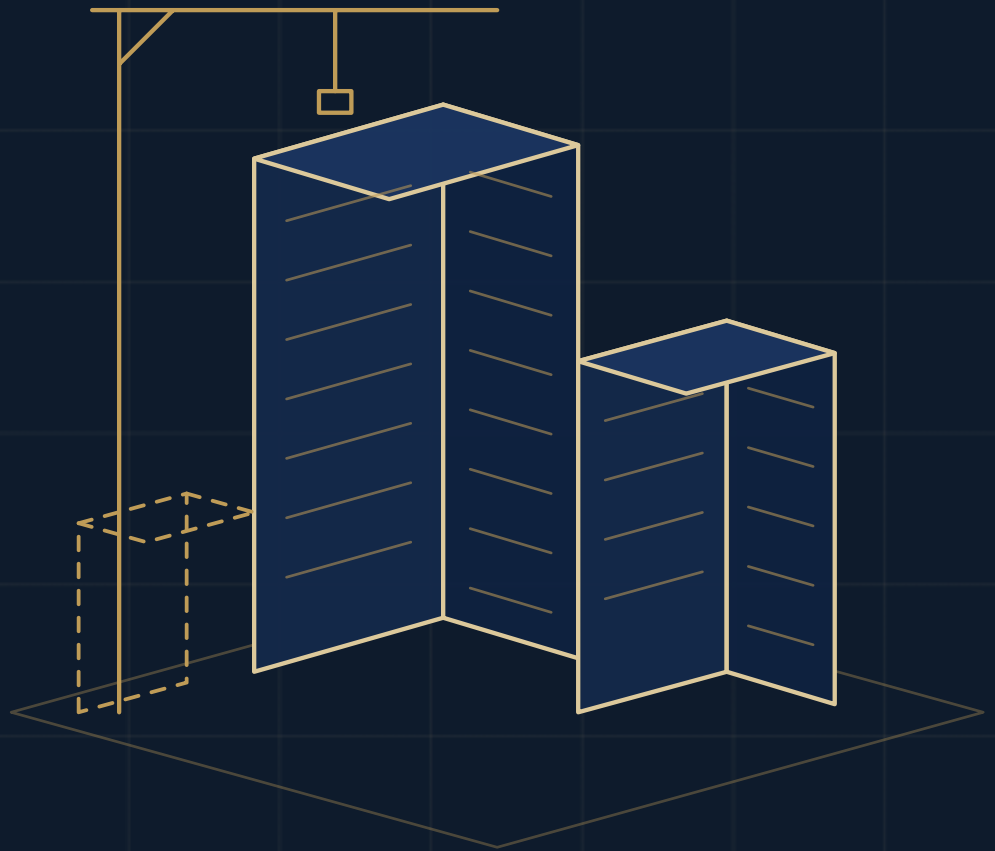




A DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING BUSINESSES AS ASSETS

The Asset-First Entrepreneur

The Real Estate Model of Entrepreneurship

DEVELOP — STABILISE — REALISE

PREPARED BY

Rashed Sawaqed

[linkedin.com/in/rashedsawaqed](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rashedsawaqed)

FOUNDATION

The Mental Model Shift

STOP THINKING

~~“How do I grow this business?”~~



START THINKING

“How do I develop this asset, stabilise it, and exit at peak value?”

Most business owners, and most people with a business idea, start a business to make money. A few build it to create wealth. The difference is not talent, capital, or luck.

It is one question, asked at every decision:

“Does this make my business more valuable, to a future buyer or as a long-term asset in my wealth portfolio?”

That shift changes what you build, how you build it, who you hire, how you manage money, when you sell, and which assets you keep and hold.

BUILT TO OUTLAST

Think of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, Petra in Jordan, or Teotihuacan in Mexico. The rulers, armies and markets that created them are long gone. What still stands is what they **built**, and thousands of years later it still draws visitors and still earns income.

Income ends when the effort stops. **An asset outlives its builder.** Not every asset is meant to be sold; the greatest ones are held.

This is not a startup playbook or a growth-hacking guide. It is a **development framework**: the discipline a real estate developer applies to every project, applied to every business you will ever build.

FOUNDATION

The three words that carry the model

01

Develop

THE DEVELOPER

Chooses the land, designs the building, builds it to a plan.

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Chooses the market, designs the business for a buyer, builds it to a plan.

02

Stabilise

THE DEVELOPER

Fills the units, secures tenants, proves the rental income.

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Secures repeat customers, steady margins, a team that runs without the owner.

03

Realise

THE DEVELOPER

Sells at the right price, or keeps the best buildings for rental income, then moves to the next project.

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Sells at the right valuation, or holds the business as an income-producing asset, then develops the next one.

WHO THIS FRAMEWORK IS FOR

Starting from an idea

Students, graduates, employees, and anyone building their first business the right way, from the first decision.

In your first years

New owners in their first one to three years who want to set the foundation before habits harden.

Running an established business

Owners who want to restructure what they have into an asset a buyer would pay for, or worth holding.

The model applies to any business. The examples focus on **traditional businesses**: services, trading, food, education, health, logistics. These are the businesses most owners never think of selling, and where the gap between “income” and “value” is widest.

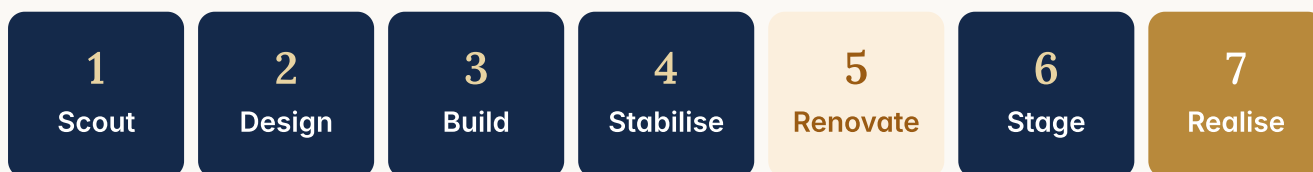
Built on proven foundations. This framework builds on established thinking about business value: John Warrillow’s *Built to Sell* and the Value Builder System, Michael Gerber’s *The E-Myth*, Daniel Priestley’s *24 Assets*, and the Exit Planning Institute’s Value Acceleration Methodology. What it adds is the real estate development model: a complete operating system for building a business from day one, with Stabilise, Sell on Plan, and the Sell or Hold choice at its core.

AT A GLANCE

Inside the framework

01	The Developer Mindset Why the model works, the real estate operating system, the serial cycle, Sell or Hold	05
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THE DEVELOPMENT CYCLE IN ONE LINE



● **Track A** · building a new business from zero: 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 6 → 7

● **Track B** · restructuring a running business into an asset: 5 → 4 → 6 → 7

PART ONE

The Developer Mindset

A business that cannot be sold is not an asset. It is a job with overhead. The real estate model forces one discipline from day one: **build something that works, earns, and transfers without you.**

01

1.1 WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

1 Buyers pay for the future, not your past effort.

A buyer values what the business will earn without you. Ten years of hard work counts for nothing if it all lives in your head.

2 Value is a multiple, income is a number.

A typical owner-run small business sells for about 2 to 3 times its yearly owner earnings. A business that runs without its owner, with a manager and contracts in place, moves into a higher price band, where every 1 of reliable profit can be worth 4 or more.

3 Designing for a buyer makes a better business anyway.

Clean books, written systems, loyal customers and a capable team make life easier even if you never sell.

4 A planned sell-or-hold decision turns one success into many.

The capital or income, reputation and experience from one project fund the next one, faster and cheaper.

1.2 OWNER THINKING VS DEVELOPER THINKING

THE BUSINESS OWNER THINKS	THE ASSET DEVELOPER THINKS
How do I grow revenue?	→ How do I grow valuation?
What did I earn this month?	→ What would a buyer pay today?
I build a team around me	→ I build systems that run without me
My business is my livelihood	→ My business is my investment
I work in the business	→ I work on the business
Exit is someday, maybe	→ Sell or hold is in the plan from day one
This business is who I am	→ This business is what I am developing

PART ONE · THE DEVELOPER MINDSET

1.3 The real estate operating system

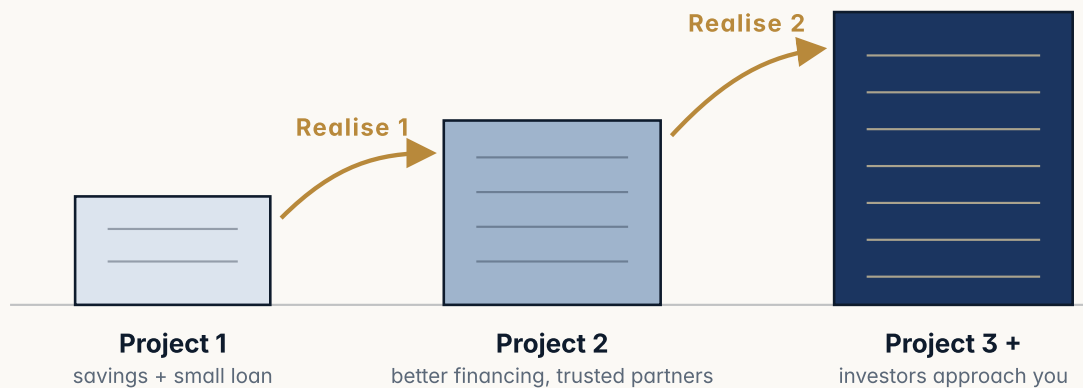
Every business decision has a real estate equivalent. When you are unsure what to do, ask: *what would a developer do here?*

REAL ESTATE	BUSINESS EQUIVALENT	THE QUESTION TO ASK
Location	Market and sector	<i>Is there demand, and are there buyers for businesses like mine?</i>
Zoning and permits	Licences and regulation	<i>What am I allowed to do, and what will a buyer need to inherit?</i>
Feasibility study	Market and financial validation	<i>Will this make money before I spend on it?</i>
Architectural blueprint	Business model and plan	<i>Is this designed for the end buyer?</i>
Plot size and floors	Scale and capacity	<i>How big can this get in this market?</i>
Foundation	Core product, process, licence, IP	<i>What holds everything up?</i>
Off-plan sales	Pre-sales, contracts, letters of intent	<i>Can I sell before I finish building?</i>
Construction loan	Startup and working capital financing	<i>What is the right money, at the right stage?</i>
Contractors	Operational partners and suppliers	<i>Who builds this with me so I am not doing everything?</i>
Interior design and fit-out	Brand, customer experience, premises	<i>Does it look like something worth buying?</i>
Tenants and rental yield	Recurring customers and earnings	<i>Is the income steady and proven?</i>
Price per square metre	Valuation multiple	<i>What is each unit of profit worth in my sector?</i>
Maintenance records	Financial statements and SOPs	<i>Can a buyer verify everything?</i>
Staging	Exit preparation	<i>Is it presented at its best?</i>
Broker	M&A advisor	<i>Who brings the right buyer?</i>
Handover	Transaction and transition	<i>Can it run on day one without me?</i>
Next project	Next venture	<i>Where does the capital go next?</i>

PART ONE · THE DEVELOPER MINDSET

1.4 The serial development cycle

A developer does not build one tower and retire. Each project funds, teaches and markets the next one. The entrepreneur works the same way.



The income during each project pays the bills. **The asset is the profit. The track record is the multiplier.**

1.5 Sell or Hold: the developer's two exits

Developers do not sell everything they build. They sell residential units to release capital, and they **keep** some assets, such as a mall, a plaza or an office building, for steady rental income. Over time, the held assets become a portfolio that pays them whether or not they are building.

Sell

REAL ESTATE

Apartments sold off-plan or on completion

BUSINESS

Sold to a buyer at a multiple of earnings

YOU GET

A lump sum of capital, now

BEST WHEN

You need capital for the next project, or the price is at its peak

YOUR ROLE AFTER

You move on

Hold

REAL ESTATE

Mall, plaza or office space kept for rent

BUSINESS

Kept, run by a manager, paying you profit every year

YOU GET

Recurring income, for years

BEST WHEN

Income is stable, the business runs without you, and growth continues

YOUR ROLE AFTER

Owner and board member, not operator

The rule does not change: a held business must be built to the same standard as one you sell. A mall that only works when the developer is on site is not passive income; it is a job. Over several cycles, a developer ends up with both: capital from the assets they sold, and income from the assets they kept. That is the portfolio this framework helps you build.

PART TWO

Before You Build

Few serious developers buy land without a feasibility study. Many entrepreneurs skip this step entirely, which is one reason so many businesses struggle in their early years. Answer these three questions before you spend.

02

2.1 LOCATION: CHOOSE THE RIGHT MARKET

In real estate, location decides most of the value before a single brick is laid. In business, the sector and market play the same role.

TEST	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	RED FLAG
Demand	Customers already paying for this today	You must “educate the market” first
Supply quality	Many small players with weak service or systems	One or two dominant players with deep pockets
Buyer activity	Groups, chains or investors acquiring businesses in this sector	No one has ever bought a business like this
Recurring potential	Customers come back monthly or yearly	One-time purchases only
Regulation	Clear licensing path you can complete	Licences tied to you personally and not transferable
Your fit	You understand the sector or have a partner who does	Pure passion with no knowledge or network

THREE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU SPEND



PART TWO · BEFORE YOU BUILD

2.2 Buyer first: know who will buy before you design

A developer knows whether they are building for families, investors or tenants before drawing a single floor plan. You must know the same about your future buyer. Write down three things:



Who would buy this business in 3 to 7 years?

A larger competitor, a group consolidating the sector, an investor, your management team, or an individual buyer.



What do they pay the most for?

Contracts, customer base, location, licence, brand, systems, team.



What would make them walk away?

Owner dependency, messy books, one big customer, unlicensed activity.

2.3 Capital and capacity: be honest about what you have

QUESTION	WHY IT MATTERS
How much can I invest without risking my household?	Good developers avoid putting their own home on the line for one project
How long can I go without taking a salary?	Many businesses need 12 to 24 months to stabilise
What financing is available to me?	Government SME funds, bank loans, supplier credit, partners
Which skills do I lack?	Those gaps become your operational partners, not your weekends
How many hours can I commit?	Part-time builders need simpler business models

Feasibility output

A one-page note naming your **market**, your **likely buyer**, your **target exit value**, your **budget**, and your **financing plan**. If you cannot write that page, you are not ready to build.

PART THREE

The Development Cycle

Every project moves through seven phases. **Track A**, building a new business from zero, uses phases 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7. **Track B**, restructuring a running business into an asset, starts at phase 5, then 4, 6, 7.

1	Scout 1–3 months	REAL ESTATE Site search and feasibility	BUSINESS Market, buyer and capital feasibility (Part Two)	OUTPUT One-page feasibility note
2	Design 1–2 months	REAL ESTATE Architectural plans, unit mix, pricing	BUSINESS Business model, offer, pricing, structure, financing plan	OUTPUT Asset-First business plan with exit target plan
3	Build 6–18 months	REAL ESTATE Foundation and construction	BUSINESS Licence, premises, first team, first paying customers	OUTPUT Proven first sales and written core processes
4	Stabilise 12–24 months	REAL ESTATE Fill units, secure tenants, prove rental income	BUSINESS Repeat customers, steady margins, owner steps back	OUTPUT 12+ months of stable, clean EBITDA
5	Renovate TRACK B 6–18 months	REAL ESTATE Renovate an old building to raise its value	BUSINESS Audit, clean books, document, reduce owner dependency	OUTPUT Exit Readiness score above 36/60
6	Stage 3–6 months	REAL ESTATE Staging, photos, listing	BUSINESS Prepare the asset for sale (buyer list, information pack) or for holding (manager hand-over, owner reporting)	OUTPUT Sale pack and buyer shortlist, or a manager in place with monthly owner reporting
7	Realise 3–9 months	REAL ESTATE Sell the units or keep the building for rent, then buy the next plot	BUSINESS Sell, Hold, Redeploy: sell the business, or hold it under a manager for income, then start the next venture	OUTPUT Capital released or annual income secured, and the next project funded

PART THREE · THE DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

Phase 4 · Stabilise: where a business becomes an asset

This is the most misunderstood phase. Owners either try to sell too early, during construction, or never sell at all. A developer sells **after** the building is full and the rent is proven, not before.

Sell early, but sell the right thing. Sell your *products* early through Sell on Plan (Part Four), but never sell the *business* before it is stabilised.

Your business is stabilised when all six are true:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Revenue has been steady or growing for at least 12 months | ☐ At least 40% of revenue comes from repeat or contracted customers |
| ☐ No single customer is more than 20% of revenue | ☐ The business ran for 30 days without you and nothing broke |
| ☐ Monthly accounts are closed, separated from personal spending, and reviewed | ☐ You know your earnings (SDE or EBITDA) and your sector's multiple |

Break-even with a strong foundation is the minimum point to consider an exit.
Stabilisation beyond break-even is where the price rises.

Phase 5 · Renovate: for businesses already running

An old building in a good location can be worth more after renovation than a new one in a weak location. A running business has the same advantage: real customers, real history.

- 1 Honest audit**
Score yourself on the Exit Readiness Scorecard (Part Six). List the three things a buyer would object to most.
- 2 Financial clean-up**
Separate personal and business spending; produce three years of clean statements; start tracking earnings monthly.
- 3 Systems and people**
Write down every core process; promote or hire a manager; remove yourself from daily operations step by step.
- 4 Revenue quality**
Convert regular customers into contracts; reduce dependence on any one customer; add a recurring service.
- 5 Re-score**
When you pass 36/60, move to Phase 4 (Stabilise) and then Phase 6 (Stage).

PART FOUR

Sell on Plan

Developers sell units before the building is finished. Buyers pay deposits on a floor plan because they trust the developer's name, the location and the plan. Entrepreneurs can do the same, at two levels: the **project** and the **developer**.

4.1 SELLING THE PROJECT ON PLAN

Don't wait until everything is built to start earning or proving demand.

STAGE	REAL ESTATE	BUSINESS EQUIVALENT	WHAT YOU SELL
Floor plan	Brochure and show unit	Concept, sample menu, course outline, service proposal	Pre-orders, founding-member offers, waiting lists
Foundation	Construction under way	Pilot, soft launch, first location	Early-access pricing, pilot contracts
Handover	Keys delivered	Full launch	Annual contracts, retainers, corporate accounts

Training centre

signs corporate training agreements before renting the premises.

Catering kitchen

secures supply contracts with two schools or offices before buying equipment.

Clinic

pre-registers patients through a partner employer before opening.

Trading company

signs a distributor or offtake agreement before importing the first container.

Why it works: it proves demand before you spend, funds the build with customer money, and shows a future buyer that the business had buyers from day one.

PART FOUR · SELL ON PLAN

4.2 Selling the developer: your entrepreneur brand

In real estate, buyers queue for the next tower from a developer they trust, often before the plot is announced. That trust is the developer's most valuable asset, and it moves from project to project. As an entrepreneur, your name can work the same way.

1 Build in public, carefully.

Share your process, your numbers where appropriate, and your lessons. Customers, partners and investors follow builders, not slogans.

2 Keep a clean record.

Paid suppliers, honest customers, licensed activity, clean exits. Reputation is your credit rating.

3 Close every project well.

A smooth handover to a happy buyer becomes your best marketing.

4 Grow your circle of backers.

Customers, suppliers, lenders and investors from Project 1 are your first callers for Project 2.

4.3 How reputation compounds

	PROJECT 1	PROJECT 2	PROJECT 3
Who knows you	Friends and family	Your sector	Investors and partners
Financing	Savings and small loan	Bank and investor interest	Investors approach you first
First customers	Found one by one	Follow you from Project 1	Pre-committed before launch
Time to stabilise	Longest	Shorter	Shortest

By your third project, your name sells the plan before the plan exists.

PART FIVE

The Financial Architecture

Monthly income is not your wealth. Your asset's value is your wealth. A developer never confuses early income with the real profit. Realising the asset is the profit, by selling it or by holding it for income.

5.1 HOW THE DEVELOPER'S NUMBERS TRANSLATE

DEVELOPER'S NUMBER	BUSINESS EQUIVALENT	PLAIN MEANING
Land + construction cost	Total investment	Everything you put in: capital, loans, unpaid salary
Rental yield	Earnings: SDE or EBITDA	The earning power a buyer pays for: SDE for owner-run businesses, EBITDA for manager-run ones
Price per square metre	Valuation multiple	How many times earnings buyers pay in your sector and size band
Sale price	Exit value	Earnings × multiple, adjusted for debt and cash
Developer's profit	Return on exit	Exit value minus total investment
Construction loan	Business financing	Money matched to the stage of the project
Deposit on next plot	Redeployed capital	What you carry into the next venture

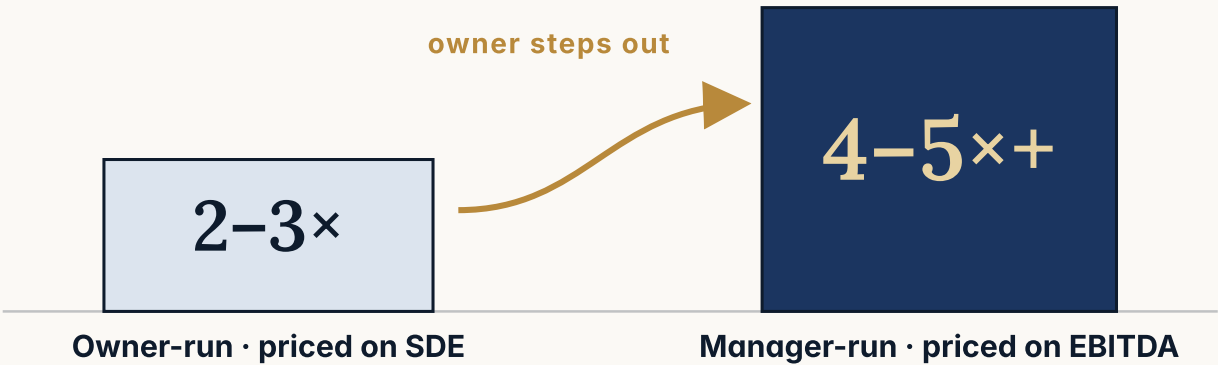
$$\text{Exit Value} = \text{Earnings} \times \text{Multiple}$$

PART FIVE · THE FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

5.2 Which earnings? The jump that creates value

Buyers use two measures, depending on how the business runs:

MEASURE	WHAT IT IS	USED FOR	TYPICAL MULTIPLE*
SDE seller's discretionary earnings	Profit plus the owner's own salary and personal perks	Owner-run small businesses, where the buyer steps in as the new operator	About 2 to 3×
EBITDA	Profit after paying a manager, before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation	Manager-run businesses, roughly 2 million in value and above	About 4 to 5× and higher



The jump from the first row to the second is the Asset-First idea in numbers: **stop being the business, and the business is worth more.**

Two levers, not one. You can raise the value by earning more **or** by being worth more per unit of profit (the multiple). The multiple rises with recurring revenue, clean books, documented systems, diversified customers, and an owner who is not essential.

Café A Owner runs the till, cash sales, no records. Priced on SDE as an owner's job. 300,000 × 2600,000	Café B Manager in place, corporate catering contracts, clean accounts. Priced on EBITDA as a manager-run asset. 300,000 × 41,200,000
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Same earnings. Double the value. That difference is what this framework teaches you to build.

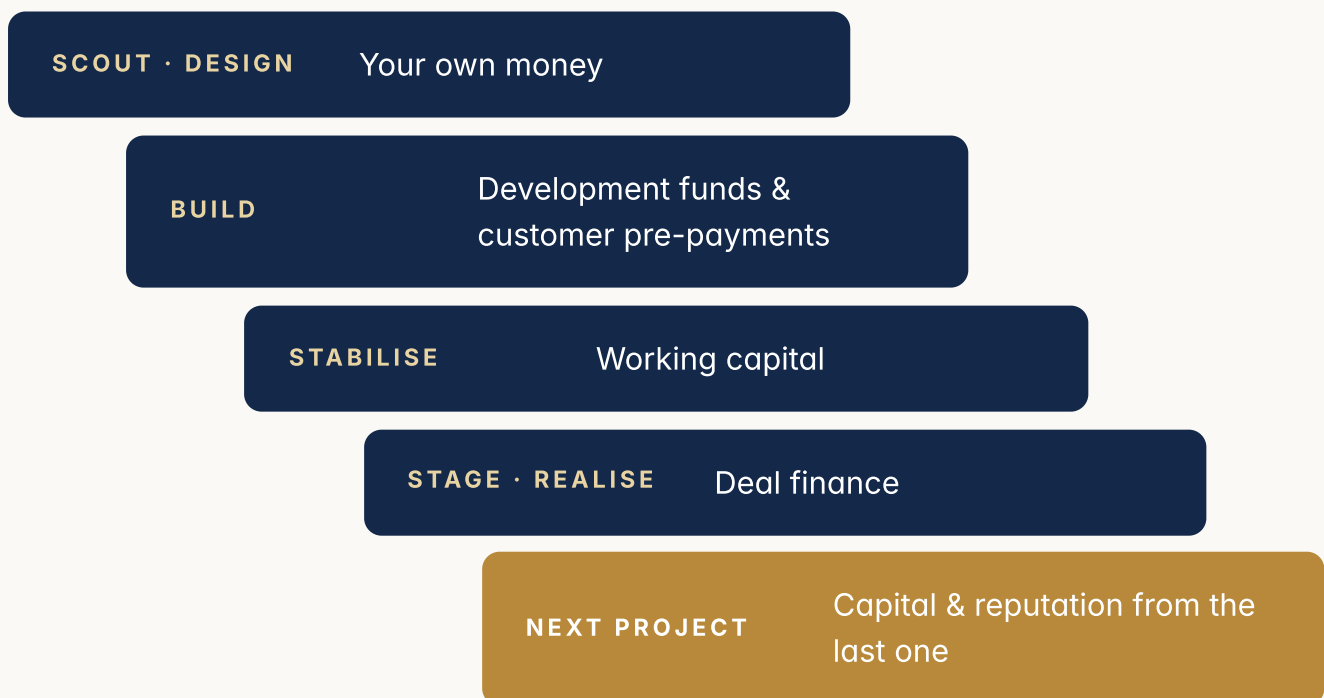
* Indicative ranges, drawn mainly from published US small-business sale data.

PART FIVE · THE FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

5.3 Financing like a developer

Developers match money to stage. Good developers avoid using expensive money for slow assets, or short loans for long builds.

STAGE	BEST-FIT MONEY	WATCH OUT FOR
Scout and Design	Own savings, small grants, competitions	Spending before the feasibility note is done
Build	SME development funds, startup loans, supplier credit, customer pre-payments	Borrowing more than the plan needs
Stabilise	Working-capital lines, equipment finance	Using short-term money for long-term assets
Stage and Realise	Seller financing, earn-outs, buyer financing	Agreeing deal terms without an advisor
Next project	Capital or income from Project 1, investors who followed you	Reinvesting everything in one project



PART SIX

The Tools

Four working tools turn the framework into your own business blueprint.
Use them in this order: **persona, drivers, scorecard, 90-day plan.**

06

6.1 BUYER PERSONA WORKSHEET

BUYER TYPE	WHO THEY ARE	MULTIPLE	WHAT THEY NEED TO SEE
Strategic buyer	A larger company in your sector or next to it	Highest	Customers, territory, contracts, clean legal record
Consolidator / investor	A fund or group buying many similar businesses	High	Documented systems, margins, a manager who stays
Management buyout	Your own team buying you out	Medium	A capable team and financing they can secure
Individual buyer	A person buying a business to run	Lower	Steady profit, simple operations, easy handover

Answer in writing: My most likely buyer is _____. They will pay most for _____. They would walk away if _____. So in the next 12 months I will build _____.

6.2 THE SIX VALUE DRIVERS

Earnings quality Profit that is real, clean and repeatable Margins tracked monthly and growing	Recurring revenue Contracts, subscriptions, retainers 40%+ of revenue	Customer loyalty Customers who come back 75%+ retained each year
Documented systems Written processes, a manager in place Runs 30+ days without you	Owned assets Brand, trademarks, licences, supplier terms that transfer Registered in the company's name	Market position A clear niche in a growing, active sector Named competitors and buyers you can list

PART SIX · THE TOOLS

6.3 Exit Readiness Scorecard 60 POINTS

Score each line 0 if not true, full points if true. Add up your total out of 60.

Financial readiness / 10

- ☐ Three years of clean statements 3
- ☐ Personal and business money fully separated 2
- ☐ EBITDA tracked monthly and growing 3
- ☐ No unresolved tax or legal issues 2

Score: ____

Owner independence / 10

- ☐ Business runs 30+ days without you 3
- ☐ Core processes written down 3
- ☐ A manager makes daily decisions 2
- ☐ No single employee is irreplaceable 2

Score: ____

Revenue quality / 10

- ☐ 40%+ recurring or contracted revenue 3
- ☐ No customer above 20% of revenue 2
- ☐ 75%+ customer retention 3
- ☐ Customer records kept in a system 2

Score: ____

Owned assets / 10

- ☐ Brand and trademarks registered 2
- ☐ Licences and contracts in the company's name 3
- ☐ Strong reputation and online presence 2
- ☐ Equipment and tools owned or transferable 3

Score: ____

Market position / 10

- ☐ Clear niche or local leadership 3
- ☐ Businesses in your sector are being bought 2
- ☐ Written growth plan a buyer can follow 3
- ☐ Hard-to-copy advantage 2

Score: ____

Exit preparation / 10

- ☐ Likely buyers named 2
- ☐ Advisor relationship in place 3
- ☐ Sale information pack drafted 2
- ☐ Target value and exit year defined 3

Score: ____

48-60

Exit-ready

36-47

Nearly ready · 6-12 months

24-35

In progress · 12-24 months

0-23

Start with Phase 5, Renovate

If you plan to Hold: add three checks. A held business must run without you just as much as one you sell.

- ☐ A manager runs daily operations and makes routine decisions
- ☐ You receive a monthly owner report: sales, costs, cash and open issues
- ☐ You track the profit you collect each year as a yield on what you invested (yearly profit ÷ total investment)

PART SIX · THE TOOLS

6.4 The 90-Day Starter Plan

By day 90, you will have drawn your own **business blueprint**: your feasibility note, your buyer persona, your exit target and financing plan, and your first pre-sale.

DAYS 1–30

Scout

- ☐ Write your one-page feasibility note (Part Two)
- ☐ List three sectors you could enter and test each against the location table
- ☐ Name five businesses or groups that could buy a business like yours
- ☐ Running business: score yourself on the Exit Readiness Scorecard

DAYS 31–60

Design

- ☐ Complete the Buyer Persona Worksheet
- ☐ Set your target exit value and exit year, in writing
- ☐ Draft your financing plan by stage (Part Five)
- ☐ Running business: separate personal and business finances completely

DAYS 61–90

Sell on Plan

- ☐ Secure your first pre-sale, pilot contract or letter of intent
- ☐ Write down your first three core processes
- ☐ Start a monthly earnings review
- ☐ Begin building your entrepreneur brand: one public update per month

CLOSING

Develop. Stabilise. Realise. Repeat.

The best entrepreneurs do not just run businesses. **They develop assets, and they know who will buy them.**

Design the exit before you lay the foundation, and every decision becomes sharper, faster, and worth more.

GLOSSARY FOR FIRST-TIME READERS

TERM	MEANING
Asset	Something that holds value and can be sold to someone else, or produces income for you
SDE	Seller's discretionary earnings: profit plus the owner's own salary and perks, used to price owner-run small businesses
EBITDA	Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation: the core operating profit, used to price manager-run businesses
Multiple	The number buyers multiply earnings (SDE or EBITDA) by to reach a price
Valuation	What the business is worth to a buyer today
Recurring revenue	Income that repeats through contracts, subscriptions or regular customers
Owner dependency	How much the business relies on you personally to operate
SOP	Standard operating procedure: a written description of how a task is done
Letter of intent (LOI)	A written, usually non-binding commitment to buy or to do business
Due diligence	The buyer's checks on your finances, legal records and operations
Earn-out	Part of the price paid later, depending on future performance
Stabilisation	The point where income is steady, proven and does not depend on the owner
Realise	Turning the asset's value into wealth, by selling it, holding it for income, or both over time

Multiples and time ranges in this framework are indicative and vary by sector, market and deal. They are drawn mainly from published US small-business sale data, since UAE and GCC deal data is rarely published. They are for planning and teaching, not valuation advice.

WORK WITH THE FRAMEWORK

Build Your Business as an Asset

YOU ARE

Starting a new business

I HELP YOU

Develop your business plan the Asset-First way, from feasibility to exit target.

YOU WALK AWAY WITH

An Asset-First business plan with your market, likely buyer, financing plan by stage, and target exit value.

YOU ARE

Running a business today

I HELP YOU

Restructure your working business into an asset a buyer would pay for.

YOU WALK AWAY WITH

Your Exit Readiness score, the gaps holding back your value, and a step-by-step Renovate roadmap.



PUT THE FRAMEWORK TO WORK · AN INNOVERTA TOOL

AssetFirst: Exit Readiness

Business Value Building & Exit Readiness Tool

Assess your business's readiness for a future sale or transition. Identify gaps in transferability, scalability, and reliance on its owner.

Assess your business · [innoverta.com/assetfirst](https://www.innoverta.com/assetfirst)



GET IN TOUCH FOR A CONSULTATION

Rashed Sawaqed

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Version 01

This framework is developed by **Rashed Sawaqed** as part of the **Innoverta** initiative.

Explore Innoverta tools and resources · www.innoverta.com

Don't just build a business. **Develop an asset.**