could	and Brussels.		
	potentially appeal to a larger			
	territory.			
Fake door: make it look like	Make it look like the service	Mon bar: Creation of a		
the project exists and is ready	exists through a basic website	Facebook page to attract a		
to be sold. »	(even free) to measure	potential community before		
	people's interactivity with it.	the final platform is created.		
Pretend-to-Own : "Before	/	/		
investing in the purchase of				
anything, rent or borrow the				
necessary equipment in the				
first instance"				
Re-Label: "Put your label	/.	/		
on an existing product that				
looks like the product you				
want to create. »				



Story Board: Réalisation de	Creation of simplified mock-	-	Foot 24-7: He made	
mock-ups simplifiée du	ups of the user's journey of an		sketches of the interfaces	
parcours de l'utilisateur	application or platform.		of his application	
d'une application ou d'une		-	Deuse: Company that	
plateforme.			can help in the realization	
			of such sketches.	

3.3.3 Action plan

Pretotype the need

- Produce an interview guide to identify the needs of individuals with regard to the services offered by the platform.
- Analyze the results and adapt the value proposition.
- Adapt the value proposition physically (e. g. Airbnb, meet with landlords and travellers and identify if they would be interested in the value proposition).
- Analyze the results and adapt the value proposition.
- Build a solid and relevant value proposition.

Pretotype the technical aspect of the platform

- Make mock-ups of the platform interfaces (paper, cardboard, power point, drawings...).
- Receive external criticism of these mocks-ups (several waves of tests with different groups).
- Analyze the results and adapt the mock-ups.
- Create a beta version of the collaborative platform based on the mock-ups.
- Receive external criticism of this beta version (several waves of tests with different groups).
- Analyze the results and adapt the beta version.
- Use one of the beta versions to pretotype a digital marketing campaign.
- Analyze the results and quantify the costs and revenues generated by the marketing campaign.
- Integrate the costs of building the platform and of the digital marketing into the financial plan.





Now that some risks have been eliminated, the entrepreneur can invest in his collaborative platform more serenely.

3.3.4 Behavious to adopt

During a pre-testing process, it is important that the entrepreneur maintains a strong conviction in his project but also that he is able to accept negative feedback. According to R. Simar, negative feedback is often the most interesting to consider. These are the ones that will allow us to move forward and best meet the needs of consumers. The posture to have when receiving objections is to always take the time to understand why this inconvenience occurs. Indeed, having only negative feedback does not necessarily mean that the project must stop. Trying to understand the precise reasons of these feedbacks will help to make the right decision in the direction that the collaborative platform will have to take.

However, "sometimes it is better to stop and move on than to keep trying in the wrong direction." (Ooms)

3.4 What are the risks that an entrepreneur may face if he does not pretotype his collaborative platform?

The pretotyping of a collaborative platform does not guarantee that all the risks associated with such development will be eliminated. However, not testing your idea before could result in a loss of time, money and also self-confidence. An entrepreneur blinded by his project, not taking the time to discover the market's feedback, could be hit in his pride if it turns out that his product/service fails.

If he does not pretotype, the entrepreneur will start developing a platform that he thinks is the most suitable for users, the risk here is twofold. Indeed, he could either create features that do not meet the expectations of potential customers or simply hide features that would have been very successful with the target audience.

It is also important to know that the risk is even greater if you have an innovative idea. Indeed, our intuition cannot be representative of the society because it is something new in which we believe because we invented it. If we go too far in the creation process without receiving feedback, the project may not materialize. The money invested in it will not be profitable because we will have created a collaborative platform that does not meet the needs of customers. As a result, money and energy will have been lost, which could have been eliminated in whole or in part.







3.5 What are the existing structures that can help to produce one or more pretotypes?

Pretotyping is a recent concept, but there are structures in the province of Liège that can help an entrepreneur in this process.

3.5.1 VentureLab

The incubator is familiar with the concept. Several young entrepreneurs have already followed a whole process to pretotype their project. A. Bonvissuto is in charge of developing and sharing this method in the ecosystem. The Do-Lab, a workshop organized by VentureLab, also accompanies the project leader in order to test it in the field.

http://www.venturelab.be/

3.5.2 Make it

It is a company selling services that help for the development of a start-up in the most personalized way possible. The services are diverse: market testing, growth marketing, financing, web development...

https://www.makeit-group.com/

3.5.3 ID Campus

Fosters an environment that generates innovative ideas for companies. Creation of a whole ecosystem around innovation.

https://www.idcampus.be/ 3.5.3.1 Fablab

"The FabLab is a laboratory for innovation and digital manufacturing. Its purpose is to help you bring your ideas to life. »

https://www.idcampus.be/fablab

3.5.4 Propulse

Propulse is a consulting company that helps developing your business. One of its activities is the support in digital pretotyping.

https://www.propulse.biz/

3.5.5 Plug-R (hub créatif de Liege)

It is a platform highlighting all the services available in Liège to support and boost innovation and entrepreneurship in the Liège region.

https://www.plug-r.be/









It is also important to note the types of people with whom you should not collaborate to pretotype. Indeed, people who are too IT-minded (developers, graphic designers...) risk developing too technical platform testing solutions that do not necessarily highlight the fundamental need. Instead, it is necessary to work with market-oriented people (R. Simar).

4 Questioning

4.1 What is the difference between the pretotype and the protoype?

The pretotype must take place before the prototype. The prototype already requires some financial investment to create something viable that will look like the final product/service. Creating a prototype without pretotyping can result in the realization of functionalities that are not adapted to the needs of users.

4.2 Can feedbacks be misinterpreted?

Yes, in general, feedback can be misinterpreted in two different ways (Savoia, 2011).

- **False negative**: We receive negative feedbacks that frighten us and push us to abandon our project instead of understanding why and adapting. Negative feedbacks do not always mean that there are no other issues. Ex: Airbnb: nobody believed in it, and yet....
- **False positive**: Too much trust in positive feedback without understanding it could blind us and reassure us that our project will triumph smoothly. This impression can guide us faster than expected to failure. Ex: Take it easy (a platform similar to Deliveroo which came first in Liège): the feedbacks were positive but they were too fast and the success quickly vanished.

4.3 Should pretotyping last for a defined period of time?

There is no fixed period during which pretotyping must last, but the aim is still to obtain relevant information quickly. This is a fast iterative process that leads to a Product Market Fit. Therefore, if the process takes one or two years, the question must be asked whether there is really a demand. Within a few months, it must evolve towards versions of the platform that grow in complexity and are closer and closer to the final service that will be commercialized.

4.4 Can we consider that a market research is a type of pretotyping?

According to F. Ooms, no. A market study will provide results that will quantify the need. While the purpose of pretotyping is to obtain physical contact and understand the how and why of the observations in order to improve the value proposition. The market research will provide precise results but it will be more complex to understand the reasons that justify these figures.





5 Examples and illustrations

5.1 Foot 24-7 by Rayan Kassir

Foot 24-7 is a platform for connecting football players whose purpose is to facilitate the networking of players.

The founder, Rayan, created a pretotyping phase that allowed him to test his market at a lower cost before investing in the development of his mobile application. In concrete terms, what did he do? He started by distributing business cards in agoras or in matches organized in sports halls. He went to the players and explain the concept to them and tell them that if they were missing players or if individually were looking for games to play, Foot 24-7 could help them. He then repeated the same procedure with flyers, the creation of a Facebook page and the creation of a free website. The goal was to measure the players' interest in this service. Success quickly came and Rayan started making contacts by emails, phones and through the Facebook page.

From that moment on, he started developing the platform. This stage of the project also had to be pretotyped. For that, he collaborated with Deuse⁴. They first created paper versions of the application's features. Then the company created a first beta version. To test these versions, Rayan selected six groups of twenty people to whom he gave access to the platform for a week to receive feedback on its features. After each week, the remarks were adapted and the application passed to the next group.

This approach allowed him to add many options that were not planned and to modify others that were not relevant (e.g.: the initial objective was just to find other players to play games. Through his human contact with players, he realized that there was interest in the possibilities of creating teams, registering for tournaments and booking fields). For him, the result would not have been the same without pretyping.

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⁴ Software, mobile and data development company and devices.

5.2 My personal project

My project consists in giving everyone the opportunity to plan their funeral according to their needs and values. At the beginning, I absolutely wanted to create a platform around this service. I realized that I did not have to try to find the way to give life to my idea but that I had to first get in touch with potential customers in order to understand the real needs that exist around this proposition. So I participated in the Testing district during the Student Entrepreneur Fair. The Testing district was a place for all young entrepreneurs who wanted to test their project.

So I had a small stand where I welcomed visitors with chips, wine and a blackjack carpet. The aim was to avoid people guessing aspects of my project and being biased in their feedbacks. Indeed, people tend to please the founder by saying that everything is fine.

The game was divided into two parts. The first was to present the interlocutor with cards that could represent concerns in his life at the time he was talking to me (given his age, experience, etc.). The person then had to choose six cards and bet tokens on them in order of importance. Surprisingly (or not) few people pointed "death" as a concern. Then, the second part consisted of the same process but with cards representing concerns about his own death. When people had chosen their six cards and classified them, the goal was to listen to them and understand why. Of the twenty people I met, all of them, without exception, entrusted to me and told me stories from their personal lives.

This intervention was very beneficial for me because I realized that at first sight, death remained a taboo subject in our society but that once we got to the heart of the matter, some people were relieved to talk about it and to externalize it. All that remained was to translate these observations into a solid and viable service.





6 To know more about it

6.1 Bibliographical references

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6.2 Internet links

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6.3 Experts and entrepreneurs met

- Aude Bonvissuto
- Ayumi Mizutani
- Frederic Ooms
- Romain Ledent
- Romain Simar
- Maxime Deuse
- Melissa Leon Blanco

6.4 Glossary

Business Model: A business model describes the reasoning that an organization follows to create, distribute and add value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Call to action: Call to action is a formulation that encourages the advertising contact or the recipient of a direct marketing document to take more or less immediate action sought by the advertiser (click here, participate in the draw, call 800...).<u>https://www.definitions-marketing.com/definition/call-to-action/</u>

Conversion rate: The conversion rate is the key indicator or KPI for most marketing actions, especially direct or digital marketing.

https://www.definitions-marketing.com/definition/taux-de-conversion/









Cost per acquisition: Cost per acquisition or CPA is a method of remuneration that consists of paying an advertising support site, an affiliate or a file rental company in proportion to the number of customers obtained during a campaign. <u>https://www.definitions-marketing.com/definition/cout-par-acquisition/</u>

Lean Start-up: "Lean Startup is an iterative way of doing business: launch a minimum offer, test the market, adjust your product, and start over until you find the best idea to sell. » https://www.lean-startup.net/

Matrix STDC:

MATRICE "STDC" - ELABORATION DU PLAN MARKETING

		PHASE SEE (VISIBILITÉ)	PHASE THINK (CONSIDERATION)	PHASE DO (CONVERSION)	PHASE CARE (FIDÉLISATION)
Les objectifs que vos clients veulent accomplir?	OBJECTIFS CLIENT				
Les objectifs que vous souhaitez accomplir?	OBJECTIFS ENTREPRENEUR				
Quels contenus rencontrent ces objectifs?	CONTENUS				
Sur quels canaux diffuser ces contenus?	CANAUX				
Qu'allez-vous mesurer ?	KPI's				

Source: Engine

Minimum Viable Product: Functional version of the product/service but limited to its basic

functions (Savoia, 2011).

Mock-up: Prototype of user interface

Objective SMART :







- Is my objective specific, i.e. it represents a specific action, formulated positively?
- Is my objective measurable, i.e. it is easy to set up indicators to measure its achievement?
- Is my goal achievable, i.e. motivating, requires commitment?
- Is my objective realistic, i.e. it takes into account my current situation, my context, my environment?
- Is my objective temporal, i.e. planned and limited in time?

Source : https://www.phisoe.com/smart/

Pivot: The turn a project takes on the basis of relevant observations and analyses.

Bounce rate: The bounce rate of a website is an audience analysis indicator calculated by web analytics tools. It is obtained by dividing the number of bounces by the total number of visits. A 50% bounce rate means that every other visit includes only one page viewed (the landing page).

https://www.definitions-marketing.com/definition/taux-de-rebond/

