



AI-powered industrial maintenance venture: From concept to US\$150k SME contract and US\$1m+ seed in 5 months

How I led a team of 4 Venture Architects to bring a blank corporate venture build mandate from a FTSE 100 industrial partner to signed contracts and committed seed capital in under half a year.

5

Months

From blank-page corporate venture build mandate from a FTSE 100 industrial partner to signed contract

\$150k+

Paid contract

Pre-product, with a Philippines packaging manufacturer, across all 5 of their factories

\$1m+

Seed committed

By the FTSE 100 corporate partner

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Founders Recruited

From 60+ founder candidates sourced and interviewed by me

The venture pain point identified: Industrial downtime costs millions, with the fix found in technicians' heads as tribal knowledge

Across **30+ in-depth interviews** with manufacturing plants in Southeast Asia, the same story kept surfacing: when machines fail, the people who knew how to fix them have left, the notes are messy, and SOPs only cover the routine faults. The opening was clear: turn fragmented technician knowledge into an AI system that pays for itself in downtime hours saved.

Illustrative case from Customer interview: 5 day regional power shutdown due to a known fault that already had an (inaccessible) case study prior to failure

A state-owned regional power utility took 5 days to restore a transformer trip that an existing case study in its own database could have resolved in hours. All the necessary knowledge existed, but the technicians on the ground did not know how to find, understand, generalise, and apply the case study to their specific circumstances

Venture-building Methodology:

I ran the venture as a systematic sequence of falsifiable hypotheses, prioritised each sprint



Desirability



Feasibility



Viability

Breaking the venture into named leap-of-faith assumptions across these three layers ensured we tested the cheapest-to-invalidate bets first, preserving capital and focus for the bets that mattered most.

Desirability validated: the pain is repeatable in continuous manufacturing, and budget owners signed paid pilots



Repeatability

Knowledge-retention and case-management pain repeated across 70+ stakeholders in F&B, O&G, Power, Chemicals, and Pharma across Southeast Asia.



Specificity

Pain was acute in continuous manufacturing where every downtime hour is revenue lost. **Batch manufacturing tolerates downtime, so we cut it from scope entirely.**



Willingness to pay

A Philippines contract packaging manufacturer signed a paid pilot contract. The FTSE 100 partner's regional engineering team formalised intent to convert to a commercial agreement.



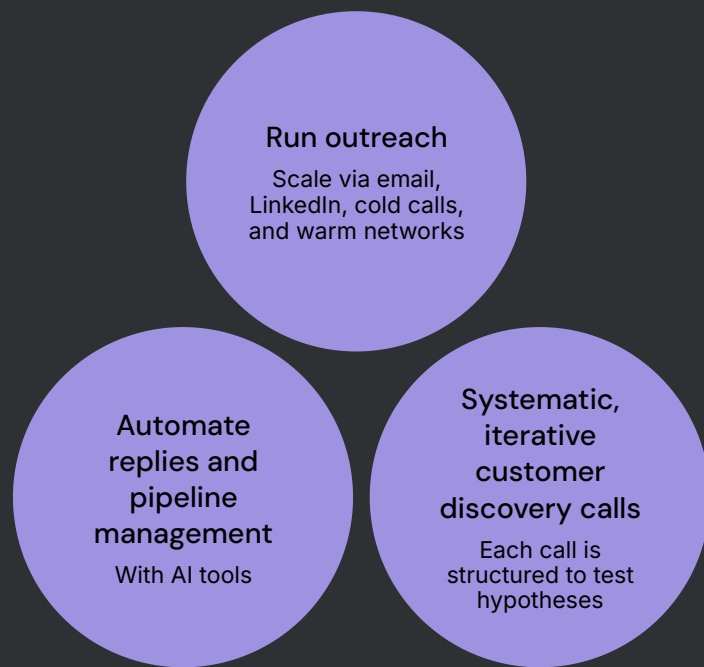
Solution feasibility validated: AI recommendations matched senior engineers' calls on live breakdowns after ingesting 600+ pages of plant literature

During the on-site Philippines pilot, the team manually scanned 600+ pages of plant maintenance literature, fed it to the prototype, and generated recommendations on real downtime events that occurred during the visit. The plant's senior engineers validated the recommendations as on par with their own. I also personally built a voice-guided multilingual case logger as a custom GPT and used it live in sales demos to prove that structured voice capture worked in SEA languages.

Hypothesis	Test	Result
Live AI recommendations match senior engineers' diagnostic calls	Fed 600+ pages of plant literature to prototype; ran against real breakdowns during on-site Philippines visit; senior engineers reviewed outputs	Validated
Voice capture works in SEA languages for structured case logging	Built multilingual voice-guided case logger as custom GPT; used live in sales demos in early 2025	Validated

Outreach & Outbound Sales for paid pilots: I ran every sales call personally to surface insights and objections to refine the venture's GTM strategy

Outreach Process



GTM Strategy Refinement



ICP: Continuous Plants

High-value output, aging machines, high technician turnover SMEs — highest pain, fastest sales cycle.



Channel Partner Explorations

Parallel discovery sprints of distribution through industrial OEMs and systems integrators.

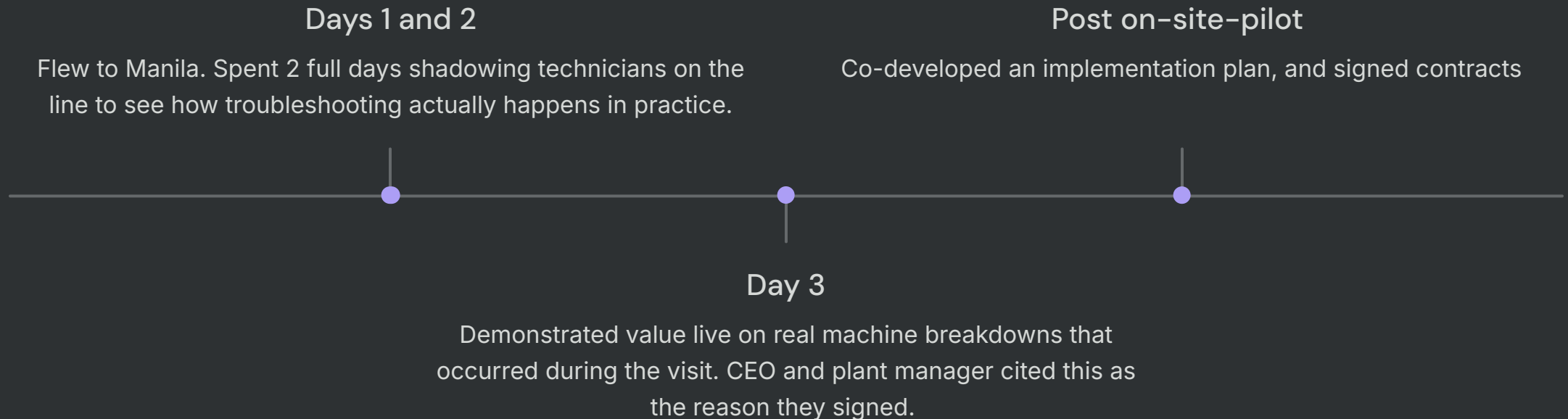


Scope Decision

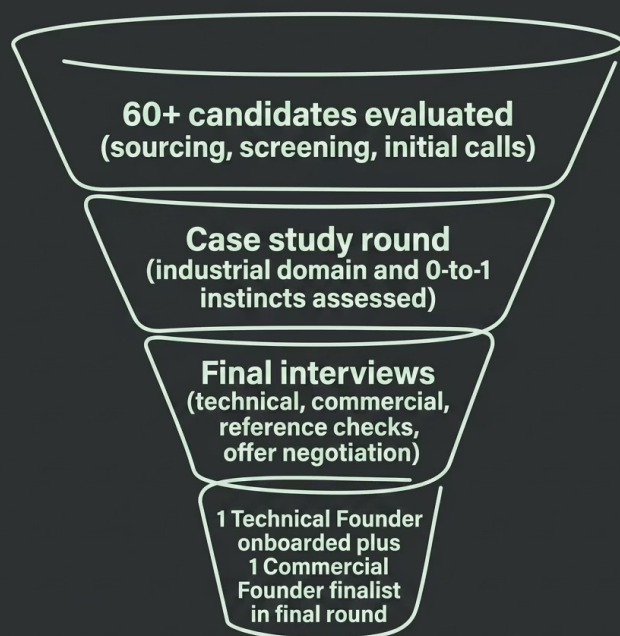
Batch manufacturers cut within 6 weeks based on objection patterns from live calls.

Closing the deal: We went on-site for 3 days and shipped a working prototype it that addressed the CEO's hair-on-fire problem

The customer's CEO and plant manager explicitly cited the live demonstration on real machine breakdowns as the reason they signed. Speed of insight-to-prototype was the competitive differentiator.



Permanent Founder recruitment: I sourced, screened, and negotiated with 60+ founder candidates to onboard the final commercial and technical co-founders



What I evaluated against

- Industrial domain depth
- 0-to-1 instincts and founder mindset
- Fundraising credibility
- Culture fit for a fast-moving venture

Who was onboarded

Technical Founder: PhD in AI and IoT, previously raised US\$13m+ scaling an AIoT startup to 150+ staff.

Commercial Founder: 3-time cofounder with 2 verifiable exits and an active SEA VC network

📄 I ran the entire funnel end-to-end, with candidate sourcing support from Wright Partners' talent expert. I handled screening, case studies, technical and commercial interviews, reference checks, and offer negotiation.