Assumption and Prioritisation Matrix™

You cannot test everything at once. This guide maps every assumption against two axes, importance and uncertainty, so you can see the critical few decisions that determine whether an early stage startup succeeds or fails.

The two questions that decide order

For each assumption on your list, ask how critical it is to success, and how unproven it is right now. Plot the answers and the order becomes obvious.

Scoring without over-thinking it

Importance, 1 to 5
If this belief is wrong, how much of the plan collapses? A 5 means the product, the pricing or the route to market has to change.

Uncertainty, 1 to 5
How unproven is it today? A 5 is a hunch or a single friendly conversation. A 1 is repeated behaviour from real customers who have something to lose.

Priority score
Importance plus uncertainty. Work from the highest score downwards, and keep at least one other person in the room while you score.

Where your assumptions come from

Before you can prioritise, you need a full list of the beliefs your plan depends on. That work is done in the Startup Assumption Framework™, which walks through nine categories and turns each belief into a short, testable statement.

> Download the Startup Assumption Framework™ at www.impactx-coaching.com, list your assumptions using its nine categories, then bring that list back to this matrix and plot it.

Worked example

A B2B reporting tool scored six of its beliefs in an hour. The argument the team had while agreeing the numbers was as useful as the numbers themselves.

Assumption	Import.	Uncert.	Score	Quadrant
Operations managers will pay £199 a month	5	5	10	**Critical risk**
Partners will refer customers to us	4	5	9	**Critical risk**
Buyers see manual reporting as a costly problem	5	2	7	Core strength
Users will upload their own data on day one	4	3	7	**Critical risk**
A self-serve trial converts better than a demo	2	4	6	Optional experiment
Our onboarding email needs rewriting	2	2	4	Ignore or defer

Pricing goes first: it scores ten, and if it is wrong the model, the sales motion and the funding plan all change. The partner channel follows, since the whole acquisition plan rests on it and no referral has ever happened. Problem severity scores five for importance but only two for uncertainty, because eleven buyers have already described the cost of manual reporting unprompted, so it is defended rather than retested.

Lower down, the self-serve trial question is genuinely open but would not sink the company either way, so it waits for a quiet fortnight. The onboarding email, however loudly it nags, is a task rather than an assumption, and the matrix gives the team permission to leave it alone.

What the matrix gives you

The matrix turns a long, anxious list into a short agenda. The assumptions at the top are the ones that actually matter right now, and everything below them is noise until those beliefs are settled. That alone changes how a founding team spends its week, because effort follows evidence rather than whichever task feels most urgent on the day.

It also names the things most likely to cause failure. High importance paired with high uncertainty is where startups quietly run out of road, usually because nobody wanted to say the belief out loud. Once it is written on the grid it stops being a private worry and becomes a piece of work with an owner, a test and a date.

Each critical risk converts directly into your next experiment. The wording on the grid gives you the question, the importance score justifies the time, and the uncertainty score tells you how much evidence you need before you can call it settled. When an assumption earns its way into core strengths, it is proven ground you can build pricing and positioning on.

Keeping the matrix alive

Review it every two weeks. Uncertainty falls as experiments complete, new assumptions appear as the product changes, and the top of the list keeps moving. A matrix that has not changed in a month usually means nobody is testing anything. With the order agreed, the next job is turning the top assumptions into small, fast experiments that observe real behaviour rather than opinion. That is covered in Innovative Experimentation.