

The Pitch Deck Playbook

A slide-by-slide construction guide for a 12-slide seed deck, with the evidence each slide must carry and the mistakes that end meetings early.

Overview

An early-stage deck is read in under four minutes, usually on a phone, usually between two other meetings. Its job is not to close the round — it is to earn the second conversation. This playbook gives you the sequence, the evidence each slide needs, and a review checklist you can run before sending.

The 12-slide sequence

- Title — company name, one-line description, stage, city, founder contact.
- Problem — who has it, how often, and what it costs them today in money or hours.
- Solution — plain language plus a real product visual, not an abstract diagram.
- Product — actual screens or the delivery workflow end to end.
- Market — bottom-up sizing: customers × price × frequency, with the source of each input.
- Traction — the strongest evidence you have, charted monthly, never cumulative.
- Business model — pricing, gross margin, CAC and payback period.
- Go-to-market — the channels working today and cost per acquisition in each.
- Competition — honest positioning against real alternatives, including doing nothing.
- Team — why this specific team wins this specific market.
- Financials — 18-24 months with visible assumptions.
- The ask — amount, instrument, use of funds, and the milestones it buys.

Evidence standard for each claim

Every statement on a slide needs a number, a source or a demo behind it. If the deck says retention is strong, show the cohort curve. If it says the market is underserved, show what customers pay today for a worse option. If it says the team is uniquely positioned, show the specific years of operating experience in that market.

Move anything that only some investors will want into an appendix. The main deck stays at 12 slides; the appendix can run to 30.

What kills decks in the first minute

- A top-down market number with no path from it to your first ₹1 Cr of revenue.
- Cumulative charts used to hide flat or declining monthly numbers.
- A 2×2 competition slide that places you alone in the top-right quadrant.
- Projections that inflect sharply with no named driver behind the inflection.
- No ask, or an ask with no milestones attached to the money.
- Dense paragraphs where a single number would do the work.

Two decks, two jobs

- Send deck — readable without you: slightly more text, self-explanatory charts, sent as a PDF.
- Present deck — visual and sparse: one idea per slide, you carry the narration.
- Never send the present deck; never present the send deck.

Pre-send review checklist

- Can a stranger state what you do after slide three?
- Is every chart labelled with units, period and source?
- Is the strongest number in the company visible within the first five slides?
- Does the file open under 10 MB and render correctly on a phone?
- Is the filename Company_Deck_Month_Year.pdf, not final_v7_new.pdf?
- Does the last slide have your email, phone and the exact ask?

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