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Growth Strategy Framework

A practical decision framework for evaluating growth options across markets, products, channels and partnerships.

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01. Executive summary

Growth rarely fails because leaders lack ambition. It fails because ambition is converted into initiatives before the underlying growth logic has been tested. The result is a portfolio of activity that looks energetic but does not concentrate resources on the few moves that can create disproportionate value.

This framework is designed to help leadership teams evaluate growth options across four arenas: markets, products, channels and partnerships. It is deliberately practical. It does not replace judgement, but it makes judgement sharper by forcing each option through the same commercial tests.

The core question is simple: where can the business grow, why should it win there, and what must be true for the strategy to work?

Used properly, the framework creates four outputs:

- A longlist of credible growth options, not just the ideas already favoured by the loudest voice in the room.
- A comparative view of strategic attractiveness, right to win, operational feasibility and risk.
- A prioritised growth portfolio, with clear sequencing between near-term, medium-term and option-building moves.
- A 90-day execution agenda that converts the chosen strategy into decisions, owners, milestones and measures.

Growth question	What good looks like	Common failure mode
Where should we play?	Clear choices on markets, customer segments, occasions and routes to demand.	Over-broad target markets, attractive in theory but expensive to reach.
How will we win?	A specific advantage that customers value and competitors struggle to copy.	Generic positioning, price-led growth or belief that better effort will be enough.
Can we execute?	Resources, capabilities, operating rhythm and leadership capacity are realistic.	A strategy designed for an organisation the business does not yet have.
What is the economic logic?	Growth produces attractive returns after acquisition costs, complexity and investment.	Revenue growth that dilutes margin, absorbs cash or increases fragility.

The aim is not to find the most exciting option. It is to identify the growth options that are commercially attractive, strategically coherent and executable within the real constraints of the business.

02. The Allington growth logic

A strong growth strategy links five elements. When one is weak, the strategy may still sound persuasive, but it becomes difficult to execute with confidence.

Element	Decision discipline	Board-level question
Ambition	Define the financial and strategic outcome growth must deliver.	What outcome are we solving for, and by when?
Arena	Choose where to compete across markets, products, channels and partnerships.	Which pools of demand justify management attention and investment?
Advantage	Identify why the business can win in the selected arena.	What gives us a credible right to win?
Economics	Test margin, cash, payback, customer acquisition and complexity.	Does the growth create value after all costs and risks?
Execution	Translate the strategy into owners, milestones, measures and governance.	What must happen in the next 90 days to prove momentum?

The most important discipline is to treat growth as a set of choices, not a list of initiatives. A choice implies trade-offs. It makes clear what the business will not pursue, which customers it will not prioritise, which channels it will not build immediately, and which partnerships are not worth the distraction.

This is particularly important for founder-led and growth-stage businesses. Energy and opportunity are rarely the constraints. The constraint is usually focus: too many possible paths, too many partial bets and too little evidence on which path will compound.

A useful growth strategy therefore needs to answer three layers of questions:

- Strategic logic: why this growth direction is attractive and aligned with the company ambition.
- Commercial logic: how revenue, margin and cash improve through the chosen growth path.
- Execution logic: how the organisation will deliver the strategy without breaking its operating model.

03. The four growth arenas

Most growth options sit within one of four arenas. They can be pursued individually, but the best strategies often combine them in a coherent sequence. For example, a company may enter an adjacent customer segment first, then add a channel partnership once proof of demand is established.

Arena	Definition	Best used when	Main risk
Markets	Entering new geographies, sectors, customer segments or use cases.	The core proposition is proven and demand is visible in adjacent pools.	Underestimating local buying behaviour, regulation or route-to-market costs.
Products	Expanding, bundling, premiumising or simplifying the offer.	Customers are asking for adjacent value and the business has credible delivery capability.	Adding complexity faster than operational maturity.
Channels	Opening new routes to demand, including digital, direct, intermediary and enterprise routes.	The product is understood but customer access is inefficient or too concentrated.	Poor channel economics, brand dilution or weak partner incentives.
Partnerships	Using alliances, distributors, platforms, integrations or joint propositions to accelerate reach.	Speed, credibility or capability gaps make organic growth too slow.	Misaligned incentives, weak control and unclear ownership of customer relationships.

A common mistake is to compare options across these arenas as if they are all the same type of decision. They are not. Market expansion is usually a demand and localisation challenge. Product expansion is often a capability and complexity challenge. Channel expansion is an economics and control challenge. Partnership-led growth is an incentive and governance challenge.

The framework therefore assesses every option using the same scoring model, but the evidence required for each arena is different.

A. Market growth

Market growth means applying the company proposition to a new pool of demand. This may be a new geography, industry vertical, customer segment or use case. It is often attractive because it appears to offer a larger addressable market. It is also one of the easiest areas to overestimate.

The critical test is not whether the market is large. It is whether the company can access a specific, valuable segment of that market at an acceptable cost and with a credible reason to win.

Diagnostic question	Evidence to gather	Decision implication
Is the problem materially similar?	Customer interviews, buying triggers, pain intensity and current alternatives.	If the problem differs, the proposition may need adaptation before entry.
Is the buying process accessible?	Decision makers, procurement route, sales cycle, compliance and channel requirements.	A large market may be unattractive if access costs are too high.
Can we win against incumbents?	Competitor positioning, switching barriers, service levels and price anchors.	Entry requires a clear wedge, not just ambition.
What will entry cost?	Sales capacity, localisation, partnerships, marketing, regulatory and support costs.	Entry should be staged if proof points are missing.

Preferred output: a ranked list of market entry options with one-page entry hypotheses for the top three opportunities. Each hypothesis should state the target segment, customer problem, entry wedge, required investment, first proof point and decision gate.

B. Product growth

Product growth is the expansion of what the company sells. It may involve new products, premium tiers, add-ons, bundles, service layers, adjacent use cases or simplification of the current offer. Product growth is powerful when it increases share of wallet, strengthens retention or opens higher-value customer segments.

The danger is that product expansion often creates hidden cost. Every new product or variant increases sales training, support load, operational process, supply requirements and management attention.

Product move	Strategic purpose	When it is attractive	Warning sign
Premium tier	Improve margin and serve more demanding customers.	Customers already ask for deeper capability, speed, quality or service.	Premium features are unclear or only cosmetic.
Entry offer	Increase adoption and widen the funnel.	The core offer has a price or complexity barrier.	Low-value customers increase support cost.
Bundle	Increase average order value and perceived completeness.	Customers buy connected solutions or want fewer suppliers.	Bundle hides weak products or depresses pricing.
Adjacent product	Expand share of wallet and defend the customer relationship.	The business has permission and capability to solve the adjacent problem.	Adjacency is driven by internal enthusiasm, not customer pull.

Preferred output: a product growth map showing current offer, customer pain points, value gaps, willingness to pay and operational complexity. The highest-priority product moves should either increase customer lifetime value or materially improve differentiation.

C. Channel growth

Channel growth is the expansion of how the company reaches and serves customers. This may include direct sales, digital acquisition, distributors, resellers, affiliates, enterprise partnerships, marketplaces, consultants, referral networks or embedded channels.

Channels change economics. A route-to-market decision is therefore not just a sales decision. It affects customer acquisition cost, gross margin, brand control, retention, data ownership and the pace at which the company learns from customers.

Channel type	Strength	Constraint to test
Direct sales	Control, customer learning and stronger relationship ownership.	Cost of acquisition, sales cycle and quality of sales management.
Digital inbound	Scalable acquisition and measurable funnel data.	Content quality, conversion rates, paid media dependence and competitive intensity.
Distributor or reseller	Faster reach and local access.	Margin dilution, limited control and weak customer insight.
Strategic platform	Credibility, scale and integration into existing workflows.	Dependency risk, negotiation power and integration cost.
Referral or advisory network	Trust-led introduction to qualified demand.	Inconsistent volume and limited control over messaging.

Preferred output: a channel economics model comparing expected volume, conversion, margin, CAC, payback, ownership of customer data and operational burden. A channel should not be prioritised until its unit economics are directionally understood.

D. Partnership growth

Partnerships can accelerate growth by providing access, credibility, capability or infrastructure that would take too long to build internally. They are especially useful when the business has a strong proposition but lacks distribution, brand trust in a segment, technical capability or implementation capacity.

However, partnerships can also become a substitute for strategy. A partnership is only valuable when the commercial logic is specific and both parties have a clear incentive to act.

Partnership type	Value created	Governance required
Referral partnership	Creates qualified lead flow through trusted introductions.	Lead ownership, qualification criteria and attribution rules.
Distribution partnership	Expands reach through an established sales footprint.	Commercial terms, training, exclusivity and performance reviews.
Technology or integration partnership	Embeds the proposition into a workflow or platform.	Technical roadmap, data sharing, support model and security responsibilities.
Co-solution partnership	Combines capabilities into a broader offer.	Joint value proposition, pricing, delivery ownership and customer accountability.

Preferred output: a partnership thesis for each priority partner type. This should define the target partner profile, mutual benefit, customer proposition, commercial model, governance model and first 90-day activation plan.

04. The evaluation model

Every growth option should be assessed through four lenses: strategic attractiveness, right to win, economic quality and execution feasibility. These lenses prevent the business from pursuing options that are exciting but not valuable, valuable but not winnable, winnable but uneconomic, or economic but impossible to execute.

Lens	What it tests	Typical evidence	Score
Strategic attractiveness	Market size, growth, urgency, fit with ambition and relevance to target customers.	Market data, customer pain, competitor mapping and strategic fit.	1-5
Right to win	Whether the company has a credible advantage or entry wedge.	Differentiation, assets, expertise, brand permission and customer proof.	1-5
Economic quality	Revenue potential after margin, CAC, complexity, cash and investment.	Unit economics, pricing, retention, payback and resource requirement.	1-5
Execution feasibility	Whether the organisation can deliver with available capability and leadership capacity.	Operational readiness, talent, systems, governance and timeline.	1-5

The scoring should not be treated as mathematical truth. Its purpose is to expose assumptions and create a common language for comparison. A score is useful only when the evidence and confidence level behind it are visible.

Score	Meaning	Interpretation
5	Very strong	Clear evidence, high confidence and strong strategic fit.
4	Strong	Positive evidence with manageable gaps or uncertainties.
3	Promising but unproven	Material upside, but evidence or capability gaps remain.
2	Weak	Important concerns on attractiveness, advantage, economics or execution.
1	Not credible	Little evidence, poor fit or significant execution risk.

05. Prioritisation and sequencing

Once growth options have been scored, the leadership team should place them into a portfolio. The best growth portfolio balances near-term commercial impact with medium-term capability building and selective option creation.

A single growth option may be too narrow. Too many options create dilution. The right answer is usually a focused portfolio with one or two primary bets, supported by a small number of enabling moves.

Portfolio category	Purpose	Typical time horizon	Management posture
Core acceleration	Improve growth from the existing proposition, customer base or channel.	0-6 months	Prioritise immediately and measure weekly.
Adjacent expansion	Extend into a nearby market, product, segment or channel.	6-18 months	Stage investment behind evidence gates.
Strategic option	Build learning or capability in a larger future opportunity.	12-36 months	Protect from short-term noise but limit capital exposure.
Stop or defer	Remove distraction from low-confidence or low-value ideas.	Immediate	Close cleanly or hold until assumptions change.

The sequencing discipline is critical. Many growth strategies fail because businesses attempt to enter markets, launch products and open channels at the same time. Sequencing defines the order in which uncertainty is reduced.

A useful sequencing test is: what is the smallest credible action that would materially increase our confidence in this growth option?

Decision matrix

The decision matrix below can be used in workshops or executive meetings. Each option is scored from 1 to 5 across the four lenses. The total score provides a starting point, but the leadership conversation should focus on the lowest-scoring lens and the assumptions behind it.

Growth option	Arena	Attract.	Right to win	Economic s	Feasibilit y	Confiden ce	Deci sion
Enter adjacent customer segment	Market	4	3	4	3	Medium	Pilot
Launch premium service tier	Product	4	4	5	4	High	Prioritise
Build reseller programme	Channel	3	3	3	2	Low	Defer
Partner with platform provider	Partnership	5	3	4	2	Medium	Test

Interpreting the decision matrix:

- High attractiveness and weak right to win usually means the opportunity is real, but the company needs an entry wedge, partner or differentiated proposition.
- Strong right to win and weak economics usually means the company can sell the offer, but the growth may not create sufficient value.
- Strong economics and weak feasibility usually means the strategy needs staging, capability building or a narrower first move.
- Low confidence should not be ignored. It should become a learning agenda with clear evidence gates.

06. Templates and working tools

The following tools are designed to make the framework practical. They can be used in leadership workshops, board discussions, investor preparation or internal planning sessions.

Tool	Use it to	Output
Growth option hypothesis	Define each opportunity clearly before scoring.	One-page hypothesis per option.
Customer proof checklist	Separate customer evidence from internal belief.	Evidence map and interview gaps.
Unit economics check	Identify whether revenue growth creates value.	Directional economics and sensitivity points.
Capability readiness check	Identify what the organisation must build or buy.	Capability gaps and owner actions.
90-day action plan	Convert priority options into delivery momentum.	Milestones, owners, decisions and metrics.

Growth option hypothesis

For each material growth option, complete a concise hypothesis before debate. This prevents the conversation from becoming abstract and ensures that every option is comparable.

Field	Prompt
Option name	What exactly are we considering?
Arena	Is this a market, product, channel or partnership move?
Target customer or segment	Who is the specific buyer, user or partner?
Customer problem	What problem, need or job are we solving?
Why now?	What has changed in the market, customer behaviour or company capability?
Right to win	Why should we win against alternatives?
Economic logic	How will this create attractive revenue, margin or cash?
Proof required	What evidence would make us more confident in 30-60 days?

Customer proof checklist

A growth option becomes stronger when the business can point to direct customer evidence. Internal conviction is not enough. The checklist below helps distinguish evidence from opinion.

Evidence type	Strong signal	Weak signal
Customer interviews	Customers describe the problem unaided and confirm the cost of inaction.	Customers agree politely after being prompted.
Behavioural evidence	Customers have paid, switched, waited, complained or built workarounds.	Customers say the idea is interesting but take no action.
Competitive evidence	Existing spend confirms the budget and problem category.	No clear buyer, budget or current alternative exists.
Price evidence	Customers understand the value and accept pricing logic.	Pricing is based on internal margin targets only.
Channel evidence	A route-to-market has produced qualified demand before scaled investment.	The channel is assumed to work because others use it.

The output should be an evidence map. For each growth option, list what is known, what is assumed and what must be tested next. The quality of the next test is often more important than the quality of the initial idea.

Unit economics check

Revenue growth is only valuable when the economics work after acquisition costs, delivery costs, complexity costs and investment requirements. A growth option should be tested through a simple economic lens before resources are committed.

Economic driver	Question to answer	Watch-out
Revenue potential	What volume and price could this option realistically achieve?	Confusing market size with obtainable revenue.
Gross margin	Does the option improve, protect or dilute margin?	New products or channels often hide additional service costs.
Customer acquisition cost	What will it cost to create one qualified, converting customer?	Early traction from warm networks may not scale.
Payback period	How quickly does the investment return cash?	Attractive lifetime value can still be dangerous if payback is too long.
Complexity cost	What burden is created in sales, operations, support and leadership attention?	Complexity accumulates quietly and damages execution.

Economic quality should be tested with ranges, not point estimates. Leaders should understand what needs to be true on conversion, pricing, churn, margin and implementation cost for the option to remain attractive.

Capability readiness check

A strategy can be commercially attractive and still fail because the organisation cannot execute it. Capability readiness is a practical test of whether the business has the skills, systems, leadership bandwidth and operating rhythm needed to deliver the growth move.

Capability area	Readiness question	Potential action
Leadership	Is there an accountable executive owner with capacity and authority?	Assign a single owner and define decision rights.
Sales and marketing	Can the business generate and convert demand in the chosen arena?	Build messaging, pipeline process and channel playbook.
Operations	Can delivery scale without damaging quality or service?	Simplify offer, standardise delivery and define service thresholds.
Finance	Can the business fund the move and track performance properly?	Create investment case, milestones and dashboard.
Technology and data	Do systems support the growth path and required insight?	Implement minimum viable systems and data ownership.
People	Are key roles, incentives and capabilities aligned to the move?	Define talent gaps, hiring sequence and incentive model.

90-day action plan

The purpose of the first 90 days is not to complete the strategy. It is to create visible progress, reduce uncertainty and build the operating rhythm needed for execution.

Phase	Objective	Core actions	Decision gate
Days 1-15	Align leadership and confirm the growth thesis.	Agree ambition, select options, define evidence gaps and assign owners.	Which options deserve deeper validation?
Days 16-45	Validate customer, economics and feasibility assumptions.	Run customer interviews, channel tests, pricing checks and capability assessment.	Which options move to pilot?
Days 46-75	Design and launch pilots or focused commercial tests.	Set pilot scope, budget, metrics, governance and learning agenda.	What evidence confirms, changes or kills the option?
Days 76-90	Convert validated moves into a scaled execution plan.	Confirm investment, operating model, milestones, owners and board reporting.	What will be scaled, stopped or sequenced next?

The 90-day plan should end with a decision, not a status update. At the end of the period, each growth option should be prioritised, paused, redesigned or stopped.

Board-ready growth narrative

When the framework is complete, the leadership team should be able to explain the strategy in a concise board-ready narrative. This narrative should avoid excessive detail and focus on choices, evidence, trade-offs and execution discipline.

Narrative component	Board-ready statement
Ambition	We are targeting [financial/strategic outcome] over [time horizon].
Growth arenas	We have assessed growth options across markets, products, channels and partnerships.
Priority choices	We will prioritise [primary growth move] because [evidence and strategic logic].
Trade-offs	We will not pursue [deferred option] at this stage because [reason].
Execution plan	The next 90 days will focus on [tests, pilots, capability building and decisions].
Measures	Success will be measured through [commercial, operational and strategic metrics].

A clear narrative matters because growth strategy is ultimately a commitment device. It tells the organisation where to focus, what not to chase and how progress will be judged.

Common pitfalls to avoid

The framework is designed to avoid the common traps that make growth strategies look compelling in presentation form but weak in execution.

Pitfall	Why it matters	How to avoid it
Mistaking TAM for strategy	A large market does not mean the company can access or win it.	Define the reachable segment, entry wedge and first customer proof.
Pursuing too many bets	Resources and leadership attention become diluted.	Limit the active portfolio and explicitly defer lower-priority options.
Ignoring economics	Revenue growth may reduce value if margins, CAC or complexity deteriorate.	Model directional economics before scaling.
Underestimating execution	The business may not have the operating model needed to deliver.	Run a capability readiness check and stage investment.
Confusing partnership interest with partnership value	Meetings and MoUs do not create growth unless incentives and activity are clear.	Define mutual economics, governance and first actions.

The strongest growth strategies are usually not the most complicated. They are specific, evidence-led and sequenced. They tell people what to do next and what to stop doing.

Conclusion

A growth strategy should give leaders confidence about where to allocate scarce resources. It should clarify the size and nature of the opportunity, the company's right to win, the economics of the move and the practical path to execution.

The Allington Growth Strategy Framework provides a disciplined way to move from ambition to action. It does this by forcing growth options through a consistent set of tests and converting the highest-quality options into a focused 90-day execution agenda.

The outcome is not just a better strategy document. It is a better set of decisions.

Allington Advisors

Allington Advisors supports leaders facing complex growth, transformation and execution challenges. We help leadership teams move from ambition to structured action through clear strategy, practical operating models and disciplined execution support.

For support applying this framework to your business, visit www.allingtonadvisors.com.