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PROPOSAL OF GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGY FOR A SELECTED DIGITAL PLATFORM

NÁVRH GO-TO-MARKET STRATEGIE PRO VYBRANOU DIGITÁLNÍ PLATFORMU

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ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the design of a Go-to-Market strategy for RiseHigh, a challenge-based hiring platform that connects university students with innovative companies through real work assignments. The theoretical part defines the relevant frameworks and concepts related to GTM strategy, platform economics, market segmentation, and startup metrics. The analytical part examines the structural conditions of the Czech junior hiring market on both sides, maps the competitive landscape, and evaluates the platform's core value exchange through a completed pilot challenge cycle. The proposal part presents a phased GTM strategy covering product improvements, B2B and B2C acquisition, pricing transition, and a six-month implementation framework.

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na návrh Go-to-Market strategie pro platformu RiseHigh, která propojuje vysokoškolské studenty s inovativními firmami prostřednictvím reálných pracovních výzev. V teoretické části jsou definovány a popsány relevantní koncepty a modely v oblasti GTM strategie, ekonomiky platforem, segmentace trhu a startupových metrik. Analytická část zkoumá strukturální podmínky českého trhu juniorního náboru na obou stranách, mapuje konkurenční prostředí a hodnotí základní hodnotovou výměnu platformy prostřednictvím dokončeného pilotního cyklu. Návrhová část představuje fázovou GTM strategii zahrnující produktová zlepšení, B2B a B2C akvizici, přechod cenového modelu a šestiměsíční implementační plán.

KEY WORDS

go-to-market strategy, platform economics, challenge-based hiring, two-sided market, cold start problem, market segmentation, startup metrics

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

go-to-market strategie, ekonomika platforem, nábor na základě výzev, dvoustranný trh, cold start problém, segmentace trhu, startupové metriky

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Affidavit

I declare that the present bachelor project is an original work that I have written myself. I declare that the citations of the sources used are complete, that I have not infringed upon any copyright (pursuant to Act. no 121/2000 Coll.). Furthermore, I declare that artificial intelligence was used during the writing process, solely for the purpose of text proofreading and language correction.

Brno dated 12th May 2026

Zdenek Ferenc

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INTRODUCTION

The junior labor market for has always been defined by a fundamental tension. Employers need to make hiring decisions before they can observe the most important variable, whether a candidate can do the job. Candidates need employment to build the experience that makes them hirable. Both sides navigate this tension through proxies, credentials, interviews, internship programmes, and recommendations. These proxies have never been perfect, but they functioned well enough in a market where the volume of graduates was limited, and the cost of a bad hire was manageable.

Both of those conditions have changed. Higher education has expanded to the point where a degree signals completion rather than distinction. The volume of candidates entering the labor market each year has grown faster than employers' capacity to evaluate them meaningfully. At the same time, the cost of hiring mistakes has increased for the companies that feel it most acutely, early-stage firms without HR infrastructure, where every team member carries a disproportionate share of operational responsibility.

Technology platforms have begun to address this, but most existing solutions treat hiring as a distribution problem rather than an evaluation problem. They make it easier to reach more candidates, not easier to identify the right ones.

Challenge-based hiring represents a different approach. Rather than optimizing the flow of applications, it replaces the application itself with a work sample a real task, evaluated on its output. This shifts the basis of the hiring decision from what a candidate claims to what they demonstrably deliver, and it does so before any employment commitment is made on either side. RiseHigh is a platform built on this model. This thesis addresses the strategic question of how to bring it to market.

GOALS OF THESIS

Problem definition

Entering a market with a two-sided platform is structurally different from launching a conventional product. The value of the platform to either side depends entirely on the simultaneous presence of the other, which means that market entry cannot be approached as a single-sided acquisition problem. The sequence in which the two sides are activated, the scale at which this happens, and the channels through which it is done are tactical questions and getting them wrong does not produce slow growth, it produces no growth.

RiseHigh operates in this environment as a bootstrapped two-person team with limited capital and no dedicated sales or marketing team. The platform has validated its core product mechanics but has not yet entered the market in a structured way.

Goals of thesis

The main goal of this thesis is to propose a feasible Go-to-Market strategy for RiseHigh that is grounded in validated market data and executable within the platform's current resource constraints.

Partial Goals

The first partial goal is to identify the structural conditions on both sides of the Czech junior hiring market that define the addressable opportunity for the platform. The second is to evaluate the platform's core value exchange under real market conditions and identify the variables that determine whether supply-side activation succeeds or fails. The third is to establish RiseHigh's competitive position relative to existing alternatives and identify the strategic gap the platform is built to occupy. The fourth is to propose a phased GTM strategy covering product improvements, B2B and B2C acquisition, a pricing transition model, and a six-month implementation framework with measurable KPIs.

Methodology

The thesis combines secondary and primary research. Secondary research draws on academic literature, published market statistics, and industry reports to establish the theoretical foundations and map the market and competitive environment. To systematically process these materials, AI tools were utilized. Gemini Deep Research was used to identify valid and accessible sources. These verified sources were then uploaded to NotebookLM for data extraction. NotebookLM was specifically chosen because it inherently functions by processing only user-provided documents, effectively eliminating the risk of AI hallucination. Finally, all extracted findings and data were rigorously cross-checked manually. The theoretical section selects only the frameworks that are directly applied in the analytical and proposal sections rather than providing a general literature overview.

Primary research is conducted through real challenge cycles run on the live platform under actual market conditions. This approach was chosen because the behavioral data it generates, covering user acquisition, activation, and submission quality on both sides of the marketplace, cannot be obtained through secondary sources. A comparative case is included alongside the main challenge cycle to provide a reference point for evaluating the conditions under which platform activation succeeds or fails.

The analytical findings are synthesized using SWOT and TOWS frameworks. The proposal section applies the STP model for market segmentation and targeting, the Value Proposition Canvas to align the product offering with documented customer needs on both sides of the marketplace, and SMART criteria to define measurable success benchmarks for the proposed launch period.

1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Theoretical foundations of startups and Go-to-Market strategy

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for understanding the challenges of launching new products to market. The initial phase of the product life cycle is a critical test for start-ups, as their projected models and assumptions are evaluated against actual market conditions. This section differentiates long-term strategic marketing from the execution focused Go-to-Market process.

The following chapters analyze the fundamental components of GTM strategy alongside the unique nature of marketing management in tech startups. The text also examines the innovation of diffusion theory and the technology adoption life cycle, since understanding the drivers and obstacles to adoption is crucial for effective strategic planning.

1.1.1 Definition of startup

A startup is a temporary organization with the primary objective of developing a repeatable, scalable business model. This goal distinguishes startups from established companies, which focus on executing proven strategies. While established businesses optimize their processes for existing customers, startups operate in search mode, where they need to verify the core market assumptions and find their customers. [1]

Startups operate under conditions of extreme uncertainty. These organizations are designed to develop new products in environments where market trends and customer behavior cannot be reliably predicted. In this context, traditional management tools like long-term financial plans or fixed roadmaps are often ineffective. Such methods rely on historical stability, which a new project inherently lacks. [1]

The primary objective in the early stage is not to maximize profit or immediate sales growth, but to achieve alignment between the identified problem and the proposed solution (Problem-Solution Fit). Management must demonstrate that the problem exists and that customers are interested in the solution before depleting available resources. Validating these hypotheses is prioritized over premature scaling, which can result in inefficiency without a proven business model. [1]

1.1.2 Specifics of marketing for technology startups

The main difference between marketing management of a corporation and a startup is predictability and access to data, rather than budget size. Traditional models rely on historical data, allowing managers to develop plans based on established customer behavior. Since startups lack this historical data, rigid planning becomes a liability, as strategies based on unverified assumptions often fail. Instead, startups require an adaptive approach in which strategy evolves through direct market feedback. [1]

As a result, the marketing role shifts in the early stages. The primary objective shifts from immediate revenue or brand awareness to validated learning. In this context, marketing serves as a tool for testing business hypotheses and evaluating actual market demand. Success is measured by the ability to identify authentic customer needs before capital is exhausted, rather than by vanity metrics such as reach.

Because startups cannot sustain paid channels when customer acquisition costs exceed lifetime value, they must adopt growth-hacking strategies that prioritize low-cost scalability. By embedding viral mechanisms directly into the product, expansion becomes a function of product design and data analysis rather than marketing budget. [1]

1.1.3 Concept and definition of GTM strategy

A Go-to-Market (GTM) strategy is a comprehensive action plan that specifies how a company will reach its target customers and achieve a competitive advantage. It functions as the primary mechanism through which an organization creates, delivers, and captures value. The strategy provides a detailed roadmap for launching a new product or expanding into a new market, minimizing the uncertainty inherent in the startup environment. [2]

The importance of a structured GTM strategy lies in its ability to bridge the gap between product development and actual market entry. Many technological startups face challenges not due to technical infeasibility but to inefficient market penetration. A robust GTM strategy addresses this issue by validating Product-Market Fit before deploying significant resources. While a general business plan outlines the broader organizational and financial structure, the GTM strategy focuses specifically on the external execution required to convert a potential customer into a paying user. [2]

1.1.3.1 GTM vs. Marketing Strategy

Within the product lifecycle, marketing and Go-to-Market strategies serve distinct but related purposes. Marketing strategy centres on communication, generating demand, and filling the sales funnel. Its main role is to articulate the value proposition and engage the target audience, with success measured by reach and engagement metrics.

The Go-to-Market strategy takes a broader approach, managing all aspects of market entry. It provides the blueprint that aligns adoption phases with launch operations. While marketing attracts interest, GTM ensures the product is positioned for early adopters and establishes user acquisition and retention strategies. Consequently, its success is evaluated through actionable metrics such as activation rates, customer acquisition cost, and user retention, rather than simple volume. GTM sets the roadmap and structure for marketing execution. [2]

1.1.3.2 Key Components of GTM Strategy

Using Friedmann's strategic framework, a comprehensive Go-to-Market strategy integrates four interconnected pillars: Market, Customers, Product with Value Proposition, and Channels with Partners. This approach shifts focus from tactical promotion to the core logic of market entry and value delivery. [2]

The Market sets the foundational context by defining the broader economic landscape. Instead of focusing on individual buyers, this element addresses the macro-environment to determine the Total Addressable Market (TAM) and analyze competitive dynamics. Identifying structural opportunities and industry trends ensures the venture targets a viable arena before narrowing its focus to specific segments. [2]

Customers are the specific actors within this landscape. Success in this area requires granular segmentation to identify an Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) and the initial beachhead segment. Beyond demographics, understanding the customer requires deep analysis of behaviors, pain points, and decision-making processes, especially in platform models where both supply and demand sides must be distinctly profiled. [2]

Product and Value Proposition bridge the gap between technical capability and market need. This component articulates not just the functional attributes of the Minimal Viable

Product but also the specific benefits that justify its adoption over existing alternatives. Translating features into a coherent value narrative ensures the solution addresses a validated problem for the target audience. [2]

Channels and Partners address the logistical and relational mechanisms of delivery. This pillar defines the ecosystem through which the product reaches the end user, including digital distribution paths and strategic alliances. For technological startups, partnerships with established institutions are vital for efficient market penetration and rapid scaling. [2]

1.1.4 Product Launch Phases

For startups, releasing a product to the entire market at once is rarely effective. It exposes the company to technical failures and negative feedback that can quickly destroy the brand's reputation. Modern GTM strategies use a phased approach instead. Each phase isolates a variable, such as technical stability, user retention, or marketing conversion, and validates it before the company commits more resources. This progression ensures the product is "market-ready" before the mass market sees it. [3]

1.1.4.1 Pre-Launch Phase

This phase occurs before the product is deployable. The main objective is to validate market demand and build an initial audience without writing code. Strategies include landing pages ("smoke tests") or community building. The goal is to capture contact information from potential Early Adopters. This phase reduces market risk by showing that a problem exists and people are seeking a solution. The output is a waiting list, which serves as the initial "fuel" for later launch stages. [1]

1.1.4.2 Beta Testing

Once the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is ready, the focus shifts to technical validation. Private Beta restricts access to a small, controlled group of users, often invited from the pre-launch list. The priority is to identify critical bugs and usability issues in a

closed environment. Public Beta then removes the invitation requirement but keeps the "Beta" label. This signals to users that the product is still in development, lowering their expectations for stability. This phase tests the system's capacity to handle load and creates the first feedback loops for product iteration. [1]

1.1.4.3 Soft Launch

A Soft Launch releases the fully functional product to a restricted market segment or specific location. Unlike the Beta phase, which focuses on bugs, the Soft Launch focuses on business metrics. The company suppresses marketing activities to keep the user base manageable. The goal is to prove the business model works, that users sign up, return (retention), and monetize. In two-sided markets, this phase is critical for testing network liquidity in a controlled environment, such as a single city, before expanding. [4]

1.1.4.4 Hard Launch

The Hard Launch marks the transition to General Availability (GA). At this point, all restrictions are lifted, and the company activates its full marketing budget. The objective shifts from learning to scaling. Success in this phase depends on validation from previous stages. If retention rates were not proven during the Soft Launch, a Hard Launch will only amplify the "leaky bucket" problem. This phase targets the broader market (Early Majority) and requires the product to be polished, as these users have low tolerance for technical errors. [4]

1.1.5 Technology adoption lifecycle

The technology adoption lifecycle is a psychographic framework that explains customers' responses to innovation in terms of risk. The first group is made up of tech enthusiasts who embrace new products for their internal technical architecture without the need for an existing business model. The adoption of technology by these users demonstrates the product's technical stability. [5]

Early adopters are visionaries seeking a strategic breakthrough in the market. This group sees technology as a means to create revolutionary change in the industry. Visionaries are

willing to take risks and accept incomplete technology in exchange for the opportunity to gain a significant advantage over others. Their goal is to transform the existing system and achieve entirely new possibilities. [5]

Overcoming the gap requires concentrating resources on a single narrow market segment. This beachhead method applies the logic of attacking a limited target to dominate a small market niche. Concentrating forces prevents the dilution of the message and allows the development of a comprehensive product, including complementary services. Small-scale dominance ensures the leadership status necessary for further expansion. [5]

1.1.6 Beachhead Market Strategy

The beachhead is the specific segment where the startup can achieve complete dominance with the resources it currently has. Moore identifies four conditions a viable beachhead must satisfy: the segment must be small enough to win with existing capacity, the users within it must have a shared and acute version of the problem the product solves, they must be reachable through a concentrated acquisition effort, and success within the segment must create a credible reference base for the adjacent segments the startup wants to enter next. [5]

For two-sided platforms, the selection problem is more constrained. The beachhead must contain sufficient density of both supply and demand within the same scope, because a platform that concentrates one side geographically while serving the other broadly cannot generate the interaction density that makes it valuable to either. The beachhead is therefore defined not by geography alone but by the overlap between where the supply side is concentrated and where the demand side is accessible.

Expansion out of the beachhead follows the same logic as entry. Moving to the next segment begins only after dominance in the first is established specifically, after the platform has a reference base of completed cycles that gives the next target segment enough evidence to adopt without waiting for broader social proof.

1.2 Strategic product design and value preposition

1.2.1 The Lean Startup Methodology and the Build-Measure-Learn Cycle

The core operational framework of the Lean Startup is the Build-Measure-Learn feedback loop. Although the name implies starting with construction, Ries argues the process should be planned in reverse. First, the founder defines the hypothesis to validate (Learn). Second, they determine what data will prove or disprove this hypothesis (Measure). Only then do they create the Minimum Viable Product (Build), designed solely to generate that data. This reverse engineering prevents the common error of building a complex product first and looking for customers second, ensuring development efforts focus on validated learning. [1]

In the execution phase, the "Build" step focuses on creating an experiment, not a perfect product. This often takes the form of an MVP or a landing page, designed to test the value proposition with minimal effort. In the "Measure" phase, the methodology prioritizes observing actual behavior over collecting verbal feedback. Surveys and focus groups are often misleading because users cannot accurately predict their future actions. The startup must track empirical evidence such as click-through rates, pre-orders, or sign-ups to see what customers do, not what they say they will do. [1]

The cycle concludes with the "Learn" phase, in which the gathered data is compared with the initial projections. This analysis leads to a binary decision: Pivot or Persevere. If the data validates the hypothesis, the startup persists (Persevere) and optimizes the product. If the data contradicts the hypothesis, the startup must execute a Pivot, a fundamental change in strategy such as changing the target segment or revenue model, without changing the overall vision. This scientific approach treats the startup not as a smaller version of a large company but as a laboratory for testing business models. [6]

1.2.2 Minimum Viable Product and Market Launch Validation

In the Lean Startup context, the MVP is the version of a new product that lets a team collect the most validated learning about customers with the least effort. The boundary of an MVP is set by the Build-Measure-Learn loop. If the product is too simple to generate meaningful user data, it does not qualify as an MVP. If it includes features that are not

essential to test the core value proposition, they are wasting resources and should be removed. [1]

There is a fundamental distinction between a prototype and an MVP. A prototype is usually an internal tool to answer questions about technical feasibility, it tests engineering risks and design specifications. An MVP, however, addresses business viability. It is released to real customers under market conditions. While a prototype proves the code works, an MVP proves the market exists. [1]

Validating an MVP requires interpreting behavioral data, not technical metrics. Success is measured by the customer's willingness to exchange value, such as time, money, or attention, for the solution. If the target audience engages with the MVP and solves their problem, the business model is validated, and further development is justified. If users reject the MVP, it is not a technical failure but a successful strategic finding. This negative result prevents the company from scaling a flawed concept and triggers the decision to pivot. [6]

1.2.3 Value proposition design

Customer profile analysis begins with identifying customer jobs, which represent the activities customers are trying to perform. The theory divides these jobs into functional (completing a specific task), social (gaining status or power), and emotional (achieving a certain feeling, such as security). Pains and gains are inextricably linked to these jobs. Pain is not defined solely as a negative outcome but also includes obstacles to task performance and risks associated with failure. Gains describe the outcomes and benefits that the customer requires, expects, or that could positively surprise them, in terms of functional utility, social gains, or cost savings. [7]

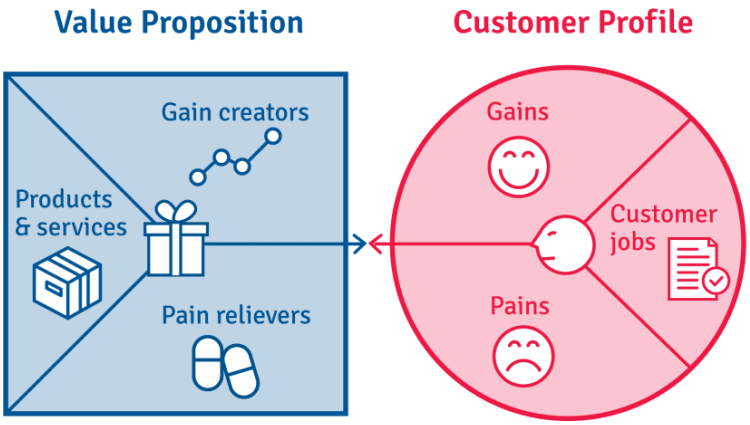


Figure 1 : Value Proposition Canvas

The value map is a response to these requirements through a specific set of elements. The offered services and items serve as the base for specific tools to mitigate difficulties. These elements, known as pain relievers, specifically remove previously identified barriers in the customer profile. Gain creators describe how the system generates the desired advantages. It is therefore not a list of features, but a description of the relationship between the product's function and the customer's need. [7]

The key to effective Value Proposition Design is strategically prioritizing and aligning these elements. Since not all customer pain points and benefits carry the same weight, it's important to rank them from least to most significant. A successful value proposition does not attempt to address all aspects of the profile but focuses with high accuracy on the most critical pains and the most desired benefits. This focus creates a distinction between a product that is merely functional and one that delivers demonstrable, customer-perceived value. [8]

1.2.4 Revenue Models and Pricing Strategies

Pricing strategy converts the abstract value proposition from earlier steps into tangible revenue. For digital startups, pricing focuses on aligning with the customer's perceived utility. To achieve this alignment and ensure long-term viability, the strategy must define the valuation methodology, the mechanism for collection, and the tactics for market entry. [9]

1.2.4.1 Value-Based Pricing Methodology

Value-Based Pricing is the standard approach for technology products. It sets the price based on the benefits delivered to the user, such as time saved or revenue generated, rather than adding a margin to development costs. This ensures the company captures a fair share of the economic value it creates and validates the product's market fit. [9]

1.2.4.2 Subscription Revenue Models

To capture this value over time, software companies typically use a Subscription Revenue Model. This changes the customer relationship from a single transaction to a recurring operational expense. For providers, subscriptions stabilize cash flow and shift the focus to long-term retention and Customer Lifetime Value. For users, it reduces the upfront investment needed to adopt the technology, lowering the barrier to entry compared to traditional licensing models. [9]

1.2.4.3 Freemium Architecture

Within this subscription framework, Freemium Architecture acts as a strategic tiering method. By offering a basic version at no cost, companies use the product as a primary marketing channel to acquire a wide user base with minimal friction. This approach relies on converting a percentage of free users into paying customers who need advanced features or higher usage limits. Free users add value to the platform through network effects and data generation, justifying the cost of supporting non-paying tiers. [8]

1.2.4.4 Market Entry and Penetration Pricing

When introducing these models to a new market, especially one with established competitors, startups often use Penetration Pricing. This involves setting initial prices low or extending free-trial durations to quickly build a critical mass of users. Once the user base is established and switching costs are in place, the strategy allows for a gradual alignment of price with the service's true value. This approach connects acquiring early adopters with the venture's long-term financial sustainability.

1.3 Market Analysis and Competitive Positioning

Entering a market successfully requires understanding it on two levels. The first is identifying who the target customer is, how the market breaks into meaningful segments, and how the product should be positioned relative to existing alternatives. The second is assessing the structural forces that determine profitability across the industry as a whole and identifying whether a strategic space exists that current competitors are not occupying. The frameworks in this section address both levels in sequence.

1.3.1 Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

The STP framework is the standard approach for defining a market. However, relying solely on demographic segmentation, such as age or income, can be deceptive in the context of startups. An example is the mismatch between chronological age and psychological profile, in which consumers in the same demographic exhibit very different needs. Therefore, behavioral variables (knowledge, attitude, and reaction to a product) provide a much more reliable basis for segmentation. [4]

Once the market is segmented by behavior, the company must decide which segments to target and, crucially, how to position the offer. Positioning is not just about marketing communication, it is the act of designing the company's offering to occupy a distinct place in the minds of the target market. The goal is to guide the consumer to perceive the brand as the optimal solution for their specific goals, rather than just another option on the shelf. [4]

1.3.2 Ideal Customer Profile

The Ideal Customer Profile represents the practical synthesis of the STP process. While segmentation identifies groups with similar behaviors, the ICP specifies the buying role. It shifts the strategic focus from "who the customer is" to "why the customer buys." This distinction is critical because it grounds the sales strategy in the purchase's causality, analyzing the specific benefits and solutions the customer is actively seeking, rather than on external characteristics. [4]

1.3.3 Structural Analysis of Industry Profitability

The state of competition in an industry depends on five basic forces. The collective strength of these forces determines the market's ultimate profit potential. In industries where these forces are intense, returns on investment remain low. Conversely, mild forces allow for higher profitability. The goal of this analysis is to identify a position where the company can defend itself against these pressures or influence them in its favour. [10]

1.3.3.1 Threat of New Entrants

New entrants bring new capacity and a desire for market share. This puts downward pressure on prices and forces competitors to increase investment to retain customers. The threat level depends on the existence of entry barriers. High barriers, such as economies of scale or capital requirements, protect profitability by deterring newcomers. If barriers are low, the industry faces a constant risk of price erosion as competitors must hold down prices to make entry unattractive. [10]

1.3.3.2 Bargaining Power of Suppliers

Suppliers influence the industry by raising prices or reducing the quality of goods. A concentrated supplier group captures more value for itself, directly reducing the profitability of the buying industry. This leverage increases if the supplier’s product is unique or carries high switching costs. In such scenarios, industry participants have limited negotiation power and must accept unfavorable terms. On digital platforms, high-quality users (supply side) often hold this power because they generate the network's core value. [10]

1.3.3.3 Bargaining Power of Buyers

Buyers compete with the industry by forcing down prices and demanding higher quality at the same cost. This behavior compresses profit margins. Buyer power is highest when buyers purchase large volumes relative to sellers’ sales, or when the product is standardized. If customers can easily find an equivalent product elsewhere, they negotiate

aggressively. Companies must differentiate their offering to prevent price from becoming the sole decision factor in the transaction. [10]

1.3.3.4 Threat of Substitutes

A substitute performs the same function as the product but uses a different mechanism. Substitutes place a strict ceiling on prices. If the industry raises prices above a certain point, customers switch to the alternative. This threat becomes critical if the substitute offers a superior price-performance trade-off. For many startups, the primary substitute is the "status quo," such as manual processes or spreadsheets, which customers often prefer due to zero switching costs. [10]

1.3.3.5 Rivalry Among Competitors

Rivalry describes the intensity of competition among existing players. Tactics such as price wars, advertising campaigns, and service improvements characterize this force. Intense rivalry limits the profit potential for the entire sector. Competition focused on price is particularly destructive because it transfers wealth directly from the industry to the customer. However, rivalry focused on features or brand identity can expand the total market value rather than destroying it. [10]

1.3.4 Value Innovation and Market Reconstruction

To avoid the structural traps of highly competitive industries, strategy must shift from beating the competition to making it irrelevant. In Red Oceans, industry boundaries are defined and accepted, and competitive rules are known. Companies try to outperform competitors to gain a greater share of existing demand. As the market space gets crowded, prospects for profits and growth shrink, turning the ocean bloody. [11]

Instead, the proposed strategy focuses on "Value Innovation" the cornerstone of Blue Ocean Strategy. It defies the conventional value-cost trade-off. Conventional logic says a company can either create greater value at a higher cost or reasonable value at a lower cost. Value innovation aligns innovation with utility, price, and cost, pursuing

differentiation and low cost simultaneously. This lets the startup unlock new demand from non-customers rather than fight for existing customers. [11]

The Strategy Canvas used in Blue Ocean Strategy serves as a diagnostic framework. It captures the current state of play in the market and identifies the factors on which the industry competes and invests. By applying the "Four Actions Framework" and asking which factors should be eliminated, reduced, raised, or created, the startup can reconstruct market boundaries. This process leads to a unique value curve that is hard for competitors to imitate because it requires a fundamental change in their operational logic. [11]

1.4 Platform Economics and Labor Market Theory

Two-sided platforms operate under a fundamentally different set of economic rules than traditional one-sided businesses, and the markets they often serve introduce an additional layer of complexity. This section covers the mechanics of multi-sided markets, the network effects that drive their growth, the cold start problem that makes their early stage structurally vulnerable, and the signaling theory that explains how information asymmetry shapes hiring decisions. Together these frameworks form the theoretical foundation for analyzing a platform that connects two groups with different motivations in a market where neither side has complete information about the other.

1.4.1 Mechanics of Two-Sided Markets

While one-sided networks, such as standard communication applications, connect homogeneous users who perform the same role, a two-sided market enables interaction between two distinct and interdependent groups, such as riders and drivers on Uber or guests and hosts on Airbnb. These groups, commonly referred to as the supply and demand sides, participate on the platform for different reasons. The platform itself does not generate value directly; value emerges through interactions between these two sides. [12]

This logic represents a fundamental shift from the linear pipeline model, where a company creates value by transforming inputs into outputs through an internal chain of activities. In a two-sided market, the firm’s role shifts from a producer to a facilitator.

Value is not generated internally, instead it is created externally through the interactions of the platform's users. The company provides the necessary digital infrastructure, like rules, tools, and trust-building mechanisms, that enables this exchange. Since the core assets are provided by the users, the platform can scale with near-zero marginal costs, as growth does not require a proportional investment in physical assets or personnel. [12]

The fundamental challenge of this model is the coordination problem. In open markets, high transaction costs and limited information often prevent efficient matching between supply and demand. The platform addresses this issue by acting as a intermediary that reduces friction, filters participants, and establishes trust. The effectiveness of this coordination mechanism directly determines whether network effects can emerge, as the platform's perceived value depends on the quality and reliability of interactions between the two sides. [12]

1.4.2 Network Effects and the Cold Start Problem

Growth in two-sided markets is mainly driven by cross-side network effects. Unlike same-side effects, where value increases as more users join the same group, cross-side effects depend on the presence of the opposite group. For example, the platform's value to students rises with the number of active companies, while companies benefit from a larger pool of relevant students. This mutual dependence creates a strong defensive advantage. Competitors may replicate the technical solution, but building an equally active and liquid user network is much more difficult. [3]

Dependence on network effects also creates a critical challenge known as the cold-start problem. In the early stages, the marketplace lacks enough activity on both sides to deliver meaningful value. As a result, early users often leave because they cannot find suitable counterparts. This negative dynamic, sometimes called anti-network effects, leads to high churn and makes the launch phase the most vulnerable stage of the platform’s lifecycle. [3]

To overcome this barrier, the literature recommends focusing on an atomic network. An atomic network is the smallest market segment where interactions can grow naturally. Instead of launching broadly and spreading participants thin, the platform targets a

narrowly defined niche, such as a single region or city. By increasing participant density in this limited scope, the marketplace can achieve the liquidity needed for stable operation before gradually expanding into other segments. [12]

1.4.3 Job Market Signaling and Information Asymmetry

The hiring process is an investment with an unknown return. Employers cannot immediately observe a new employee's productivity, as this becomes clear only after a significant period. Hiring is therefore like a lottery with an unpredictable outcome. To assess the chance of success, employers rely on observable attributes to estimate a candidate's future contribution. [13]

1.4.3.1 Taxonomy of Market Attributes: Indices and Signals

Market participants evaluate two types of data. First, indices are fixed attributes such as age, gender, or race. Applicants cannot change these, yet they influence employers' productivity estimates. Second, signals are characteristics that individuals can change through personal investment. Education is a primary example of a field in which a candidate invests resources to maximize the gap between future wages and the cost of acquiring the signal. [13]

1.4.3.2 The Mechanism of Costly Signaling

The effectiveness of a signal depends on the relationship between signaling costs and productivity. For a high-quality candidate, acquiring the signal must be easier and cheaper than for one with lower potential. If costs were identical for everyone, all applicants would obtain the signal, and it would lose its ability to differentiate talent. The cost difference acts as a filter, separating productive individuals from the rest of the market. [13]

1.4.3.3 Signaling Equilibrium and Market Traps

Market equilibrium is a dynamic feedback loop. Employers form beliefs about productivity and set wages based on these expectations. Applicants observe these offers and decide how much to invest in signals to maximize their net return. If employers expect low productivity from a group, they offer lower incentives. This leads the group to invest less in signals, confirming the initial low expectation. This creates a stable but inefficient cycle called a lower-level equilibrium trap. [13]

1.5 Metrics and Analytical tools

Measuring the right things at the right stage of development is as important as the strategic decisions themselves. This section covers the frameworks used to track product and business performance in early-stage companies, and the analytical tools used to synthesize internal and external findings into strategic direction. Together they form the measurement and evaluation layer that connects the analytical section of this thesis to the proposals that follow.

1.5.1 Startup Metrics and Data Validity

In an established company metrics serve as a reporting mechanism. In a startup, their function is different, they are the primary tool for navigating uncertainty before available capital runs out. Ries describes this as a requirement for intellectual honesty, using data to actively challenge assumptions rather than to validate decisions that have already been made. [1]

The central distinction this creates is between vanity metrics and actionable metrics. Vanity metrics, such as total registrations or page views, produce numbers that look encouraging but carry no decision-making value because they cannot be connected to a specific business outcome or changed through a targeted intervention. Actionable metrics are expressed as ratios tied to observable user behavior. A conversion rate, a retention rate, or a cost per acquisition each describes the health of a specific part of the business and responds measurably when that part is adjusted. [6]

A related risk is the aggregate average. A startup can show growing total engagement while quietly losing the ability to retain new users, because the activity of loyal early adopters masks the churn of everyone who joined later. Grouping users by the period in which they joined prevents this, making it possible to see whether the product is genuinely improving or whether the numbers are being held up by a shrinking group of early loyalists. [7]

1.5.2 The AARRR Framework (Pirate Metrics)

The AARRR framework, introduced by Dave McClure and commonly referred to as Pirate Metrics, divides the customer journey into five sequential stages: Acquisition, Activation, Retention, Referral, and Revenue. Each stage isolates a distinct part of the relationship between the user and the product and can be measured and optimized independently. The diagnostic value of the framework lies in its sequential structure: by tracking conversion rates between stages, a startup can identify the specific point at which users are lost rather than treating growth problems as undifferentiated. [14]

1.5.2.1 Acquisition

Acquisition covers the process by which potential users first reach the product. The relevant metrics are channel-specific conversion rates and cost per acquisition, tracked at the individual channel level rather than in aggregate. This granularity reveals which sources produce users who engage meaningfully with the product and which generate volume without contributing to downstream stages of the funnel. [14]

1.5.2.2 Activation

Activation measures whether a new user experiences the core value of the product during their first interaction. The key metric is the share of new users who complete the action that defines a meaningful first session, which corresponds to the moment the product delivers on its primary promise. Low activation rates point to friction in the onboarding process rather than a problem with the quality of acquired users. [14]

1.5.2.3 Retention

Retention tracks whether users return after their initial session and how frequently they do so over time. It is the most direct measure of whether the product delivers sustained value. The relevant metrics are return rate, churn rate, and session frequency across defined time windows. Strong acquisition and activation figures accompanied by poor retention indicate a fundamental product problem that increased marketing investment will not resolve. [14]

1.5.2.4 Referral

Referral measures the rate at which existing users bring new ones into the product. A high referral rate signals that users derive sufficient value to recommend the product without external incentives, which represents the most capital-efficient acquisition channel available to an early-stage company. The relevant metrics are referral conversion rate and the proportion of new users acquired through referral relative to paid channels. [14]

1.5.2.5 Revenue

The revenue stage focuses not on total turnover but on the structural relationship between Customer Lifetime Value and Customer Acquisition Cost. A business in which CAC consistently exceeds CLV is loss-making regardless of the direction of revenue growth. The standard benchmark for sustainable unit economics is a CLV to CAC ratio of 3:1. Tracking this ratio over time, rather than absolute revenue figures, determines whether growth is moving the business toward a viable model or scaling an existing structural deficit. [14]

1.5.3 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis maps a company's strategic position across two dimensions: internal factors the organization controls, and external factors it does not. The internal dimension covers strengths and weaknesses, the external covers opportunities and threats.

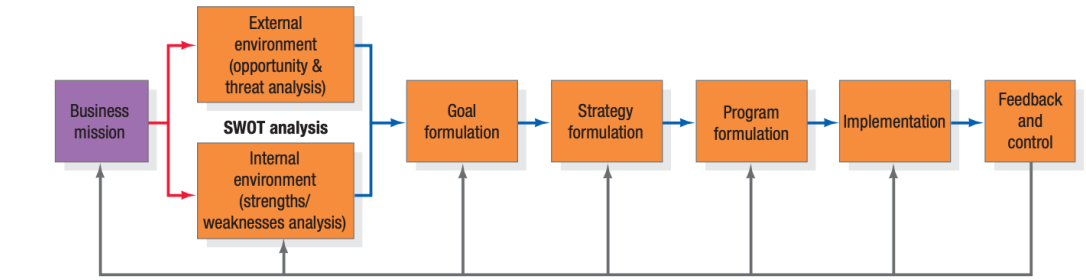


Figure 2 : Strategic Marketing Planning Process

(Source: [4])

The purpose of the framework is not to produce four independent lists but to establish a structured basis for understanding where the company's current capabilities align with market conditions and where they create exposure. [4]

1.5.3.1 Strengths

Internal characteristics that give the organization a competitive advantage. They are resources, capabilities, or structural features that the company can deploy to pursue its objectives more effectively than competitors. Identifying them accurately is important because the temptation in early-stage companies is to list aspirational attributes rather than those that are genuinely defensible. [4]

1.5.3.2 Weaknesses

Internal factors that constrain performance. They are not simply the absence of strengths but distinct limitations, whether structural, operational, or resource-based, that reduce the organization's ability to execute its strategy or respond to market demands. The analytical value of documenting weaknesses honestly is that it prevents the proposal section from being built on assumptions the company cannot support. [4]

1.5.3.3 Opportunities

External conditions the organization can exploit if it has the right internal capabilities in place. They arise from shifts in the market environment: changing customer behavior, regulatory developments, emerging technologies, or structural gaps left by competitors. An opportunity that the company lacks the capability to act on is not an opportunity in

practice, which is why the internal and external dimensions must be read together rather than independently. [4]

1.5.3.4 Threats

External factors that can damage performance or undermine strategic plans. They originate outside the organization and cannot be directly controlled. Their relevance depends on the company's internal position: the same external threat carries very different implications for a company with strong cash reserves and a differentiated product than for one that is bootstrapped and operating in a commoditized space. [4]

1.5.4 TOWS Matrix

Reading the quadrants in isolation produces a static description of the situation. The analytical value is realized when the quadrants are read in combination, which is the function of the TOWS matrix.

Table 1 : TOWS Matrix

(Sources: own work, based on [15])

TOWS	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	**SO - Maxi-Maxi** Use strengths to capture available opportunities	**WO - Mini-Maxi** Overcome weaknesses to exploit favorable conditions
Threats (T)	**ST - Maxi-Mini** Deploy strengths to offset external threats	**WT - Mini-Mini** Minimize weaknesses to reduce threat exposure

In practice, these four directions represent different strategic approaches based on the company's current position. The matrix essentially combines internal capabilities with market realities to show what choices the company has. It covers everything from aggressive growth strategies when conditions are ideal, to purely defensive moves aimed at basic survival. Instead of just listing problems, this method forces the researcher to look for realistic solutions and ways to balance corporate strengths against market risks.

This outputs a practical framework that directly justifies why specific strategic changes are being proposed later in the thesis. [15]

1.5.5 SMART Goals

Defining strategic objectives precisely enough to be measurable is a prerequisite for evaluating whether a strategy has worked. The SMART framework provides a structure for this by requiring that every goal satisfy five criteria: it must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. [16]

A goal that fails any of these criteria cannot be evaluated objectively. A goal that is not specific enough leaves room for interpretation about what counts as success. A goal that is not measurable cannot be tracked. A goal that is not achievable within the current resource constraints produces no useful information when it is missed. A goal that is not relevant to the strategic priorities of the current phase wastes the measurement effort. A goal that has no time boundary cannot distinguish between success and delay. [16]

In the context of early-stage startups, SMART goals serve an additional function beyond performance tracking. Precisely defined goals force the founding team to make their assumptions explicit before execution begins. When a goal is missed, the SMART structure makes it possible to determine whether the strategy was flawed, the execution was poor, or the underlying assumption was wrong.

2 ANALYTICAL PART

RiseHigh is an operational platform with a registered user base, completed challenge cycles, and a defined market position. This chapter does not treat it as a hypothetical concept but as a product with a documented history and measurable early-stage data. The analysis starts from that position and works outward.

The chapter is structured in four parts. The first describes the platform as it currently exists, its mechanics, business model, and the traction it has generated since launching into Open Beta. The second examines the market around, mapping the structural conditions on both sides of the junior hiring equation and establishing where the platform sits relative to existing alternatives. The third is the Sportera pilot, the first completed challenge cycle run under real conditions, which generates the primary behavioral evidence this thesis draws on. The fourth synthesizes all these findings into a SWOT and TOWS assessment that feeds directly into the GTM proposal.

2.1 Overview of the RiseHigh Platform

RiseHigh is a career and crowdsourcing platform that replaces traditional CVs and job interviews with real work challenges. Instead of asking candidates what they can do, companies post tasks and evaluate what candidates deliver. This approach addresses a structural problem on both sides of the junior hiring market. Students lack a credible way to demonstrate their abilities early in their careers, while companies face significant uncertainty when hiring junior talent based on self-reported credentials alone.

The platform was founded by students of the Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development program at VUT Faculty of Business and Management. The inspiration came from two directions. The first was the ESBD program itself, where companies regularly came into the class and students worked on real business problems through workshops and practical exercises. The second was an international ERASMUS exchange in Finland, where the founders saw the same dynamic play out across different cultures and university systems, which made it clear that the gap between academic education and real work experience was not a local problem but a structural one. Combining these two observations, the founding team spent six months developing the business model and prototyping the product before launching RiseHigh into Open Beta in September 2025.

2.1.1 How the Platform Works

RiseHigh is a web application built on Next.js and Supabase technological stack. It operates as a platform with two distinct user roles, students and companies, each with a separate onboarding flow, dashboard and set of features.

All core functionality runs in the browser without requiring any installation. The platform supports two challenge formats, file-based submissions, an anonymous evaluation system, gamification and an automated portfolio builder. As of April 2026, the product is bootstrapped and developed by two founders.

2.1.1.1 Student journey

A student begins by creating a profile on risehigh.io, specifying their hard skills and languages alongside basic information such as their university and field of study. This skill profile is the foundation of their presence on the platform, and it replaces the traditional CV as the primary identifier.

After registration, the student enters dashboard that displays their metrics, current skill levels, XP points, and a set of recommended challenges matched to their declared skills. They can also browse the full challenge catalogue independently, applying filters to find relevant opportunities.

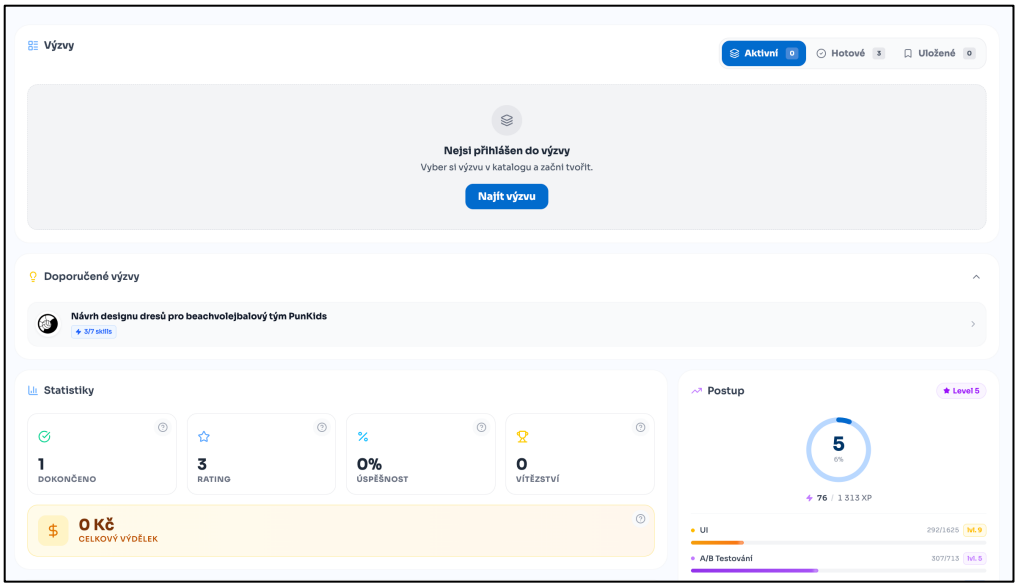


Figure 3 : Student dashboard on the platform

When a student finds a challenge, they want to pursue, they can view the full brief, including the deadline, reward structure, detailed description, challenge goals, expected outputs, and any attached reference files, which are accessible only to enrolled users. After enrolling the student works on their solution independently and submits it directly through the platform before the deadline. They then wait for the evaluation period to conclude.

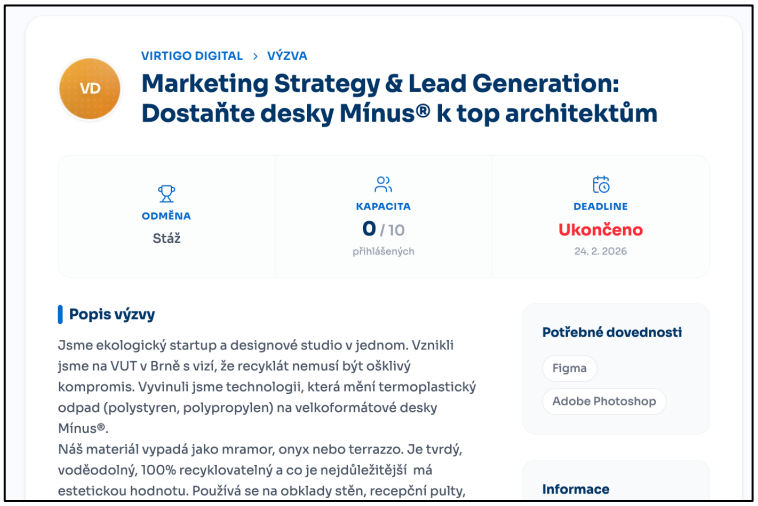


Figure 4 : RiseHigh Challenge brief

Every participant receives guaranteed written feedback and a numerical score from the company regardless of their final placement. This is a deliberate product choice, in contrast to standard hiring processes where candidates frequently receive no response at all. Completed challenges and their results are added to the student's public profile, forming a verifiable portfolio of real work.

2.1.1.2 Company journey

Companies register by providing basic information including their name, registration number, and business category. After submitting their registration, they are placed on a waitlist pending manual approval by the RiseHigh team. During this period, they can freely explore the platform and begin building a challenge, but they cannot publish it until their account is approved.

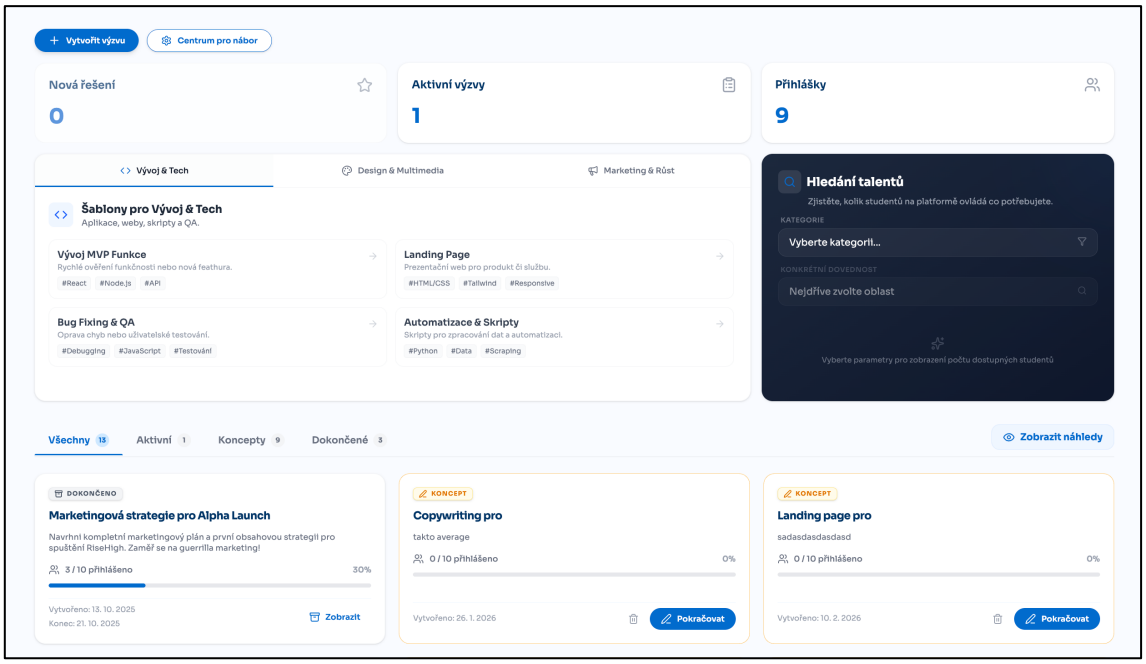


Figure 5 : Startup dashboard on platform

When creating a challenge, the company defines the description, specific goals, expected outputs, any supporting files, the reward structure, and the submission deadline. RiseHigh currently supports two challenge formats. A Hiring Challenge is used when a company wants to identify candidates for an open position. The challenge serves as a practical screening tool that replaces or precedes the traditional interview. A Bounty Challenge is a short-term task with a fixed financial reward, suited for companies that need a specific deliverable such as a market analysis, a design concept, or a communication draft.

Once the deadline passes, the company enters the evaluation phase. All submitted solutions are presented anonymously, so the evaluator sees only the quality of the work itself. The company must assign a numerical rating and written feedback to every submission before the challenge can be closed. This requirement ensures that no student is left without a response. After all submissions are rated, the company proceeds to winner selection, where they assign final placements using a simple ranking interface. Only at this point does the system reveal the identities of the students behind the submissions, and the company receives contact details for the selected winners.

2.1.2 Current Status and Traction

As of April 2026, RiseHigh has 119 registered students and 14 registered companies, of which 7 have actively posted at least one challenge. Of the 119 registered students, 54 have submitted at least one solution while the remaining 65 have not yet actively participated. Most users are from VUT, with a smaller sample from other universities and outside of Brno. Since launch, seven challenges have been posted in total: two completed successfully, four currently active, and one that received zero submissions.

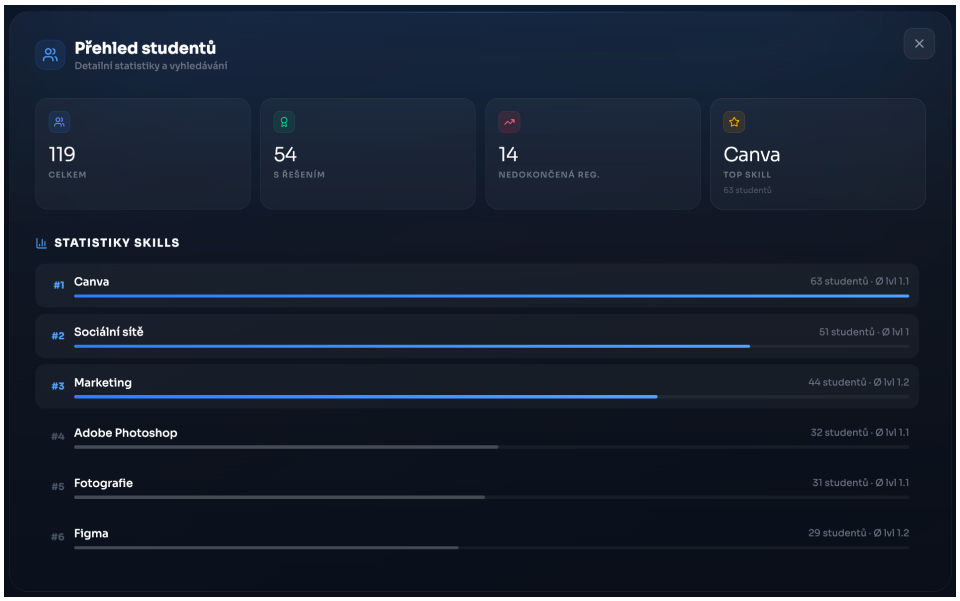


Figure 6 : Screenshot of RiseHigh admin overview panel

Looking at these numbers more closely, two distinct patterns emerge. On the student side, the fact that 54 out of 119 registered users converted into active participants the moment a relevant challenge was available is a strong signal that the barrier to participation is not the platform itself but the volume and variety of challenges on offer. The remaining 65 are not all disengaged, some of them are waiting for an opportunity that matches their skills and interests.

On the company side, the gap between registered companies and those that have actively posted a challenge reflects a deliberate strategic choice. Company onboarding in this phase has been a high-touch process, direct meetings, onboarding calls, and hands-on support structuring the challenges. This was done to ensure that the first challenges on

the platform were well-defined and likely to attract genuine student engagement. The trade-off is that company activation currently depends on personal outreach rather than a scalable process.

These numbers reflect a platform that has validated its core mechanics but has not yet entered the market in any coordinated sense. The challenges posted so far were intentionally limited in reach and scope, designed to test whether the platform works under real conditions before committing to scale. The fundamental concept works. The open question and the one this thesis addresses is how to move from these controlled early experiments to a structured, repeatable market entry.

2.2 Market Environment and Competitive Position

Before proposing a GTM strategy, it is necessary to establish the market conditions that RiseHigh operates in. This section analyses the junior hiring market from both sides of the marketplace, the student supply side and the company demand side. It examines the competitive landscape in which the platform must position itself. The goal is not to describe the market in general terms but to document the specific structural failures that create the opportunity RiseHigh is built to address, and to identify where the platform sits relative to existing alternatives.

2.2.1 The Supply Side: Students and the Credibility Gap

The following section analyses the supply side of the junior hiring market in the Czech Republic, specifically the situation of university students and recent graduates. The goal is to document the structural barriers they face when trying to enter the labour market and to establish if these barriers can transform to market opportunity.

2.2.1.1 Massification of Education and the Declining Value of the Diploma

The Czech education system currently enrolls around 260,000 students at public universities and 28,000 at private institutions, with between 56,000 and 60,000 graduates entering the labor market every year. This is a result of the massification of higher education, a trend where university studies shifted from an elite privilege to a mainstream

path, with more than 50% of the young generation now enrolling and at least 40% obtaining a degree. [17]

The consequence is not the number of graduates, but what it does to the value of their credentials. When enrolment rates climb past 50%, a diploma stops functioning as a filter and becomes a baseline expectation. A signal that most of the population can acquire loses its ability to differentiate strong candidates from average ones. [18]

This creates a structural opening for a model that evaluates candidates on demonstrated output rather than formal qualifications. This is precisely the signaling failure the platform is built around, not that graduates are unqualified, but that the credential no longer tells employers anything useful about who is.

2.2.1.2 The Reality of Student Work Experience and the Relevance Gap

Understanding the credibility gap requires going beyond employment statistics and examining what kind of work students do during their studies. The data reveals a fundamental contradiction. Czech students are among the most economically active in Europe, yet most of this activity does not translate into career-relevant experience. Around 52% of Czech students work regularly throughout the academic semester, with 20% doing so occasionally, leaving only 28% focused exclusively on their studies. [19]

Students in postgraduate programmes work a median of 20 hours per week, meaning that paid work effectively occupies half of their working week alongside with their studies. However, this high level of job market activity is mainly driven by financial situation rather than strategic career building. For 80% of students, the primary motivation for working is financial income. Around 39% of students rely entirely on their own earnings, and the share of students facing serious financial difficulties has grown from 20% to 26% between survey waves. [19]

The consequence is that there is a significant relevance gap between the work students do and the experience that employers value. Only 48% of students that work report there is close or very close connection between their job and their field of their study. Among bachelor's students, this figure drops further to 41%. In practical terms, this means that

more than half of all working Czech students are gaining experience that does not build their sector-specific competencies. [19]

Formal internships, which represent the most direct path to relevant experience, are only partially accessible. According to data, 59% of internships completed by Czech students take place outside the mandatory curriculum on a voluntary basis, and only 51% of these are paid. Students are therefore frequently forced to choose between unpaid sector-relevant experience that builds their CV and paid but unrelated work that covers their living costs. This trade-off is not a matter of motivation but of financial constraint. [19]

2.2.1.3 Structural Barriers to Entering the Labor Market and the Failure of Traditional Tools

From the student perspective, the barriers are well documented. Only 30% of young people managed to secure their first job in their field without prior demonstrable experience, while 41% consider it completely impossible and 15% describe it as highly difficult. [20]

Together, more than half of all labor market entrants are systematically locked out of building relevant experience through conventional means.

The standard tools are not solving this. Junior CVs lack the keywords and measurable achievements that automated screening systems look for, which means they get filtered out before anyone reads them. The result is the black hole effect, candidates submit applications and receive no response, with no way to understand what they are missing or how to improve. [21]

Career center services account for less than 5% of successful placements, and most students shift to personal networking as their primary strategy instead. [21]

The employer side confirms the same failure from the other direction. Work experience during studies is the second most important hiring criterion after field of study, and over 66% of employers expect 6 to 12 months of relevant experience before hiring. Yet 66% of Czech companies report being unable to find candidates with the right profile. The market simultaneously overproduces graduates and underproduces the practical experience that would make them hirable. [22, 23]

2.2.2 The Demand Side: Innovative Companies and Their Hiring Reality

This section examines the same structural failure from the perspective of the companies. The goal is to document who these companies are, what their hiring process costs them, and why the tools currently available to them are failing to solve their core problem.

2.2.2.1 The Target Market: Profile and Behavior of Potential Customers

The Czech innovative sector is dominated by founder-led companies. According to the Czech Founders Impact Report 2024, 84.6% from over 1000 community members are active founders building and running their companies directly. Hiring decisions in these companies are not made by HR departments, they are made by founders and technical leads already stretched across multiple responsibilities. [24]

In 2024, Czech startups raised 590 million EUR in venture capital, a year-on-year increase of 175%. This capital inflow increases pressure to build teams quickly. At the same time, one in four founders actively considers relocating outside the Czech Republic, often citing difficulties accessing deep enough talent pools. Efficient junior hiring is therefore not just an operational challenge but a strategic one. [24]

The types of roles these companies are hiring for have also shifted. For the first time in its history, StartupJobs recorded higher demand for marketing and business roles than for development positions in 2024, with marketing and sales at 32% of listings versus 28% for technology. This signals that a substantial share of Czech startups has moved past the initial product-building phase and now needs go-to-market execution and commercial operations. [25]

The ideal customer profile for RiseHigh is an early-stage or growth-stage startup with between 5 and 50 employees. Below this threshold, companies rely on personal networks rather than structured hiring. Above it, dedicated HR functions begin to emerge. The 5 to 50 employee segment is where hiring pressure is highest, HR capacity is lowest, and the cost of a bad hire is most acute.

2.2.2.2 The Financial and Operational Cost of Junior Hiring

The complete hiring process in the Czech Republic takes 3 to 4 months from job posting to signed contract, according to Grafton Recruitment. For a startup where speed matters, a three-month gap in team capacity is an operational setback. [26]

The volume problem compounds this. A single StartupJobs listing receives on average 18,08 applications. For a founding team without HR support, processing this manually, doing CV screening, introductory calls, interview rounds, represents hours of senior management time per open position. [27]

Outsourcing to a recruitment agency makes the cost explicit. Czech agencies charge 22 to 27% of the candidate's first-year gross salary. For a junior specialist earning 35,000 CZK per month, this translates to 92,400 to 113,400 CZK per hire, a difficult spend to justify before the candidate has demonstrated any value. [26]

Beyond the direct agency fee, a poor hiring decision compounds the cost further. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a bad hire costs an organization an average of 30% of the employee's first-year salary. For a junior specialist at 35,000 CZK monthly, that translates to approximately 126,000 CZK in wasted recruitment effort, onboarding, and lost productivity. This figure captures the combined effect of the time spent on the original hiring process, the cost of onboarding a candidate who ultimately does not stay, the lost productivity during the period before the problem becomes visible, and the cost of restarting the search. For a founding team managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously, a failed junior hire costs the months of senior attention that went into making the wrong decision. [28]

2.2.2.3 Why Traditional Hiring Tools Fail the Junior Segment

The most acute frustration is the gap between what candidates claim and what they deliver. Randstad's HR Trends 2024 survey found that 82% of Czech companies cite unrealistic candidate expectations as their primary hiring challenge, up 8 percentage points year on year, and 43% cite a lack of practical experience. [29]

The root cause is the same in both cases. CV presents a narrative of the past with no evidence of future performance. As Alma Career explicitly notes in its own market

analysis, a CV is an arranged version of the past but offers no guarantee of what comes next. [30]

The filtering problem compounds this. In the year covered by the StartupJobs 2024 report, candidates submitted nearly 180,000 applications to approximately 1,600 companies, with the average candidate applying to 4.8 different positions. The result is funnel flooding, platforms deliver high volumes of documents at the top of the hiring funnel with no mechanism to verify competence where the actual decision is made. [25]

The market is beginning to respond. CzechInvest actively supports hackathons and case competitions through initiatives like Czech Startup Week, and platforms like "Nápad roku" show that challenge-based evaluation formats are already being used by Czech technology firms to identify talent. [31]

The barrier is operational, these formats require internal organization, mentorship capacity and event infrastructure that early-stage startups cannot sustain independently. This is the gap RiseHigh is built to fill.

2.2.3 The Brno Beachhead Market

Brno is the natural starting point for RiseHigh's market entry. The decision follows from three structural conditions that make it the most viable first market for a challenge-based hiring platform at this stage. First, it has a high concentration of the target supply, meaning university students with relevant skills. Second, it has a high concentration of the target demand, meaning innovative companies that face the exact hiring problem RiseHigh is designed to solve. Third, RiseHigh already has an institutional foothold there as an official VUT startup, which reduces the acquisition cost for both sides compared to entering any other city.

Taken together, these three conditions satisfy the atomic network requirement: enough density on both sides, in a small enough scope, to generate the marketplace liquidity that makes the platform worth using before it is scaled.

2.2.3.1 The Supply Side: Student Concentration

Brno is home to 63,353 students enrolled at universities within the city, representing 15.73% of the total population of 402,739 residents as of January 2025, roughly one in every six people. This level of concentration places Brno among the most student-dense cities in Central Europe, reflected in its 30th place ranking worldwide in the student mix category of the QS Best Student Cities 2025 index. [32–34]

The skills profile of this student base aligns directly with the types of challenges companies post on RiseHigh. The Brno Tech Region 2026 report identifies 6,408 students enrolled in IT programmes across the city, a figure that has grown 12.3% since 2020. Business and economics faculties at VUT, MUNI and Mendel collectively enroll several thousand additional students covering marketing, management and related disciplines. [35–38]

The platform's current registered base is drawn almost entirely from VUT, which reflects its institutional origin rather than the available supply. With over 63,000 students across multiple universities, the supply side has significant room to grow without leaving the city.

2.2.3.2 The Demand Side: The JIC Ecosystem

The demand side of the Brno beachhead is shaped by the South Moravian innovation ecosystem. The central institution is JIC, which has supported more than 1,300 companies since 2003. A more precise figure for the addressable B2B market comes from the evaluation of JIC's regional innovation strategy, which records that its focused acceleration programmes supported 142 companies and early-stage entrepreneurs during the evaluated period. These firms passed a competitive selection process, are actively hiring and financially motivated to reduce hiring costs. They form the core of the serviceable obtainable market for initial B2B acquisition. [22]

The broader SME segment reinforces this. Total investment into regional technology companies between 2022 and 2025 reached 300 million EUR, and the typical firm in the ecosystem falls within the 5 to 50 employee ICP defined in the previous section. These are companies with capital and hiring pressure but without dedicated HR capacity. [18]

2.2.3.3 The Institutional Access Gap

One of the clearest indicators that Brno is an underserved market is the structure of existing university-to-company access. Both MUNI and VUT run partnership programmes with annual fees ranging from 100,000 CZK for basic access to 300,000 CZK for strategic partner status. In 2025, MUNI's programme involved 28 partner companies, and facilitated 133 internship positions, where the majority is going to large established firms like Red Hat, SAP and AT&T. VUT operates on the same model, with fees from 60,000 to 300,000 CZK per year. [39, 40]

These fees make both inaccessible to the companies RiseHigh is targeting. An early-stage startup on limited runway cannot justify spending 100,000 CZK annually for access to student talent when it may only need one specific deliverable, like a market analysis, a UI concept, or a sales script. The formal channels serve large established firms that need structured long-term pipelines. RiseHigh's model removes that barrier entirely and serves the segment that the existing infrastructure ignores. For companies with an immediate deliverable need, a bounty challenge provides access to student talent at a fraction of the cost and without any long-term commitment. For companies looking to hire, a hiring challenge replaces weeks of CV screening with a single evaluated work cycle before committing to anything.

2.2.4 Competitive Analysis

The following section analyses the competitive environment in which RiseHigh operates. It begins with an overview of the key players in the market and their core characteristics, then applies Porter's Five Forces to examine the structural dynamics of the industry and concludes with a Blue Ocean analysis that identifies where the gaps in the current market lie.

Table 2 : Competitor overview table

(Own work)

Platform	Type	Primary Audience	Business Model	Candidate Evaluation	Feedback	Portfolio
Jobs.cz	Job portal	All candidates	Pay-per-post 2,990–39,000 CZK	CV screening	None	No
Práce.cz	Job portal	Blue collar, part-time jobs	Pay-per-post 2,990–9,690 CZK	CV screening	None	No
StartupJobs	Job portal	Startups, tech	Pay-per-post 7,000–9,999 CZK	CV + basic tests	None	No
LinkedIn	Professional network	All professionals	Freemium + CPC from $7/day	CV + profile	None	Partial
Fiverr	Freelance platform	Freelancers, companies	20% commission per transaction	Portfolio + ratings	Post-project	Yes
Contra	Freelance platform	Creative, tech freelancers	Zero commission + Pro $29/mo	Portfolio + ratings	Post-project	Yes
Parker Dewey	Micro-internships	Students, companies	Project-based fees	Real work output	Structured	Yes
RiseHigh	Challenge platform	Students, startups	Pay-per-post 1,000 CZK	Real work, Blind Review	Guaranteed	Yes

2.2.4.1 Competitor Overview

The Czech junior hiring market consists of two distinct groups of platforms. The first group is traditional Czech job portals, Jobs.cz, Práce.cz and StartupJobs, which dominate the market by volume and brand recognition but share a uniform evaluation logic: CV screening with no candidate feedback and no portfolio output. The second group is global platforms operating on alternative models, either freelance marketplaces like Fiverr and Contra, or challenge-based tools like Parker Dewey. What separates these two groups is not just the product but the underlying assumption about how talent should be evaluated. Traditional portals treat the CV as sufficient signal. The alternative platforms treat

demonstrated output as the only reliable one. RiseHigh sits in the second group, but unlike Fiverr or Contra it is built specifically for the junior hiring context rather than freelance transactions.

2.2.4.2 StartupJobs as The Direct Benchmark

StartupJobs.cz is the most relevant point of comparison for RiseHigh. It targets the same audience, innovative companies and junior candidates in tech and business roles and it is the platform that companies in the RiseHigh ICP are most likely already using.

StartupJobs operates as a listing-based platform. A company pays between 7,000 and 9,999 CZK for a 30-day listing, candidates apply, and the company receives CVs. The platform's value proposition is reach. Everything that follows, screening, calls, interviews happen outside the platform entirely. [27]

The consequence is visible in its own data. The average listing receives 21.92 applications, which means a founding team without HR support spends hours per position on manual screening before a single qualified conversation takes place. The platform delivers volume at the top of the funnel with no mechanism to verify competence where the actual hiring decision is made. There is no guaranteed outcome, no feedback to candidates, and no record of what any candidate was capable of doing.

This matters for RiseHigh's positioning because the companies it is targeting know StartupJobs well. They know what it costs and they know what it delivers. When they encounter RiseHigh for the first time, the natural comparison is to the tools they already use. If the platform is communicated as a cheaper or faster job board, it will be evaluated as one. The only way to avoid that comparison is to lead with what makes the product structurally different. Companies do not pay for the probability that a good candidate will apply, they receive evaluated work output before making any commitment.

2.2.5 Structural Analysis of Industry Profitability

To understand the competitive dynamics of the market RiseHigh is entering, this section applies Porter's Five Forces framework to the Czech junior hiring platform segment. The analysis examines five structural forces that collectively determine the profitability and attractiveness of the market: the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of buyers,

the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of substitutes, and the intensity of rivalry among existing competitors. Each force is evaluated based on documented evidence, with the goal of identifying where RiseHigh is structurally protected and where it faces the most significant competitive pressure.

2.2.5.1 Threat of New Entrants: Medium - High

Building a two-sided marketplace web app requires an upfront investment. Average hourly labor costs in the Czech Republic stood at 19.8 EUR in 2025, with technology sector rates significantly higher. A functional platform covering dual user profiles, file submission, evaluation systems, gamification, and notifications takes between 1,400 and 2,100 development hours based on standard estimation benchmarks. AI coding tools are gradually lowering this barrier, though they do not eliminate the entry cost entirely. [41, 42]

Brand recognition presents an equally significant barrier. Alma Career generated 107.2 million EUR in revenues from its Czech and Slovak operations in 2024 at a 40.6% operating margin, with digital revenues at 85.9% of total income in Q1 2026. Any new entrant competes against decades of established trust on both sides of the market. [43]

2.2.5.2 Bargaining Power of Buyers: Medium

The buyer side consists of startups and companies that post challenges on the platform. Research on HR technology adoption shows that more than half of HR professionals have worked with two to three different HR systems during their careers, and nearly 30% have used four to five. Platform loyalty in this segment is low and willingness to switch is high. [44]

What drives these switches is functionality, not price. Specific features are the main reason for changing HR tools for 28% of companies, while only 9% switch primarily because of cost. This means that if RiseHigh delivers real value, meaning verified candidate output, objective evaluation and guaranteed feedback, companies have a strong reason to stay. If it does not, they will leave just as easily. [44]

The size of the potential buyer market is clear. In 2025, 1,588 companies used StartupJobs to search for talent, generating 166,839 applications on a single platform. These are companies already actively investing in junior hiring and familiar with the cost of doing so. [27]

2.2.5.3 Bargaining Power of Suppliers: Low to Medium

The supplier side of the platform consists of students and junior candidates who submit solutions. On an individual level their bargaining power is low. No single student is critical to how the platform operates, but as a group they are the core resource of the marketplace. Without their active participation, companies have no reason to post challenges in the first place.

The data shows that young people rarely stick to one platform when looking for work or relevant experience. On StartupJobs alone, the average candidate sends 4.8 applications to different listings within one search cycle and 75% of candidates look up a company on social media before they even send an application. For a student, signing up on RiseHigh costs nothing and commits them to nothing. Using multiple platforms at the same time is completely natural, which makes student platform loyalty essentially zero. [27, 45]

Research on platform user behavior shows that users constantly compare the effort they put in with what they get back. When a platform feels like sending applications into a black hole with no response, people leave fast. Among Gen Z specifically, 45% say that being ghosted after applying stresses them out more than an actual rejection, and if there is no response within a week, 62% of young candidates simply move on and look elsewhere. RiseHigh's mandatory feedback requirement for all challenge participants directly addresses this, but only if there are enough challenges to bring students back after their first submission. [46, 47]

2.2.5.4 Threat of Substitutes: High

Substitutes for RiseHigh represent the most significant competitive force in this market. Companies have access to channels that deliver junior talent without any platform fee or challenge infrastructure.

Employee referral programmes produce disproportionately strong hiring outcomes. Analysis of 4.5 million real job applications found that referral candidates are seven times more likely to be hired than candidates from public job boards. Data from more than 60,000 small and medium enterprises confirms that referrals generate only 2% of all applications but account for 11% of successful hires, a conversion rate ten times higher than standard job boards. Own career pages are similarly efficient, generating 13% of applications but 26% of signed contracts. [48, 49]

University career fairs retain strong relevance. Among 20,482 surveyed university students, more than half attended a career fair in the preceding year, with more than 45% receiving an interview invitation as a result. Traditional internships deliver the highest conversion of all substitutes: the average rate of internship-to-full-time-offer conversion stands at 63.1%, with an average time from first interview to offer of 27 days. [50, 51]

These channels operate outside any platform fee structure and deliver candidates whose practical ability has been verified through extended real-world exposure, making them the primary competitive threat to any challenge-based hiring model.

2.2.5.5 Rivalry Among Existing Competitors: Low to Medium

The Czech job portal market is concentrated around one dominant player, Alma Career, which operates both Jobs.cz and Práce.cz under the Finnish Alma Media group. As documented above, the group's revenues and margins reflect decades of established market position. None of the smaller Czech portals compete on candidate quality verification or challenge-based evaluation. The rivalry among them is focused on listing volume, brand visibility and price, dimensions on which RiseHigh deliberately does not compete.

On the global side, Fiverr and Contra operate as freelance transaction platforms rather than hiring tools, creating indirect competition with RiseHigh's Bounty challenge format for one-off deliverables but offering neither a hiring nor a portfolio-building dimension.

No existing player directly replicates the challenge-based hiring model in the Czech market. The rivalry that exists is indirect and segment-based, which confirms the low to medium assessment of this force.

2.2.6 Competitive Positioning and Blue Ocean Analysis

Whether it is Jobs.cz, StartupJobs.cz, or Prace.cz, the underlying model is always the same. Company posts a job, candidates send CVs, and someone gets picked for the position. This is what Blue Ocean Strategy calls a Red Ocean, a space where everyone offers essentially the same thing and competes for the same customers. The Four Actions Framework is used here to identify where the actual gaps in this market are.

2.2.6.1 Eliminate

The factor that every existing platform treats as standard is the CV as the primary way to evaluate candidates. Schmidt's landmark meta-analysis of 100 years of personnel psychology research found that the methods job portals rely on most are among the weakest predictors of future job performance. Years of work experience correlate with future performance at just 0.16, and level of education at 0.10. Work sample tests, where candidates complete a task representative of the actual role, reach a predictive validity of 0.54, more than three times higher than years of experience and five times higher than educational credentials. For companies making hiring decisions under uncertainty, that difference is the difference between a guess and an informed decision. [52]

Students reflect the same scepticism. Only 25% believe a CV can adequately show what they are capable of, and only 30% trust the traditional interview process. The second factor the market has normalised is ghosting. Candidates regularly submit applications and receive no response, which pushes them away from platforms and toward personal networks as their primary strategy. [53]

RiseHigh eliminates both. The CV is replaced by a work sample as the primary evaluation mechanism. Guaranteed written feedback to every participant is a structural requirement of the platform, not an optional feature.

2.2.6.2 Reduce

The data from the demand side analysis showed that junior hiring in the Czech Republic is slow and expensive. In three quarters of 2024, the Czech labour market processed 5.4 million CV submissions and reactions, while the total number of filled positions dropped

by 2%. Companies are spending more time reviewing more applications and getting fewer successful hires as a result. The current model oversupplies unverified information and undersupplies actual evidence of what candidates can do. [54]

RiseHigh reduces the screening overhead directly. Instead of processing 21.92 applications per listing manually, a company receives a set of evaluated work outputs from candidates who have already demonstrated they can deliver. The sequential process of CV review, introductory calls, and interview rounds collapses into a single challenge cycle.

2.2.6.3 Raise

The demand for better quality information exists on both sides of the market. LinkedIn's Future of Recruiting 2024 report found that a skills-first approach to candidate evaluation leads to a 24% higher offer acceptance rate compared to credential-based screening. Better information produces better matches, and better matches produce better outcomes. From the student side, 75% of respondents in Parker Dewey's survey said they want to explore career opportunities through practical work rather than sending traditional applications. The gap between what both sides want and what current tools deliver is consistent across multiple data sources. [55, 56]

2.2.6.4 Create

Three things are entirely missing from the Czech junior hiring market. No platform lets students build a verifiable public record of completed projects with company ratings, the only thing that grows on existing platforms is a list of applications sent. No platform offers anonymous evaluation, where companies assess the work without knowing who submitted it. The current approach, where a candidate's name, university and photo are visible from the first interaction, creates the conditions for unconscious bias that hiring research consistently documents. And no platform applies gamification to career development in any meaningful way.

Data is also showing that Gen Z actively looks for concrete, verifiable proof of their own value. These gaps define what is structurally missing from every tool currently available in this market. [57]

2.2.6.5 Strategy Canvas

The Strategy Canvas below maps the nine factors from the Four Actions Framework and shows how Czech job portals and RiseHigh compare on each of them.

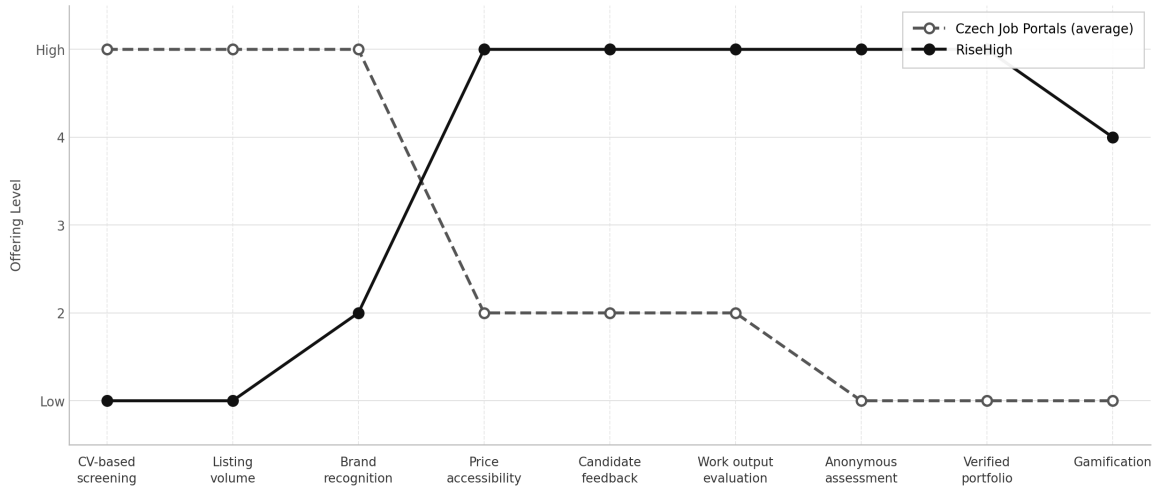


Figure 7 : Strategy canvas of RiseHigh against competitors

(Own work)

Existing platforms score high on the left side of the canvas, on CV screening, listing volume and brand recognition. These are exactly the factors identified above as losing their effectiveness. RiseHigh scores low on all three by design. On the right side the picture reverses. RiseHigh scores high on price accessibility, candidate feedback, work output evaluation, anonymous assessment, verified portfolio and gamification, while existing platforms score low or zero on most of them. On work output evaluation, portals also score a 2 because some hiring processes do include a practical task or assignment at a later stage, but this is optional and not the default. The two curves cross in the middle and diverge in opposite directions, which is exactly what a Blue Ocean strategic shift looks like in practice.

2.2.6.6 The Structural Gap

The four steps of the framework point consistently in the same direction. The factors that currently define competition in the Czech junior hiring market. CV screening, listing volume and brand scale are the same factors, that the data across the supply side, demand side and competitive analysis identifies as losing effectiveness. The factors that neither company or students are getting from existing tools are practical evaluation, verified portfolios, anonymous assessment and guaranteed feedback. These are absent across the entire competitive landscape.

This does not mean that existing platforms are unaware of these gaps. It means that addressing them would require a fundamentally different product architecture than the one job portals are currently built on. Whether that shift is feasible for established players is outside the scope of this analysis. What the framework does establish is that these gaps are real, documented on both sides of the market, and currently unaddressed.

2.3 Competitive Pricing Analysis

The dominant model among job portals is pay-per-post with fixed time-limited visibility. StartupJobs.cz charges between 7,000 and 9,999 CZK per listing for a 30-day period. Jobs.cz operates in a significantly higher price, with listings from 6,990 CZK for 10 days to 39,000 CZK for a 60-day campaign. Práce.cz runs from 2,990 to 9,690 CZK. In all three cases the company pays for visibility, not for any verified outcome. The listing fee is spent regardless of whether a single qualified applicant applies. [58, 59]

LinkedIn's base model is freemium, one free listing with deliberate visibility decay after seven days, designed to push companies into its paid CPC system. Promoted listings require a minimum daily budget of $7 to $10, with costs per applicant averaging approximately $2.83 in competitive markets. For an early-stage startup without a dedicated HR budget this introduces significant cost unpredictability. [60]

Table 3 : Pricing overview of competition and RiseHigh

(own work – sources used [41,42,43])

Platform	Model	Price per listing / transaction	Source
StartupJobs.cz	Pay-per-post	7,000 – 9,999 CZK / 30 days	startupjobs.cz/pro-firmy
Jobs.cz	Pay-per-post/ Subscription	6,990 – 39,000 CZK / 10–60 days	teamio.com ceník PDF
Práce.cz	Pay-per-post/ Subscription	2,990 – 9,690 CZK / 10–45 days	teamio.com ceník PDF
LinkedIn	Freemium + CPC	Free (1 listing) + min. $7–10 / day promoted	business.linkedin.com/hire
Fiverr	Commission-based	20% seller fee + 5.5% buyer fee per transaction	help.fiverr.com
Contra	Freemium + SaaS subscription	Free ($2–29 fixed fee) / Pro $29 / month	contra.com/pricing
RiseHigh.io	Pay-per-post (current)	1,000 CZK per challenge	Internal data

RiseHigh's current pay-per-post price of 1,000 CZK per challenge is fraction of the market rate price. StartupJobs.cz charges seven times more for a comparable listing, and Jobs.cz charges up to 39 times more for its premium format. This is penetration pricing in practice, it is a deliberate choice to price below the platform's real value to build the reference base that makes a later transition to value-based pricing defensible. The trade-off is that at 1,000 CZK per challenge, the platform does not yet generate revenue sufficient to cover even basic operational costs, which confirms that the current pricing is a market entry tactic rather than a sustainable long-term model.

The structural difference between RiseHigh and all listed competitors is the unit of value being sold. Every competing platform sells visibility or access, meaning company pays for the probability that a candidate will notice the listing. RiseHigh sells evaluated work output, company receives actual deliverables from actual candidates before making any

commitment. This distinction is not reflected in the current 1,000 CZK price point, which prices the platform as a cheaper job board rather than as a fundamentally different product category.

2.4 Value Proposition Analysis

This section maps the Customer Profile of each side of the marketplace against RiseHigh's Value Map, following the jobs-pains-gains structure introduced in the theoretical section.

2.4.1 Value Proposition Canvas: Student Side

Table 4 : Value proposition canvas for student side

(Own work)

CUSTOMER PROFILE	VALUE MAP
Customer Jobs	**Products & Services**
- Get relevant job before graduation - Build professional identity - Reduce anxiety from opaque hiring process	- Challenge-based career platform - Verified public portfolio profile - Blind review evaluation system
Pains	**Pain Relievers**
- No feedback after applications - Experience gap - Financial pressure forces unrelated work	- Guaranteed feedback on every submission - Evaluated on work output - Bounty format for paid sector-relevant work
Gains	**Gain Creators**
- Immediate, substantive feedback - Prove competence without work history - Realistic preview of company environment	- Submissions become verified portfolio entries - XP and levels track skill progression publicly - Challenge brief provides realistic job preview

2.4.1.1 Customer Jobs

The primary functional job for student is to secure relevant employment or a paid internship in the field of study, ideally before graduation. Beyond placement, students need to build a credible professional identity that distinguishes them from other graduates with identical credentials. The emotional job underlying both is reducing the anxiety tied to a process that offers little transparency or feedback. Data confirms that more than two thirds of Czech university students experience mental health difficulties, with the recruitment process identified as a significant stressor. [19]

2.4.1.2 Pains

The most critical pain is the black hole effect, documented in the supply side analysis, applications submitted without any meaningful response. The second pain is the experience barrier. 41% of students consider entering the labor market without prior sector-relevant experience to be completely impossible. The third is financial pressure. 29% of Czech students could not afford to continue studying without paid employment, and the share experiencing financial difficulties has grown from 20% to 26%. This forces students toward income-generating work that does not build relevant competence. [19]

2.4.1.3 Gains

Students most desired gain is immediate feedback after every interaction with a company. The Deloitte Gen Z 2024, covering 23,000 respondents across 44 countries, identifies transparent feedback as a defining expectation. The second gain is the ability to demonstrate competence without relying on a work history. 86% of Gen Z consider merit-based evaluation important to their professional satisfaction. The third is a realistic preview of what working at a specific company looks like. 44% of Gen Z have declined an employer on ethical grounds, indicating they actively seek authentic insight into companies. [61]

RiseHigh's own registration data provides a supplementary signal from within the platform's user base. Of 53 students who completed a motivation step during registration where they must select their primary reason for joining from three options. 31 indicated

financial earnings, 13 gaining practical experience, and 9 indicated portfolio building. [62]

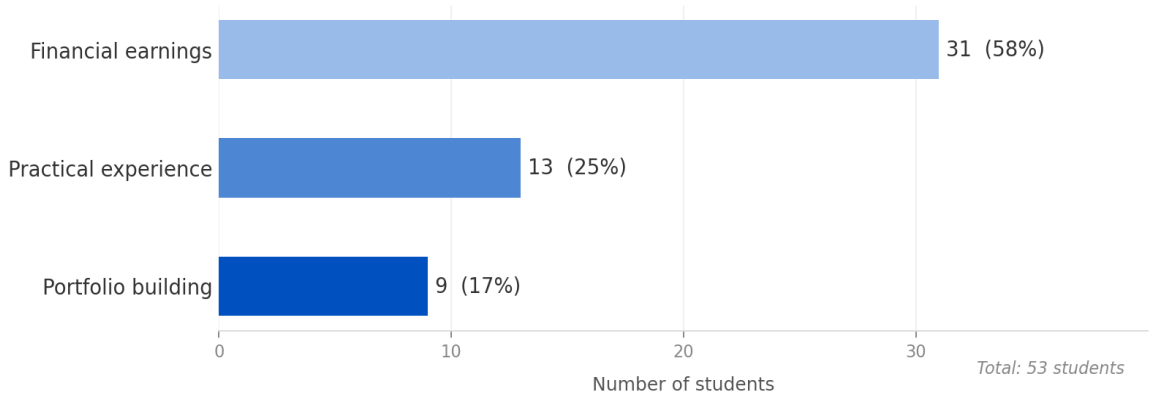


Figure 8 : Student motivation data from registration step

(own work, sources: [45])

While the sample size limits generalizability, the data suggests that financial motivation is the dominant driver for students entering the platform, which aligns with the EUROSTUDENT VIII finding that 29% of Czech students could not afford to study without paid employment. The practical experience and portfolio motivations together account for 42% of responses, consistent with the documented gain of demonstrating competence without prior work history. [19]

2.4.1.4 Value Map - Student Side

RiseHigh's core product is a challenge-based platform where companies post real work briefs and students submit solutions evaluated on output quality. Each completed challenge is added to the student's public profile as a verified portfolio entry.

In terms of pain relievers, the platform requires every company to provide written feedback and a numerical score to every submission before a challenge can be closed. This mechanism corresponds to the documented black hole pain. The challenge format evaluates students on submitted work rather than on prior employment history, which corresponds to the experience barrier pain. Blind review means companies evaluate

submissions without knowing the identity of the student, which corresponds to the pain of informal filtering based on university name or CV presentation. The bounty challenge format attaches a fixed financial reward to specific deliverables, which corresponds to the financial pressure pain.

In terms of gain creators, completed challenges are automatically recorded on the student's public profile as verified outputs, which corresponds to the documented gain of demonstrating competence without prior work history. The content of the challenge brief exposes students to real problems the company faces, which corresponds to the documented gain of understanding a company before committing to a formal application.

The platform's own traction data shows that 65 of 119 registered students have not yet submitted a solution. The supply side analysis established that student motivation to build a portfolio is present, 54 of 119 registered users submitted a solution the moment a relevant challenge appeared. The data therefore indicates that the current gap between registered users and active participants reflects challenge volume and relevance rather than a mismatch between the platform's offering and student needs. The registration motivation data further indicates that 58% of students who completed the motivation step are primarily driven by financial reward, which suggests that the bounty challenge format is more directly relevant to most of the current user base than the hiring challenge format. [62]

2.4.2 Value Proposition Canvas - Company Side

Table 5 : Value proposition canvas for company side

(Own work)

CUSTOMER PROFILE	VALUE MAP
Customer Jobs	**Products & Services**
- Verify candidate performance before hiring - Crowdsource fresh perspectives on problems	- Challenge infrastructure - Anonymous evaluation of multiple candidates - Contact reveal only after winner selection
Pains	**Pain Relievers**
- CV screening has near-zero predictive validity - High application volume - 21.92 applications per listing - Cost of failed hire up to 200% of salary	- Work output replaces CV as primary signal - Blind review eliminates bias - Parallel evaluation reduces senior screening time
Gains	**Gain Creators**
- Real candidate work output visible before any interview - Multiple independent solutions from a single challenge - Visibility and employer branding among Gen Z talent	- Challenge brief produces real deliverables, not inferred potential - Single challenge cycle generates multiple parallel solutions - Challenge format positions company as merit-based employer to Gen Z

2.4.2.1 Customer Jobs

The primary functional job is to verify that a junior candidate can deliver useful output before making a hiring commitment. As documented in the demand side analysis, the standard process takes 3 to 4 months and up to 113,400 CZK in agency fees before any reliable performance evidence is available. [26]

The secondary job is crowdsourcing, obtaining multiple external perspectives on a specific business problem without the overhead of an internal ideation process.

2.4.2.2 Pains

The most significant pain is the low predictive validity of CV-based screening. Years of experience has a predictive correlation with job performance of only 0.07, and years of formal education only 0.10. The financial consequences were documented in the demand side analysis: a failed junior hire costs a minimum of 30% of first-year earnings, with replacement costs reaching up to 200% of annual salary for specialized roles. The second pain is application volume, a single listing receives an average of 21.92 applications, generating 10 to 15 hours of screening time per position for founding teams without HR support. [27, 52]

2.4.2.3 Gains

Companies in the target segment are not just looking to avoid bad hires, they are looking for ways to get more value out of the hiring process itself. The primary gain is seeing real candidate work before any interview takes place. Rather than inferring potential from a CV, the company receives actual deliverables produced under real brief conditions, which allows a much more confident evaluation of fit. The secondary gain is the crowdsourcing dimension. A single challenge produces multiple independent solutions to the same problem simultaneously, which no traditional hiring format can replicate. Even candidates who are not ultimately hired contribute perspectives and ideas that have standalone value. The third gain is visibility among student talent that is difficult to reach through conventional channels. Companies that post challenges on RiseHigh present themselves as organizations that give students a real opportunity to demonstrate their ability. Which is a positioning that is directly relevant to Gen Z, for whom merit-based evaluation is a documented preference.

2.4.2.4 Value Map - Company Side

The platform provides end-to-end challenge infrastructure: defining a brief, receiving and anonymously evaluating multiple submissions, selecting winners, and accessing contact details of top performers only after evaluation is complete.

CV screening is replaced by evaluated work output, companies receive actual deliverables before making any commitment, which directly addresses the low predictive validity of credential-based selection. Blind review ensures the evaluation is based on work quality alone, removing the candidate background information that generates bias in standard screening. The parallel submission format means multiple candidates are assessed simultaneously on identical conditions, which collapses the 10 to 15 hours of sequential screening time that a conventional process requires.

A single challenge cycle generates multiple independent solutions to the same problem, the crowdsourcing dimension that no traditional hiring format can replicate. And the challenge format itself positions the company as one that evaluates on merit and gives students a genuine opportunity to prove themselves, which is directly relevant to how Gen Z evaluates potential employers.

The fit between the Value Map and the Company Customer Profile is strong at the level of both pains and gains. The same dependency identified in the student canvas applies here: the value the platform delivers to companies is contingent on sufficient student participation. A challenge with no submissions addresses none of the pains and creates none of the gains. This confirms that supply-side activation remains the central operational precondition for the platform to function on either side.

2.5 The Sportera Pilot

The Sportera pilot represents the first operational test of the RiseHigh platform under live market conditions. Sportera is a startup developing within the same ESBD programme at VUT's Faculty of Business and Management, sharing institutional context with RiseHigh. Launching the first challenge with a partner organization minimized communication overhead and allowed rapid iteration on both product and process. The pilot was a Measure phase, a structured experiment to generate behavioral data about both sides of the marketplace under real conditions.

The challenge ran from 18 November to 14 December 2025, a period of 27 days, and was structured as a bounty challenge, a format in which a fixed financial reward is attached to a specific deliverable. The required outputs were SVG logo files and written documentation of design decisions, with a bonus point available for a mascot proposal. The reward was set at 2,000 CZK for the winning submission. [63]

The pilot also represented the first attempt to achieve what the theoretical section describes as atomic network liquidity, the minimum level of simultaneous activity on both sides of the marketplace required for the platform to begin delivering value. The target scope was deliberately narrow: one company, one challenge, one student community concentrated around VUT.

2.5.1 Acquisition and Funnel Analysis

Interpreting the pilot's performance requires distinguishing between vanity metrics and actionable metrics. Raw counts such as total visitors or total enrolments do not indicate platform health in isolation. The relevant unit of analysis is the conversion rate between funnel stages, which corresponds directly to the five stages of the AARRR framework introduced in the theoretical section.

Table 6 : Funnel Analysis based on AARRR metrics

(own work, sources: [47])

AARRR	Stage	Count	Conversion	Note
Awareness	Total reach	~2,000	x	Instagram + faculty channels + offline materials. Overlap with page visitors not quantified, analytics were not configured.
Acquisition	Page visitors	590	~29.5%	Measured via platform analytics. Conversion from awareness is approximate due to untracked overlap between online and offline reach.
Activation	Enrolled students	30	5.1%	Completed full registration flow. Original cap of 15 filled rapidly and was gradually raised to 30.
Retention	Submitted solutions	14	46.7%	16 enrolled students did not submit. Follow-up mailing sent; response rate was zero. Exact drop-off point could not be identified, measurement limitation.
Referral	x	x	x	Not measured during this pilot. No referral tracking was implemented.
Revenue	Winner selected	1	7.7%	2,000 CZK reward paid directly by Sportera. RiseHigh operated in pre-monetization phase, meaning no platform revenue generated from this challenge.

The challenge page recorded 590 unique visitors during the campaign period. An additional 800 people were reached through Instagram and offline faculty materials including QR codes. [64]

The overlap between these two audiences cannot be precisely quantified, as campaign analytics were not fully configured at this stage, click-through tracking for the Instagram link and QR codes was not implemented. This constitutes the first measurement limitation of the pilot.

Of the 590 unique page visitors, 30 students completed the full registration flow and enrolled in the challenge, producing an activation rate of 5.1%. The original enrolment cap was set at 15, which was filled rapidly, prompting a gradual increase to 30. This early cap saturation indicates that initial demand exceeded the platform's planned capacity for the challenge. [64]

Retention in the context of a single challenge means whether enrolled users followed through to delivering an output. Of 30 enrolled students, 14 submitted a solution, producing a submission rate of 46.7%. A drop-off rate of 53.3% represents 16 students who completed onboarding and enrolled but did not submit. A follow-up mailing was sent to all non-submitting students offering them the opportunity to indicate where they had disengaged. The response rate was zero. The precise point of drop-off therefore cannot be identified from available data, which constitutes the second measurement limitation of this pilot. [64]

Observation of submission timing reveals a pattern consistent with deadline-driven behavior. One submission was recorded on day 9 of the challenge period, followed by a gap until day 20. From day 20 onward submissions increased incrementally, with four submitted on the penultimate day and two on the final deadline day. This means 42.9% of all submissions were concentrated in the final two days of the 27-day window. [64]

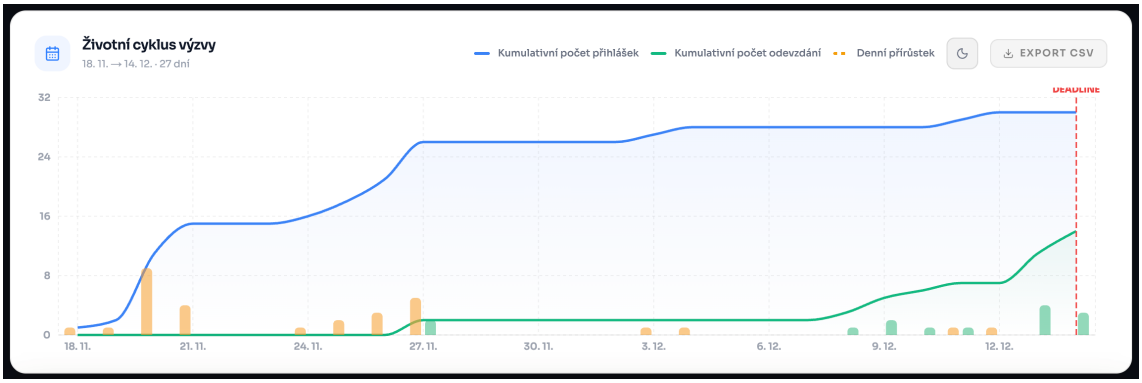


Figure 9 : Picture from challenge admin data analysis dashboard

(Sources: [47])

This deadline concentration pattern has a direct operational implication, the platform's reminder system and perceived urgency influence submission volume in a measurable way.

Referral data was not captured during this pilot phase, constituting a third measurement limitation. Revenue in the direct sense was not generated by RiseHigh from this challenge, as the platform was operating in a pre-monetization phase. The 2,000 CZK reward was paid directly by Sportera to the winning student. [63]

2.5.2 Submission Quality and Evaluation

All 14 submitted solutions were evaluated by Sportera within two weeks of the submission deadline. The average score across all submissions was 5.9 out of 10.[1] A qualitative distribution of submission quality, based on feedback from Sportera, shows three distinct tiers. [63, 64]

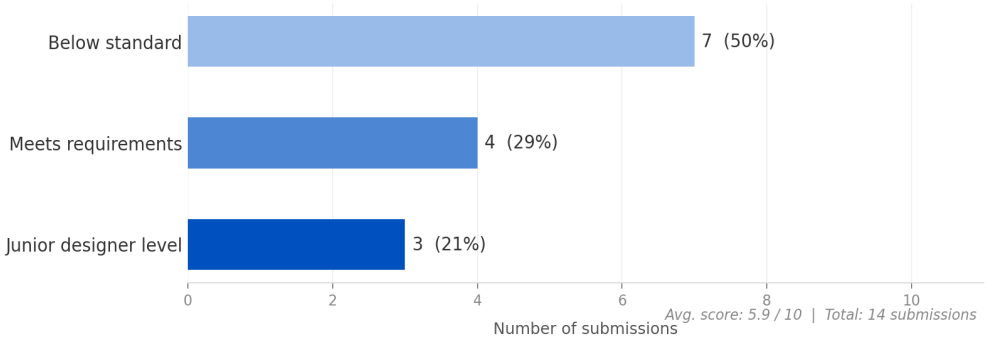


Figure 10 : Submission quality spread

(Own work, sources: [46,47])

Approximately seven submissions were below the expected standard, delivered in an incorrect format despite clear specification in the brief, or representing a first attempt at logo design without prior relevant experience. Approximately four submissions met the basic requirements in terms of format and output relevance. Three submissions demonstrated a level of craft consistent with a junior designer profile, including appropriate typography, spacing, and well-structured written documentation of design decisions. [63]

This distribution is worth reading in the context of the reward level. A junior logo design in the current market typically costs between 5,000 and 15,000 CZK when commissioned through a freelancer or junior designer. The 2,000 CZK reward set for this challenge was therefore significantly below the standard market rate for the deliverable. At this price point, the challenge attracted a broad entry pool, including candidates without prior design experience. When the cost of entry is the same for everyone, the submission pool reflects the full distribution of the candidate population, not a filtered segment of it. The average score of 5.9 across all fourteen submissions reflects this spread.

It is also worth noting that Sportera received multiple design iterations from several independent candidates and selected the best output from the pool, a format that a traditional freelance commission at the same price point would not provide. The platform delivered variety and selection optionality that the reward level alone would not have secured on the open market.

Feedback was delivered to all 14 submitting students in the form of a numerical score and written commentary from Sportera, fulfilling the guaranteed feedback mechanism identified as a primary pain reliever in the Value Proposition Analysis. The winning student received the 2,000 CZK reward. [63, 64]

2.5.3 Platform and Process Observations

The pilot generated two categories of operational observations: technical and process related.

On the technical side, a code error prevented the challenge from closing at the scheduled deadline. The mailing system failed due to an excessive number of requests, causing a temporary outage. The issue was identified and resolved within 24 hours. This incident is relevant not as evidence of systemic instability but as a data point about the platform's operational model. A single-developer team was able to diagnose and deploy a fix to a production environment within a day, which is consistent with the rapid iteration capacity that the Lean Startup methodology identifies as a structural advantage of early-stage startups. [64]

On the process side, Sportera required direct assistance from the RiseHigh team to complete the challenge brief. Onboarding consisted of a brainstorming session to clarify the company's needs and expected outputs, followed by a draft prepared by the RiseHigh team, which Sportera reviewed and approved with minor adjustments before the challenge was published. The total time investment for the company was in the range of a few dozen minutes. [63]

This is consistent with the demand side finding from section 2.2 that companies in the target segment require hands-on onboarding support in the early stage, while also establishing that this support does not represent a prohibitive time cost when the process is structured.

As the first company to complete the full challenge lifecycle on the platform, Sportera identified a series of minor UI and UX improvements. These were layout and design adjustments rather than functional gaps, and none affected the core challenge mechanics.

Their identification is a direct output of the cycle, the Measure step generated specific product inputs that feed into the next Build iteration. [63]

2.5.4 Comparative Finding: The TechFides Challenge

A second challenge run during a comparable period provides a contrast to the Sportera results. TechFides, a company in the technology sector, posted a hiring challenge on the platform during a period overlapping with the Easter holiday. The challenge ran for seven days and received zero student enrollments and zero submissions.

The complete absence of participation reflects three distinct factors. The first is structural. TechFides posted a hiring challenge a format where the reward is not a guaranteed payment but a chance of being invited to a job interview. As the registration motivation data established, 58% of students who completed the motivation step cited financial earnings as their main reason for joining. Challenge without a guaranteed reward directly contradicts the dominant motivation of the current user base, and this misalignment would have suppressed participation regardless of timing or marketing quality. [62]

The challenge launched during the Easter holiday period, when student engagement with professional platforms is structurally lower. Marketing preparation was insufficient, with limited time and content produced and a short distribution window before the challenge opened. [64]

Unlike the Sportera challenge, where RiseHigh was the sole channel promoting the opportunity, TechFides was running its own hiring campaign across LinkedIn, its own career page and other job portals. Students who discovered the role through those channels had no reason to engage with it through RiseHigh specifically. This parallel distribution reduced the platform's ability to capture the attention of even those students who were otherwise interested.

Table 7 : Comparative table of two finished challenges

(Own work, sources: [63])

	Sportera	**TechFides**
Challenge type	Bounty challenge	Hiring challenge
Guaranteed reward	2,000 CZK	None
Duration	27 days	~10 days
Timing	Nov–Dec 2025	Easter holiday period
Enrolled students	30	0
Submissions received	14	0
Marketing preparation	IG campaign + leaflets	Insufficient
Distribution exclusivity	RiseHigh only	Parallel (own channels, LinkedIn, other portals)
Company onboarding	Joint session + RiseHigh draft, ~30 min	Joint session + company self-served, polished
Outcome	Winner selected, feedback delivered to all	No output for either side

Sportera and TechFides cases establish that supply-side activation is not automatic. It is a function of challenge design, reward structure, timing, and distribution quality. The absence of any one of these factors is sufficient to produce complete activation failure.

2.5.5 Key Findings

The pilot data produces four findings that serve as direct inputs to the proposal section.

The first concerns supply-side motivation. A 46.7% submission rate among enrolled students, combined with rapid cap saturation, confirms that student motivation is present when reward structure and challenge design align with documented preferences. The limiting factor is challenge volume and relevance, not inherent disengagement. [64]

The second concerns the relationship between reward level and submission quality. The 2,000 CZK reward attracted a broad entry pool, including candidates without prior design experience, which is expected at that price point. More significant is that three submissions reached a standard consistent with junior professional work, including appropriate typography, output layout and design documentation. [63]

For a deliverable that typically costs 5,000 to 15,000 CZK on the open market, the platform delivered output at a fraction of the market rate, alongside multiple alternative concepts for comparison. This suggests that the challenge format generates disproportionate value relative to the reward level when the brief is well-specified, and that reward level is a design variable that directly shapes the quality distribution of the submission pool.

The third concerns onboarding dependency. Companies in the target segment require direct support to define and publish a challenge. The time investment is measurable in dozens of minutes, but the dependency on RiseHigh team involvement means the current B2B process is not fully self-serve. [63]

The fourth concerns the binary nature of activation failure. The TechFides case confirms that supply-side failures are complete, not gradual. A challenge without submissions produces no value for either side, confirming that challenge design, reward structure, timing and distribution exclusivity are preconditions, not variables.

2.6 SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis synthesizes the findings of the analytical sections presented in this chapter. Each point is grounded in a specific finding from the preceding analysis rather than representing a general assumption about the platform or the market. The purpose of this synthesis is to identify the strategic position of RiseHigh at the current stage of its development and to establish the critical factors that the proposal section must address.

Table 8 : RiseHigh SWOT analysis

(Own work)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Work sample evaluation: predictive validity 0.54 **Guaranteed feedback, blind review** built into platform flow, not optional **VUT startup:** institutional credibility + low-cost beachhead access **Validated traction:** real behavioral data	**B2B onboarding not fully self-serve:** team polish required before publishing **Insufficient challenge volume:** 65 of 119 students inactive **No acquisition analytics:** click-through and drop-off tracking **Single developer:** single point of failure **Bootstrapped:** 50,000 CZK limits parallel execution
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• **Institutional access gap:** FI MUNI + FIT VUT fees 100–300K CZK exclude startups • **JIC Ecosystem:** pre-qualified early-adopter segment • **JobChallenge fair:** 1,500 students, direct access • **Academic integration:** organic supply growth via VUT syllabi **Skills-based hiring trend:** talent pool up to 10x larger	• **Cold start problem:** binary failure confirmed by TechFides case • **Decline junior position:** VUT foothold does not transfer automatically • **Low switching costs:** platform used alongside competitors • **Seasonal patterns:** holidays + exam periods suppress activation

2.6.1 Strengths

The platform's most significant strength is its core evaluation model. Work sample tests, where candidates complete a task representative of the actual role, are consistently identified in personnel selection research as stronger predictors of job performance than CV-based screening. This is a structural advantage grounded in how the product works, not a positioning claim. Guaranteed feedback and blind review reinforce this by directly addressing the two most critical student pains identified in the analysis: the black hole effect and informal filtering.

RiseHigh's VUT startup status provides institutional credibility and direct access to both sides of the beachhead market at a cost that an external entrant without this affiliation could not replicate. Finally, the platform already holds something most early-stage marketplaces do not: real behavioral data from a completed challenge cycle, including funnel conversion rates and student motivation data, which provide a validated baseline for future decisions. [64]

2.6.2 Weaknesses

The most critical weakness is challenge volume. The platform's core value on both sides depends on a sufficient density of active challenges, and the current state does not yet support this.

The B2B onboarding dependency is directly linked to this. Every company so far required direct team involvement to define and publish a challenge. While the time investment is modest when the process is structured, it means that company activation cannot scale without a proportional increase in team capacity, which the current two-person bootstrapped structure cannot easily provide. Beyond operational capacity, the platform currently has no meaningful presence outside the VUT ecosystem. Brand awareness among both startups and students outside Brno is effectively zero, which limits organic inbound from either side of the market. The absence of click-through and drop-off analytics further limits the team's ability to identify where users disengage and improve the funnel with reliable data. Finally, the available bootstrapped capital of approximately 50,000 CZK constrains the speed at which these gaps can be addressed simultaneously.

2.6.3 Opportunities

The most actionable opportunity is the institutional access gap. Formal university partnership programmes at FI MUNI and FIT VUT charge between 100,000 and 300,000 CZK per year, pricing out the early-stage startups that RiseHigh is specifically built for. This creates a well-defined underserved segment with no viable alternative currently available. The JIC ecosystem of 142 accelerated companies represents the most concentrated cluster of pre-qualified early adopters in the region, firms that are growth-oriented, actively hiring, and without dedicated HR capacity.

On the supply side, the JobChallenge fair provides direct annual access to 1,500 students at near-zero cost. The academic integration path, embedding RiseHigh challenges into VUT course syllabi, represents a longer-term organic growth channel that would generate student participation without paid acquisition. Both are consistent with a broader market shift toward skills-based hiring, a model that research increasingly identifies as expanding access to talent beyond what credential-based screening alone can reach. The market is structurally moving toward the model the platform is already built on.

2.6.4 Threats

The cold start problem is the most immediate operational threat. As the TechFides case confirmed, activation failure is binary. A challenge with no submissions delivers no value to either side, and this outcome can result from a single misaligned variable in reward structure, timing, or distribution. This makes the cold start not a growth challenge but a precondition for the platform to function at all.

A structural long-term threat is the decline of junior positions. Data documents a measurable drop in junior listings as a direct consequence of AI adoption across Czech companies. [27]

A platform built around junior hiring is exposed to this trend as the demand side of its market gradually contracts. Low switching costs compound the nearer-term competitive risk. Companies can simultaneously use RiseHigh alongside StartupJobs or LinkedIn without any friction, meaning retention depends entirely on consistent challenge performance rather than platform lock-in. Seasonal suppression and the geographic

concentration of the current user base in Brno round out the threat profile: both are manageable, but each requires deliberate operational decisions to mitigate.

2.7 Analytical synthesis

The analytical section examined RiseHigh's market from four angles: the structural conditions on both sides of the junior hiring market, the competitive landscape, the platform's value proposition, and the results of the first live challenge cycle. Read together, these findings produce a clear picture of where the opportunity lies, what is blocking it, and what the platform has already demonstrated is possible.

The junior hiring market in the Czech Republic is failing both sides simultaneously. Students graduate with credentials that no longer differentiate them in a market where more than half the relevant age group holds a degree. Companies, some of them founder-led without dedicated HR capacity, spend weeks processing applications that tell them very little about whether a candidate can do the job. The current tools available to both sides were built to solve a distribution problem, getting more applications in front of more companies, and they do that reasonably well. What they do not do is solve the evaluation problem, and that is where the gap that RiseHigh is built to address sits.

The competitive analysis confirmed that this gap is not being addressed by any existing platform. Every competitor in the Czech market competes on listing volume, brand recognition, and CV reach. The factors that RiseHigh is built around, verified work output, anonymous evaluation, guaranteed feedback, and a portfolio that grows with each completed challenge, score zero across the entire competitive landscape. No existing player has built a product around these dimensions because doing so would require abandoning the listing-based model that their entire business is built on.

The cold start is the only risk in the analysis that could prevent the platform from functioning at all. The TechFides case made this concrete: a challenge without submissions delivers nothing to either side, and the failure had nothing to do with the product. It came from a misaligned reward structure, poor timing, and insufficient distribution. The Sportera pilot ran the same product under better conditions and produced a 46.7% submission rate with three submissions reaching junior professional standard.

The gap between these two outcomes is entirely explained by how the challenge was designed and deployed, which means it is a controllable variable.

The pilot also produced a more finding about student motivation. Financial reward was the most frequently cited reason for registering, but the data also showed students motivated by portfolio building, practical experience, and the prospect of direct feedback from a real company. What the platform does not yet know is the relative weight of these motivations and how they interact with different challenge formats. A student drawn primarily by the reward may behave differently than one seeking a portfolio entry, and those differences have real implications for how challenges should be structured and communicated. The platform has identified what brings students in. What makes them stay and return is the question that the next phase of operation needs to answer.

The platform has validated the core cycle once, under partially controlled conditions. The Sportera pilot confirmed that the infrastructure works, that students engage when a challenge is well-designed, and that companies receive outputs they find genuinely useful. Whether this holds across different challenge types, different company profiles, and without the institutional familiarity that made the first pilot easier to run, remains open. That is precisely what Phase 1 of the proposed strategy is designed to test.

The analytical findings collectively point toward one conclusion: the platform is ready to enter the market, but the way it enters matters more than the speed at which it does so. The competitive gap establishes why the product has a place in this market. The pilot data establishes that the product works when conditions are right. What follows is a strategy for making those conditions reliable.

3 RECOMMENDATION PART

The analytical section established that RiseHigh is entering a market with a documented structural gap, a validated product, and a single completed challenge cycle as evidence that the model works. The goal now is to create a repeatable process for making that cycle happen consistently across different companies and different challenge types.

Before acquisition can scale, the conditions that determine whether a challenge succeeds or fails need to be reliable by design not dependent on getting everything right by intuition. That means addressing challenge format, reward structure, timing, and the onboarding process that gets a company from first contact to a published brief. Only once those variables are under control does it make sense to invest in bringing more companies and students onto the platform, because a broken challenge cycle repeated at scale produces nothing but a larger pool of disengaged users on both sides.

Acquisition itself cannot be treated as two separate problems. The platform's value to companies depends on students being present and engaged. Its value to students depends on companies posting challenges worth their time. The proposals address both sides in parallel, with a clear view of which side needs to move first and why. Pricing follows from this: the transition from the current model to one that reflects what the platform delivers is contingent on having built the reference base that makes a higher price defensible to a company that has not yet seen the product work.

The implementation framework at the end of this section brings these priorities together into a phased execution plan with defined metrics that determine when the platform has earned the right to shift its focus from validation to scale.

3.1 Strategic Framework: TOWS Analysis and Launch Phasing

3.1.1 TOWS Matrix

TOWS	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	**SO - Maxi-Maxi** VUT institutional credibility and the validated Sportera pilot data together unlock the JIC partnership. Concrete pilot results convert an institutional introduction into active company onboarding. The bounty format gives the platform a reliable activation mechanism for Phase 1 because it aligns with what the registration data shows students respond to when engaging with the platform for the first time. Guaranteed feedback and blind review are the differentiators that keep students coming back once the initial challenge cycle has been completed.	**WO - Mini-Maxi** Challenge volume is the most critical weakness. The JIC ecosystem is the fastest way to address it, reaching twenty to thirty pre-qualified companies through a single institutional channel compresses what would otherwise take months of individual outreach. The Sponsored Activation Programme bridges the gap between hiring challenges and the bounty format, giving companies with a hiring need a challenge that students have a concrete reason to engage with.
Threats (T)	**ST - Maxi-Mini** The work-sample evaluation model becomes more valuable as junior listings decline, verified output fills the gap that a shrinking CV pool leaves behind. Validated pilot data and VUT credibility counter the cold start risk by giving new companies a concrete result to evaluate rather than an unproven concept. Guaranteed feedback retains students even against zero switching costs, because no other platform currently offers a substantive response after every submission.	**WT - Mini-Mini** Low challenge volume and the cold start are addressed by bonus to hiring challenges, user activation and low-barrier challenges. Limited capital and declining junior listings point toward geographic concentration as a deliberate choice. Phase 1 focuses entirely on Brno, converting the constraint into a beachhead. The absence of funnel analytics combined with zero switching costs is the most urgent combination, without drop-off data, platform churn cannot be diagnosed until users have already left.

The SO quadrant establishes that institutional credibility and validated pilot data are the platform's strongest assets for early market entry. A cold outreach campaign to unknown contacts cannot achieve the same conversion rate as an introduction backed by a concrete case document and a university affiliation. This makes the JIC partnership the primary

B2B acquisition channel, and it frames the bounty format as the most reliable activation mechanism available at this stage because it aligns with what students have already demonstrated they respond to.

The WO quadrant identifies challenge volume as the most critical weakness and the JIC ecosystem as the fastest way to address it. Reaching twenty to thirty pre-qualified companies through a single institutional channel compresses what would otherwise take months of individual outreach. The Sponsored Activation Programme bridges the gap between hiring challenges and the bounty format, ensuring that companies with a hiring need can still run a challenge that students have a concrete reason to engage with.

The ST quadrant establishes that the work-sample evaluation model is a competitive asset because it directly addresses the decline of junior listings. While traditional CVs lose credibility, this model provides companies with verified work output and validated pilot data backed by VUT's institutional authority, converting the cold start risk into a manageable evaluation. The commitment to guaranteed substantive feedback further strengthens this position, building a unique retention loop and candidate loyalty that larger, more rigid competitors cannot replicate.

The WT quadrant produces two urgent operational decisions. Geographic concentration in Brno is a deliberate response to limited capital, converting a constraint into a focused beachhead rather than a liability. Implementing funnel analytics is an immediate product priority because without drop-off data the platform cannot identify where it is losing users until they are already gone.

3.1.2 Strategic Phasing

The TOWS analysis produces a two-phase launch structure. The logic behind this sequencing follows the soft launch principle. Phase 1 isolates and validates the core business metrics before Phase 2 activates full market entry. The target scope is deliberately narrow, focusing on one city, one primary institutional channel, and a prioritized challenge format. This is the atomic network approach in practice. Concentrating activity in a small enough segment achieves the liquidity that makes the platform valuable to both sides before expanding.

Phase 1 sole objective is to establish a consistent, repeatable challenge cycle within the Brno beachhead, meaning that active challenges reliably attract student submissions and that companies can move through the full cycle without requiring direct team involvement at every step. The JIC ecosystem is the primary B2B target in this phase because accelerated companies represent the early adopter segment in the technology adoption lifecycle. These are firms that have passed a competitive selection process, are actively building their teams, and are willing to adopt an unproven tool in exchange for a more efficient solution to a problem they already recognize. Until the cycle is repeatable, expanding to new geographies, challenge formats, or acquisition channels would dilute the limited capacity without generating activity that makes the platform valuable to either side.

Phase 2 runs from months four to six and activates once Phase 1 metrics confirm that the challenge cycle is stable. The objective shifts from establishing the cycle to scaling it. B2B outreach expands beyond the JIC cluster to the broader Brno SME segment and preparation for Prague market entry begins. The academic integration pathway moves from initial groundwork to active negotiation with course guarantors. Pricing transitions from the current penetration model to the value-based tier structure. The distinction between phases is not a calendar constraint. If Phase 1 metrics are reached earlier, Phase 2 activities begin earlier. If they are not reached by month three, Phase 2 activities do not begin until they are.

3.1.3 SMART Goals

3.1.3.1 Goal 1: Challenge volume and company activation

Reach 20 companies with at least five completed challenge cycles by the end of month six. A completed cycle means a published challenge, at least one student submission, and evaluated feedback delivered to all participants. The current baseline is seven companies that have actively posted at least one challenge as of April 2026, which means the target requires onboarding thirteen additional companies across the two phases. This is achievable given the B2B acquisition capacity described, where the JIC ecosystem alone provides a pre-qualified pool of 142 companies and direct outreach targets three to four new activations per month. Twenty is also the minimum number required to generate the

catalogue density that the 65 inactive students are waiting for, below this threshold, challenge volume remains the binding constraint on supply-side activation regardless of how many students are registered.

3.1.3.2 Goal 2: Supply-side activation rate

Maintain an average submission rate at or above 40% across all closed challenges throughout the launch period. The 46.7% rate achieved in the Sportera pilot is the only empirical baseline available, and it was produced under partially controlled conditions with a well-specified brief, an appropriate reward, and sufficient distribution lead time. Setting the target at 40% rather than 46.7% accounts for the fact that subsequent challenges will be posted by different companies with varying brief quality and reward structures. A consistent rate at this level across multiple cycles is a measurable indicator that the challenge design and timing principles are working in practice. If the rate falls below 40% across two consecutive challenges, it triggers a review of challenge design and distribution before the next launch rather than waiting until the end of the phase.

3.1.3.3 Goal 3: Challenge format validation

Complete at least one successful challenge cycle in each of the two formats the platform supports, bounty and hiring, with a submission rate at or above 40% in both, by the end of Phase 1. The bounty format has one completed cycle behind it, the Sportera pilot, which produced a 46.7% submission rate under partially controlled conditions. The hiring format has not yet been validated under any conditions that controlled for reward structure, timing, and distribution simultaneously. The Sponsored Activation Programme is the mechanism through which this validation happens: by contributing a financial reward to qualifying hiring challenges, it creates the conditions under which a fair comparison between the two formats becomes possible. Achieving this goal by the end of Phase 1 means the platform enters Phase 2 with evidence that both formats can reliably activate the supply side, not just one of them. Without that evidence, the Phase 2 strategy rests on an assumption rather than a documented result.

3.2 Product and Challenge Design

The Sportera pilot and the TechFides case together established that challenge outcomes are not primarily a function of platform quality, they are a function of how well the challenge itself is designed. A well-specified brief with an appropriate reward structure, launched at the right time with sufficient distribution, produced 30 enrolments and a 46.7% submission rate. The same platform, with a poorly timed challenge in the wrong format and without a financial reward, produced zero. The proposals in this section address the variables that sit between these two outcomes.

3.2.1 Sponsored Activation Programme

For hiring challenges where the company does not provide a financial reward, RiseHigh contributes a fixed activation bonus of 2,000 CZK for first place. The programme is capped at five challenges in Phase 1 with a total budget allocation of 10,000 CZK. Adding a financial reward to a hiring challenge also functions as a signaling mechanism, it raises the perceived value of participation and filters for candidates whose motivation goes beyond passive browsing.

To qualify, the company must complete a structured brief review session with the team before publishing. A joint working session clarifies the company's need, and a draft is reviewed and approved before the challenge goes live. The Sportera pilot established that this takes approximately 30 minutes of the company's time and directly determines the quality of the submission pool. For challenges where RiseHigh is contributing to the reward, this step is mandatory.

The programme is a Phase 1 experiment. In MVP terms, it isolates the reward variable while holding other conditions as controlled as possible, creating a direct comparison between a bounty challenge, a hiring challenge without a reward, and a hiring challenge with a RiseHigh-contributed bonus. The results will determine whether the hiring format is viable with a financial component and whether it warrants continued investment in Phase 2.

3.2.2 Platform Improvements

Beyond challenge design, the analytical section identified several product gaps that limit the platform's ability to scale acquisition and activation without proportional growth in team involvement. The following improvements address these gaps directly. Each is assigned an estimated implementation time that feeds into the implementation timeline.

3.2.2.1 Analytics and funnel tracking

The Sportera pilot generated two documented measurement limitations. Click-through tracking for the Instagram link and QR codes was not implemented, and drop-off within the enrolled students group could not be identified because no event tracking was in place between enrolment and submission. Implementing click-through tracking on all external links and QR codes and adding event-based tracking within the student flow. Recording when a student views a brief, begins a submission, and abandons it, converts the funnel from a table of end-state counts into an actionable diagnostic tool. Without it, decisions about acquisition and activation channels remain based on incomplete information regardless of how many challenges are run. Estimated implementation time: 1-2 weeks.

3.2.2.2 Skill-matching notifications

The platform currently matches students to relevant challenges through the catalogue and dashboard recommendations but relies on students to check these actively. The pilot data showed that the enrolment cap filled rapidly once students were aware of the Sportera challenge, the constraint was not willingness to participate but awareness of the opportunity. Implementing automated email and push notifications triggered when a new challenge is published that matches a student's declared skill profile converts a passive discovery mechanism into an active one. As challenge volume grows and the catalogue becomes more populated, this improvement becomes progressively more important. Estimated implementation time: 1-2 weeks.

3.2.2.3 AI-assisted brief formulation

Every company that has posted a challenge so far required direct team involvement to define and structure the brief. The process works but does not scale. The proposed solution is a conversational interface embedded in the challenge creation flow that guides companies through defining their problem, expected outputs, target skills and evaluation criteria, and generates a structured draft brief from their responses. This effectively replicates the structured onboarding session without requiring team time. This is a Phase 2 item, it should be built on patterns identified from Phase 1 onboarding sessions, which serve as direct input into what a well-specified brief looks like across different challenge types. Estimated implementation time: 3-4 weeks.

3.2.2.4 Teacher-facing dashboard

For university course guarantors to embed RiseHigh challenges into their syllabi sustainably, they need to monitor student participation, track submission status, and access evaluation results independently. In the current architecture this information is accessible only through the admin interface, making academic integration impractical at any scale. A dedicated dashboard giving course guarantors read access to participation and submission data for students enrolled through their course removes this dependency and makes the academic integration model self-serve from the faculty side. This is a Phase 2 item, to be built in parallel with academic integration conversations so the feature can be shaped around the specific needs that faculty members identify. Estimated implementation time: 2–3 weeks.

3.3 B2B Acquisition: Three-Layer Approach

Attracting companies to the platform requires a different approach at each stage of the relationship. Cold outreach to unknown contacts, a partnership with an established institutional player, and presence at ecosystem events each serve a distinct function and reach a different segment of the target market. The three layers below are designed to operate simultaneously rather than sequentially, each generates a different type of

company activation and together they cover the realistic B2B acquisition surface available to a bootstrapped two-person team in the Brno market.

3.3.1 Direct Outreach: ICP Definition and Contact Sequence

The demand side analysis defined the ideal customer profile as an early to growth-stage startup, where hiring decisions are made by the founder or a technical lead, and where the cost of a bad junior hire is acute but the capacity to run a structured process is limited. On LinkedIn, this translates to a specific search profile: founders, CTOs, and heads of product at that are actively hiring or have posted a job listing in the past 30 days. These are people who are already feeling the problem RiseHigh solves.

Every outreach message is built around something specific to that company. An open role they are advertising, a product they recently launched, a deliverable type that maps directly to what a bounty challenge on RiseHigh can produce. The first message after a connection is accepted introduces RiseHigh in three sentences: the problem it addresses, what it does differently from a standard job listing, and one concrete outcome from the Sportera pilot. That pilot result is the only social proof currently available and it is used explicitly in every conversation, because a founder who sees a 46.7% submission rate and a completed evaluation cycle from a company in the same ecosystem is looking at evidence, not a pitch.

If there is no response, one follow-up goes out with a direct question about whether a short call makes sense. If the contact does not respond, it moves to email, where the same logic applies but with slightly more room: one sentence on the problem they recognize, one on what RiseHigh does differently, one on the Sportera outcome, and a single link to book a twenty-minute call. The call to action is always one thing, never a list of options.

3.3.2 JIC Partnership

The JIC ecosystem is the most concentrated cluster of pre-qualified early adopter companies available in Brno. Reaching them through a JIC partnership rather than individual cold outreach would compress months of prospecting into a single institutional introduction.

RiseHigh currently has no existing relationship with JIC, which means the preparation before the first contact matters as much as the contact itself. Three things need to be in place before approaching JIC. The first is a one-page case document built around the Sportera pilot, specific numbers, the challenge cycle timeline, and what the company received at the end of it. This is the primary credibility asset for any institutional conversation. The second is a clear value proposition for JIC itself. JIC's interest is the success of its portfolio companies. RiseHigh gives those companies access to student talent for one-off deliverables and pre-hire screening at a price point that the formal university partnership programmes exclude them from entirely. The third is a defined and modest ask to introduce RiseHigh through JIC's existing communication channels, a newsletter mention, a slot at a portfolio meetup, or a short demo session for JIC alumni.

RiseHigh should not enter the conversation as a startup looking for distribution. It should enter as a solution to a documented problem that JIC's own portfolio already faces. The ask is small and the benefit to their companies is concrete, which makes the value exchange easy to justify internally.

The target outcome in Phase 1 is an introduction to twenty to thirty portfolio companies, with a conversion rate of twenty-five to thirty percent producing five to eight new active companies from this channel alone.

3.3.3 Events: JobChallenge Fair and Czech Startup Week

Events serve a different function than outreach or partnership, they provide direct access to a concentrated audience in a context where RiseHigh's institutional credibility is most visible. JobChallenge fair is primarily a B2C acquisition event, but it also attracts company representatives and provides an opportunity for face-to-face conversations that outreach cannot replicate. The proposed presence at the fair includes a physical stand with a live demo of the challenge creation flow and a printed one-pager summarizing the Sportera results. Companies that express interest at the event are followed up within forty-eight hours with the same outreach sequence described in section 3.3.1, with the in-person conversation as the opening rather than a cold connection request.

Czech Startup Week and comparable ecosystem events serve a complementary function. The goal is to boost visibility among the broader startup community and potential conversations with accelerators and incubators outside Brno whose portfolio companies overlap with the RiseHigh ICP. Phase 1 presence at these events is limited to one or two appearances with a clear conversion goal. The metric is not impressions or brand awareness but the number of qualified company conversations that result in a follow-up call.

3.4 B2C Acquisition

Acquiring students requires a different operational approach than acquiring companies. A company needs to be walked through a value proposition and convinced to post a challenge. A student needs to find out that a relevant challenge exists before it closes. Every acquisition effort in Phase 1 is tied to a specific active challenge, targeted at the student profile that matches it, and distributed from the moment the challenge goes live.

The long-term positioning goal runs alongside this. RiseHigh is built to be a career development tool, a place where students accumulate a track record of real work evaluated by real companies. That identity needs to be consistent in how the platform communicates with students from the beginning, even while Phase 1 leans on financial reward as the primary entry point.

3.4.1 Challenge Format: Bounty-First in Phase 1

The registration data established financial reward as the dominant student motivation, and the Value Proposition Canvas confirmed it as one of the primary pain relievers on the student side. Bounty challenges are the format that fulfils this directly.

The Sportera pilot is the only completed challenge cycle the platform has. It was a bounty challenge, and it is the only format for which there is documented evidence that the full cycle works under real conditions. Phase 1 concentrates on replicating what has already worked before introducing formats that have not yet been validated.

In practice, this means that B2B outreach actively targets companies whose immediate need aligns with the bounty format. When approaching a new company, the first

conversation steers toward a concrete deliverable rather than a hiring need, because a well-scoped bounty challenge is faster to publish, easier to promote to students, and more likely to produce the submission density the platform needs at this stage. Challenge volume is the priority above all else, which means no company is turned away and no challenge format is refused.

Hiring challenges are a natural part of the catalogue, and some companies will come with a hiring need as their primary motivation. For those cases, the Sponsored Activation Programme provides a financial component that brings the challenge closer to the bounty format in terms of student motivation.

3.4.2 Acquisition: Challenge-Tied Distribution

Every acquisition push is built around one specific active challenge. The content is always concrete: the brief in plain language, the reward amount, the deadline, and what the student receives beyond the money, specifically a verified portfolio entry and guaranteed written feedback from the company. Generic platform advertising does not run in Phase 1 because a student responding to a specific opportunity is already closer to submission than a student who just heard the platform exists.

Distribution runs in two tiers. The first is zero-cost: the platform's own Instagram, faculty and university channels that have agreed to share challenge opportunities, and direct outreach to relevant student groups. The second is a single boosted Instagram post per challenge, geographically targeted to students in Brno, at 500 to 1,000 CZK. The key metric for each push is enrolled students. A student who registers but does not engage with any active challenge has not been activated, and the acquisition effort has not yet produced value. If a challenge push produces fewer than ten enrolments, the content, targeting, or channel mix is reviewed before the next launch.

3.4.3 Faculty-Level Density

Broad acquisition across all faculties is less effective in Phase 1 than concentrated acquisition within one specific faculty. A dense cluster of students from the same

programme shares skill profiles, knows each other, and is more likely to spread awareness of the platform organically.

The approach is simple. For each challenge, one faculty is selected as the primary acquisition target based on skill match between the challenge type and the student population. A graphic design challenge targets design-adjacent programmes. A marketing challenge targets FP VUT or MUNI's Faculty of Economics. This is a distribution focus, not a restriction, the challenge remains open to all registered students regardless of faculty or university. The targeted outreach simply ensures that the students most likely to submit a strong solution are the first to hear about it.

Reaching students at faculty level does not require a formal agreement. Every faculty has student groups and communication channels that are accessible through one or two well-placed contacts. One active student per target faculty who shares the challenge link within their existing peer network is sufficient. No formal structure or compensation is needed on either side.

3.4.4 Networking Positioning

Career centers account for fewer than 5% of successful placements, and students are increasingly aware that traditional application channels are not working well for them. RiseHigh fits into this gap as a way to make a concrete impression on a real company through work rather than through a CV. The platform should be communicated to students consistently as a tool for building a track record. Whether or not a student wins a challenge, they have produced something a real company evaluated and responded to with written feedback. This framing is consistent across all student-facing communication: submit real work, get feedback, build something you can show.

3.4.5 Challenge Timing and Inter-Period Operations

High engagement launch windows are the beginning of each academic semester and the active periods of October through November and March through April. Challenges launched during exam periods or summer months carry a meaningfully higher risk of low

participation, and wherever possible the team steers companies toward windows where student engagement is predictably higher.

Timing is a strong operational preference rather than a hard constraint. If a company comes with a two-week window and a well-scoped brief, the challenge goes live. A challenge launched outside the preferred windows with strong design still produces value, and any cycle that runs under non-ideal conditions becomes an additional data point on how much timing influences outcomes.

Every challenge should have a minimum 21-day submission window where the company's timeline allows it. The first week is dedicated primarily to distribution, content creation, and targeted outreach to the relevant student segment. The Sportera data showed that 42.9% of submissions arrived in the final two days, a pattern that reflects how students work and one that only develops if the window is long enough for it.

The periods between active challenges are used for company pipeline development, brief preparation, and product iteration so that the next challenge is ready to publish as soon as a high-engagement window opens. The goal is to keep the platform active enough that students who check in between challenges find something worth coming back for.

3.4.6 Academic Integration

Academic integration is a Phase 2 objective, but the groundwork starts in Phase 1 because academic processes move on semester timescales.

The value proposition for faculty is direct. Students complete a real challenge brief from a company in their field, receive evaluated feedback, and produce a verified portfolio entry as part of their assessed coursework. The faculty member does not need to source the company, define the brief, or evaluate the submissions. What they gain is a practical assessment format with a direct impact on student employability, metric universities are increasingly measured against.

The blind review mechanism provides a structural safeguard, companies evaluate submissions anonymously, without knowing student identities, but the separation between platform operation and academic assessment needs to be explicit in any faculty agreement.

The first step is identifying two or three courses at FP VUT where project-based practical assessment is already part of the curriculum. These are the most realistic entry points because the challenge format fits naturally into an assessment structure that already exists. Once the right courses are identified, the relevant course guarantors are approached with a specific integration proposal.

These conversations serve two purposes. The first is to agree on how a RiseHigh challenge fits into their course. The second is to understand exactly what the guarantor needs to monitor and manage student participation independently. That input directly shapes the teacher-facing dashboard around the actual requirements rather than developed generically and adapted later.

Phase 2 ends with the teacher dashboard complete and tested with at least one course guarantor, ready for broader rollout. A guarantor who has been part of shaping the tool from the beginning is also the most credible reference point for expanding the integration to other faculties and programmes beyond Brno.

3.4.7 Activating the Existing Student Base

The current registered user base includes a significant number of students who signed up but have not yet submitted a solution to any challenge. Before investing in acquiring new users, Phase 1 addresses this pool directly. The platform's skill data provides a clear starting point: an analysis of the most frequently declared skills across inactive accounts identifies which challenge type would be relevant to the largest share of this group. The first challenge targeting that skill is then distributed specifically to these students. A student who registered because the platform looked interesting but never found a relevant challenge is in a fundamentally different position than a cold acquisition target. The activation barrier is lower because the first step has already been taken.

3.4.8 RiseHigh Challenges

Alongside company-posted challenges, RiseHigh will run a series of its own repeatable skill-verification challenges. These are short, well-defined tasks scoped around a single skill, evaluated directly by the RiseHigh team and invited practitioners from relevant

fields. There is no financial reward attached. The purpose is to give students a low-commitment way to complete their first challenge on the platform without the pressure of competing for a company's attention or a cash prize. A student who completes a RiseHigh Challenge has a verified portfolio entry, a piece of written feedback, and a concrete reason to return when a company-posted challenge matching their skills goes live. This format also helps address one of the platform's structural risks: students who are career-motivated but hesitant to engage with a company challenge before they feel ready now have a structured on-ramp.

3.5 Pricing strategy

3.5.1 Current Position and the Case for Transition

RiseHigh's current price of 1,000 CZK per challenge was set deliberately low to remove the financial barrier for early-stage companies during the launch phase. The competitive pricing analysis showed that this is seven times cheaper than StartupJobs and up to 39 times cheaper than Jobs.cz premium formats. The logic was straightforward, get companies onto the platform before price becomes a reason not to try it.

The problem is that 1,000 CZK prices RiseHigh as a cheaper job board rather than as a different product. Every competing platform sells visibility. RiseHigh sells evaluated work output, a company receives actual deliverables from real candidates before making any commitment. The current price point does not reflect this distinction.

The economic case for transition is clear when you compare what companies currently pay for alternatives that deliver far less. Agency fees and job portal listings cost significantly more and offer no guarantee of candidate quality. RiseHigh at Starter pricing delivers verified work output from multiple candidates at a fraction of those costs. The value gap between what the platform delivers and what it currently charges is the entire basis for the transition.

The pricing transition does not happen immediately. Two conditions need to be met first. A consistent submission rate above 40% across multiple challenge cycles confirms that the platform reliably delivers what it promises. A reference base of at least five to ten

completed challenge cycles gives new companies enough evidence to evaluate the platform on outcomes rather than on price alone. Both are Phase 1 objectives.

3.5.2 Proposed Pricing Model

The model is built around a clear progression that reflects where a company is in its relationship with the platform.

During Phase 1, companies approached through direct outreach and the JIC partnership receive their first challenge at no cost. This is not a permanent free tier but a deliberate Phase 1 acquisition decision. The platform is building its reference base and a company that has completed one challenge cycle at no cost is significantly easier to convert to a paying customer than one that has not yet experienced the product. Once the first challenge is complete, all subsequent challenges are priced at the standard rate.

From Phase 2 onwards, a single challenge is priced at 2,500 CZK as a listing fee. Compared to StartupJobs and Jobs.cz, this positions RiseHigh as meaningfully more accessible for early-stage companies while reflecting the distinct value of evaluated work output over a standard job listing.

Starter at 2,990 CZK per month unlocks both bounty and hiring challenge formats with a shared limit of three challenges per month. Additional challenges can be added at 1,500 CZK each. A company running two or more bounty challenges per month breaks even against standalone pricing from the first month, and gains access to hiring challenges on top.

Growth at 4,990 CZK per month includes five challenges per month, additional challenges at 1,000 CZK each, and adds access to the student catalogue, a searchable database of profiles filtered by skills students have demonstrated through completed challenges. A portfolio entry earned through an evaluated challenge carries filtering capacity that a self-declared skill cannot. Students with contact enabled can be reached directly.

Enterprise is a custom plan defined in a dedicated onboarding call. It includes everything in Growth plus featured placement on the homepage, promotion across RiseHigh social

channels, and a fully managed concierge service for brief creation and challenge setup. Pricing and features are agreed individually.

The pricing is structured so that moving up a tier always makes more financial sense than staying put. The tipping point from standalone challenges to Starter comes at the second challenge, and from Starter to Growth at the fourth. Each step-up costs marginally more but delivers meaningfully more, with the student catalogue as the critical unlock at Growth level. The catalogue is not just an add-on, it is the point where RiseHigh stops being a challenge tool and becomes a talent platform. It shows what students have already delivered and how companies rated it, not what they claim they can do. That is a fundamentally different kind of access than any job board offers.

3.6 Implementation Plan and Financial Framework

The proposals in the preceding sections are sequenced into a six-month execution plan. Phase 1 runs from months one to three with a single objective: establish a consistent, repeatable challenge cycle within the Brno beachhead. Phase 2 runs from months four to six and shifts the objective to scale. Phase 2 does not begin on a fixed date. It begins when Phase 1 metrics confirm that the challenge cycle is stable. If the submission rate falls consistently below 40% or fewer than eight companies are active by the end of month three, Phase 2 activities are delayed until those conditions are met.

3.6.1 Implementation Timeline

The strategy launches at the end of July. Phase 1 runs through October and is built around one timing insight, September is the highest-engagement window of the year for both sides of the market. Companies resume hiring after summer and students enter a new semester actively looking for relevant experience. Everything in Phase 1, product readiness, B2B pipeline, academic integration conversations, and the first RiseHigh Challenges needs to be in place before that window opens, not during it. Month one is preparation. Month two is activation. Month three is the data month, where the first completed challenge cycles generate the funnel and brief quality insights the team uses to iterate before Phase 2.

The pivot check at the end of month three is the gate between phases. If submission rates are consistently above 40% and at least eight companies are active, Phase 2 launches in November anchored by the JobChallenge fair. If not, the fair still takes place but Phase 2 scaling activities are delayed until the underlying issues are resolved. The distinction matters: the fair is a fixed event that cannot be moved, but the decision to scale around it depends on whether the challenge cycle has proven reliable enough to handle the volume it will bring.

Phase 2 runs from November through January, opening with the JobChallenge fair. The platform arrives at the fair with two or three active challenges already running, so students who register on the day have an immediate reason to submit rather than waiting for something to come later. Pricing tiers launch at the same time, and the AI brief tool development begins based on onboarding patterns from Phase 1. December extends the post-fair momentum with follow-up challenges and Prague pilot outreach. January closes the six-month period with a full review of B2B performance, pricing conversion, and academic integration progress and sets the acquisition and commercial plan for the spring semester.

Table 9 : Implementation timeline

(Own work)

	Product	B2B Acquisition	B2C Acquisition	Pricing
PHASE 1: Preparation & Foundation (July - October)				
Month 1 *Jul - Aug*	Analytics tracking + skill-matching notifications; onboarding flow review and documentation	JIC case document prepared; LinkedIn outreach begins (50 contacts/mo); first company briefs in preparation	Academic integration conversations initiated at FP VUT; existing inactive base targeted with skill-matched content	Free first challenge + Sponsored Activation Programme active
Month 2 *September*	Skill-matching notifications deployed; first RiseHigh Challenges launched to build student portfolio base	JIC first contact; 3-5 companies onboarded; first company challenges go live ahead of semester peak	Start-of-semester acquisition push; RiseHigh Challenges active as low-barrier on-ramp for new students	
Month 3 *October*	First challenge cycle data analyzed: funnel drop-off identified, brief quality reviewed, notification performance assessed; product iteration deployed	JIC demo session; Phase 1 outreach review; target 8+ active companies; second wave of company briefs prepared	Mid-semester acquisition push; faculty density targeting; follow-up to existing registrants; JobChallenge fair preparation begins	Phase 1 pricing review
Pivot Check	*Submission rate consistently above 40% and at least 8 active companies? If yes: Phase 2 begins with JobChallenge fair as the primary activation event. If not: diagnose failing variable and correct before expanding.*			
PHASE 2: Scale & Transition (November - January)				
Month 4 *November*	AI brief tool development begins based on Phase 1 onboarding patterns	Outreach expands to broader Brno SME; Prague research begins; JobChallenge fair company presence	JobChallenge fair, primary B2C acquisition event (1,500 students); challenge-tied push around active listings	Starter + Growth tiers launch; first subscription conversion tracking
Month 5 *December*	AI brief tool deployed; teacher dashboard development begins with guarantor input	Prague pilot outreach (5-10 companies); Czech Startup Week participation	Post-fair follow-up challenges: academic pilot course confirmed; second acquisition event	Subscription conversion analysis: tier adjustments if needed
Month 6 *January*	Teacher dashboard tested with first course guarantor; spring semester product readiness review	Phase 2 B2B review; Prague viability assessment; spring semester outreach plan prepared	Academic pilot confirmed for spring 2027; broader faculty rollout planned; spring semester acquisition calendar set	Full pricing model review; prepare for spring semester commercial push

3.6.2 Budget Allocation

The total available budget is 50,000 CZK. The platform currently runs at zero infrastructure cost as hosting and the database are both on free tiers, which means the entire amount is available for market activation rather than operations. This is an unusual position for a bootstrapped product at this stage and it shapes how the budget is structured.

The allocation below maps directly to the acquisition and activation proposals in the preceding sections. The two largest items address the two highest-priority problems the strategy identified. The Sponsored Activation Programme takes the largest share because cold start failure is the only risk in the matrix rated Critical. Without supply-side activation on hiring challenges, the three-way format comparison the programme is designed to produce cannot happen. The JobChallenge fair receives equal weight because it is the single highest-density B2C acquisition event available to the platform, with 1,500 students in direct attendance at near-zero marginal cost per contact.

Table 10 : RiseHigh budget allocation

Category	Amount	Justification
Sponsored Bonuses	10,000 CZK	5 hiring challenges x 2,000 CZK first-place reward. Direct cold start intervention for the hiring challenge format.
JobChallenge Fair	10,000 CZK	Stand registration, roll-up banner, printed materials, QR codes. Largest single B2C acquisition event available, 1,500 students in direct attendance.
Social Media Content Production	8,000 CZK	Per-challenge Instagram graphics and copy, reusable visual templates, 4-5 boosted posts at challenge launches. Supports the challenge-tied acquisition principle.
Outreach and Partnership Materials	6,000 CZK	Sportera case study document design and print, JIC presentation materials, cold outreach one-pager. Primary credibility asset for B2B cold contact.
Faculty and Event Outreach	5,000 CZK	Printed materials for faculty-level student acquisition, participation costs for Czech Startup Week or a second Phase 2 event.
Phase 2 Reserve	6,000 CZK	Prague first outreach steps, unexpected Phase 2 acquisition opportunities. Allocated based on Phase 1 outcomes.
Contingency Reserve	5,000 CZK	Unforeseen expenses across both phases.
TOTAL	**50,000 CZK**	

The remaining items are sized to support credible execution of the B2B and B2C acquisition channels without overspending before Phase 1 results are known. Social media content production covers the per-challenge Instagram output that the challenge-tied acquisition principle requires. Outreach materials cover the Sportera case study document and JIC presentation identified as the primary credibility asset for cold B2B contact. Faculty and event outreach covers physical presence at Czech Startup Week and the printed materials needed for faculty-level student acquisition. The Phase 2 reserve and contingency together hold 22% of the budget unallocated. The most consequential Phase 2 decisions should be made on the basis of Phase 1 data, not committed in advance of it.

3.6.3 Financial Outlook and Pricing Transition

Phase 1 trades short-term revenue for validated reference cases. Companies onboarded during this phase receive their first challenge at no cost, which removes financial friction, gets them through a full blind-review evaluation cycle, and produces the verified submission rate baseline that Phase 2 B2B acquisition depends on. A company that completes a successful cycle becomes the social proof that converts the next ten conversations.

Phase 2 activates the pricing transition. The revenue model reflects two demand streams identified through Phase 1 onboarding: companies seeking specific deliverables, which translate into standalone bounty challenges at 2,000 CZK, and companies integrating the platform into their hiring process, which convert to monthly subscriptions. The core financial objective of Phase 2 is moving active users from one-off transactions to Monthly Recurring Revenue.

A conservative conversion scenario assumes that by the end of month six, out of 20 active companies, four convert to Starter (11,960 CZK MRR) and one to Growth (4,990 CZK MRR), generating a combined MRR of 16,950 CZK. Supplemented by transactional bounty revenue, this comfortably covers the infrastructure costs that will transition from free to paid tiers as platform usage scales (approximately 1,000 CZK per month). The absolute revenue at month six is modest, but its strategic value is high. A platform exiting the launch phase with 20 active companies, a documented submission rate above 40%, and a proven willingness to pay demonstrates validated Product-Market Fit.

3.6.4 Unit Economics and Financial Sustainability

The viability of a two-sided platform depends on the structural relationship between the cost of acquiring users and the value they generate. The 50,000 CZK budget is not general operational expense, but a calculated investment partitioned to build liquidity on both sides of the marketplace.

On the B2B side, the direct allocation for company acquisition is 16,000 CZK - 6,000 CZK for outreach materials and 10,000 CZK for the Sponsored Activation Programme. Across 20 target companies, this produces a Customer Acquisition Cost of 800 CZK per

company. At Starter pricing of 2,990 CZK per month, the payback period is under one week of subscription value. Even under a conservative assumption that a company stays on Starter for only three months, the resulting CLV:CAC ratio of 11.2:1 significantly outperforms the 3:1 benchmark for sustainable unit economics.

On the B2C side, acquisition costs function as the platform's cost of goods sold — student liquidity is what makes the product sellable to companies. Allocating 23,000 CZK to student channels (JobChallenge fair, social media, faculty outreach) to reach the 180 new registrations target produces an acquisition cost of 127 CZK per student. Adjusted for the 45% activation rate, the cost per actively submitting student is 283 CZK.

The remaining 11,000 CZK is held in strategic reserves. As infrastructure costs transition from free to paid tiers in Phase 2, the platform requires only a single active Starter subscription to reach operational break-even. The GTM strategy exits month six with partitioned acquisition costs, validated unit economics, and the structural foundation of a sustainable business rather than a prototype

3.6.5 Risk Matrix

The six risks below are drawn directly from the analytical section. Each represents a documented failure mode rather than a hypothetical concern. Probability and impact are assessed in the context of Phase 1 conditions. The colour coding in the table reflects the severity of each combination: red cells indicate critical impact, orange indicates high impact, and green indicates manageable impact.

Table 11 : RiseHigh Risk Matrix

(Own work)

Risk	Probability	Impact	Mitigation
Cold start: challenge without submissions	**High**	**Critical**	Sponsored Activation Programme; bounty-first Phase 1 prioritisation; timing calendar as operational rule
B2B onboarding bottleneck	**Medium**	**High**	Self-serve onboarding improvements, brief review session mandatory for sponsored challenges
JIC partnership fails to materialize	**Medium**	**High**	JIC portfolio companies reachable via direct LinkedIn outreach
Seasonal suppression	**Medium**	**High**	Timing calendar defines launch windows; inter-period operations prevent gaps in team activity
AI-driven decline in junior positions	**Low**	**High**	Bounty format is independent of hiring demand; positioning as screening layer reduces exposure to junior hiring contraction
Budget depletion before Phase 2	**Medium**	**High**	Category caps enforced monthly; activation bonus hard-capped at 10,000 CZK; Phase 2 reserve ring-fenced

The cold start risk is rated Critical because its consequences are binary, a challenge without submissions delivers no value to either side and directly undermines the platform's credibility with both companies and students. Every other risk in the matrix is manageable if the cold start condition is controlled first. The budget, the timing calendar, the Sponsored Activation Programme, and the bounty-first Phase 1 prioritization all exist primarily to reduce the probability of this single outcome.

3.7 Strategic Synthesis

The proposals across this chapter answer one operational question: how to turn a product that worked once into a platform that works repeatedly. The answer is sequencing. Product readiness, B2B and B2C acquisition, and pricing do not happen in parallel because the same team is executing all of them, and they do not happen in any order because each depends on the one before. Product groundwork in month one creates the conditions under which acquisition in months two and three has something reliable to onboard companies and students into. Acquisition in Phase 1 builds the reference base that makes the pricing transition in Phase 2 defensible to a company that has not yet seen the product work. The implementation timeline is not a calendar but a dependency map, and the pivot check at the end of month three is the structural mechanism that prevents Phase 2 scaling from happening before the cycle it scales has actually been validated.

What this strategy buys is not revenue at month six. The MRR figure of 16,950 CZK is enough to cover infrastructure but not enough to fund exponential growth, and it was never the point. What month six produces is something the platform cannot buy with capital it does not have: twenty companies with completed cycles, a sustained submission rate above 40%, two validated challenge formats, an academic pilot confirmed for the following semester, and a documented case base for Prague entry. The risk matrix identifies cold start as the only failure mode that could prevent any of this from happening, and every operational decision in the strategy, from the Sponsored Activation Programme to the timing calendar to the bounty-first Phase 1 prioritisation, exists primarily to control that one variable.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to propose a feasible Go-to-Market strategy for RiseHigh, a challenge-based hiring platform entering the Czech junior labor market as a bootstrapped two-person operation. The four partial goals have each been addressed across the analytical and proposal chapters. The structural conditions on both sides of the market have been documented, the core value exchange has been evaluated under real market conditions, the competitive position has been established, and a phased execution framework has been proposed within the platform's current resource constraints. The main goal of producing a strategy grounded in validated data has been met.

The work produced a finding that extends beyond the original problem statement. The Czech junior hiring market is not failing because the available tools are inadequate. It is failing because those tools were built to solve a different problem. Existing platforms optimize for distribution, meaning the speed and volume at which applications reach companies. They were never designed to solve the evaluation problem, which is what both sides of the market are now structurally short of. This distinction is what makes the strategic gap RiseHigh occupies a substantive one rather than a positioning claim, and it provides the platform with a defensible position against incumbents many times its size. These incumbents cannot close the gap without abandoning the business model that established their market position in the first place.

The defining methodological decision of this thesis is the use of primary research conducted on the live product rather than hypothetical market analysis. The Sportera pilot and the comparative TechFides case together produced the type of behavioral evidence that secondary research cannot replicate. The platform was demonstrated to function under real conditions, and the conditions under which it fails were equally well documented. The difference between a 46.7% submission rate and zero submissions was not a product failure but a design failure, and the proposed strategy is constructed around the variables that close it. This distinguishes the work from a strategy proposal grounded in assumption and allows the recommendations to be operational rather than aspirational.

The strategy is structured around the recognition that a two-sided platform cannot be launched in parallel across both sides without producing the cold start outcome documented as the single most consequential failure mode. The phased approach, the

bounty-first prioritization, the Sponsored Activation Programme, implementation timeline and the November JobChallenge fair are all designed to control this variable. The pricing transition follows from validation rather than preceding it. The unit economics confirm that the budget allocation produces sustainable acquisition costs on both sides of the marketplace, with operational break-even achievable on a single Starter subscription once Phase 2 monetisation activates.

This thesis does not claim that the strategy will succeed in execution, as no pre-launch GTM proposal can offer that guarantee. What it does establish is that every recommendation is grounded in documented market data or behavioural evidence from the platform's own pilot cycles. The structure of the framework also allows the team to detect failure early enough to correct it before the budget is exhausted. The pivot check at month three is the mechanism that converts a six-month commitment into two separate three-month commitments, each measurable against defined conditions. For a bootstrapped team operating under capital constraints, this represents the most consequential safeguard the strategy provides.

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LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

AARRR – Acquisition, Activation, Retention, Referral, Revenue

AI – Artificial Intelligence

B2B – Business-to-Business

B2C – Business-to-Consumer

CAC – Customer Acquisition Cost

CLV – Customer Lifetime Value

CPC – Cost Per Click

CV – Curriculum Vitae

ESBD – Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

GTM – Go-to-Market

HR – Human Resources

ICP – Ideal Customer Profile

JIC – Jihomoravské inovační centrum (South Moravian Innovation Centre)

MRR – Monthly Recurring Revenue

MVP – Minimum Viable Product

SaaS – Software as a Service

SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

SME – Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

STP – Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

TOWS – Threats, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Strengths

UI – User Interface

UX – User Experience

VUT – Vysoké učení technické v Brně (Brno University of Technology)

XP – Experience Points

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Appendix 1: Motivation step registration data

The attached file motivationdata.xslx contains anonymized data from the registration motivation step.