

STARTUP FEVER_{BETA}

You have a brilliant product idea. You fire your boss. You start your own company.

Your product takes off. Users love it. Money pours in. You hire the best people, improve your product and gain more users. But others do the same...

Unfortunately there are never enough engineers, sales people, or money.

Who will have the most users at the end?

OVERVIEW AND GOAL

Each player owns a Web company. They manage money and employees (engineers, sales, executives) and allocate them to the right products. Hiring engineers creates better products, which attract more users, who in turn generate more money. Hiring sales generates more money which can be used to hire more engineers. As the supply of engineers and sales people dries up, hiring the best employees away from your competitors becomes crucial – as does retaining existing employees. At the end of every year the best products steal users from the other products during a product showdown.

To win, players must build the largest user base.

CONTENTS

1 Rules Book	This book
1 Game Board	To track products, users, employees, and turn order
1 Die	With numbers 1 to 6
6 Quick Reference Cards	Rules overview, one per player, each with a company logo
64 Event Cards	Good and bad events happening to companies and products
24 Product Chips	4 product areas each in six company colors with company logos
36 Product Markers	3 markers each in twelve product colors, used for user tracking and turn order
100 Money Tokens	To pay for employees, marketing, etc.
Employees	
50 Nerds	Technical and workers, mainly engineers (green cubes). Creatives go here, too.
50 Suits	Non-technical workers: mainly sales (blue cubes)
6 Big Nerds	Technical executives: One per company (green meeples)
6 Big Suits	Non-technical executives: One per company (blue meeples)
6 Lawyers	In case things get rough (see last page): One per company (black meeples)
If you run out	
•	Once all employees have been hired, companies can only hire employees away from other companies. This is called <i>poaching</i> - think of it as a tight labor market.
•	If the bank runs out of money, companies will have no revenue until someone spends again - think of it as recession.
•	If you run out of Event Cards, flip and shuffle the Event Cards pile.

There is a section towards the end of the rule book that explains some concepts and terms.

The left column contains the rules. This column contains additional information, including clarifications of rules, references to other sections of the rules and examples.

Workers refers to **Nerds**, and **Suits**. **Executives** refers to **Big Nerds** and **Big Suits**. **Employees** refers to all.

Meeples are small pawns.

Think of the Big Nerd as the Chief Technology officer (CTO) and the Big Suit as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

GAME COMPONENTS



Example Board setup for a 4 player game.

Bottom left: impact of hiring, vesting, retaining and poaching on employees on the vesting track.

The main circle on the board consists of the twelve product spaces, each with a **Vesting Track**. Each player controls two to four products - depending on the total number of players.

When players **hire employees** (blue and green wooden pieces), they put them on the fields marked with four of the vesting track. Every year, employees move one space closer to the fully vested field. The closer they get, the easier it is for other companies to hire them away.

Next to the fully vested field there is room for a **Product Chip** that describes the product, and a **Product Marker** that links the product area to the Turn Order and User Tracks. At the beginning of the game the products are secret, and the Product Chips are face down. Product Chips of one player have the same color.

The number of users of each Product is indicated by its matching **User Marker** on the **User Track** around the board. Products can go from no users at the start to a few billion users. Once they reach the end of the track, they stop advancing. There is no lapping. At that point every Internet user is your customer.

The large brown numbers on the User Track indicate base revenue and the smaller red ones indicate victory point for any product on that field.

In the middle of the board is the **Turn Order**. Turn Order Markers indicated when a product plays.

The red **Launch Line** is the latest point where a product has to launch. If your **User Marker** passes this line, you have to immediately reveal what product category your employees are working on.

Tips for speeding up the game

Creating piles of money tokens (yellow cubes) and employees (blue & green cubes & meeples) will greatly speed up the game later. These are the **bank** and the employees available to hire.

At the beginning of each Product Turn move the **Turn Order Marker** of the currently playing product to the middle of the board.

At the end of the Product Turn move the Turn Order Marker back.

When you determine the Turn Order for the next year, take all the markers off the board.

When resolving ties, take all tied Turn Order Markers inside a cupped hand, shake and pull out one by one.

SETTING UP THE GAME

1. Board Setup

Put the game board in the middle of the table, shuffle the Event Cards, and put them face down next to the board. Put one executive of each color less than there are players on the board, and the rest back in the box. E.g. for 4 players, use three Big Nerds and three Big Suits.

2. Pick Products

Each player gets a quick reference card and four **Product Chips** with matching logo and puts her Product Chips face down in the spaces provided on the board according to the table below.

Number of Players	2	3	4	5	6
Products per player	4	4	3	2	2

3. Set Up Companies and Products

Each player gets three **Product Markers** per product. The first is the **User Marker** and goes on the field marked with 0 of the **User Track**. The second is the **Turn Order Marker** and goes on the **Turn Order** in random order. The last one goes on the product chip.

4. Draw Event Cards and Receive Money Tokens

Each player draws four Event Cards from the stack and takes 2 money tokens from the bank.

Example: See previous page for an example of a 4 player game.

Product Chips represent four **Product Categories:** Social Networking, Communication, E-Commerce and Media. In 4-6 player games, players only use parts of their Product Chips in the game and keep the others face down on the side.

In 2 and 5 player games there are empty product spaces on the board.

All Event Cards are explained in more detail later in the rules book.

GAME PLAY

The game is played over approximately four to six years. Every year each product gets one turn. The year ends with a competition phase, followed by company and game administration. Event Cards can be played by *any player at any time* - unless indicated differently on the card.

PRODUCT TURNS

Every year players get one turn for each of their products in **Turn Order**. Each product turn consists of the actions below. Not all actions are possible on each turn.

1. New User Adoption

More users begin to use *this product*.

- ❖ Roll the die for base user growth
- ❖ Add 1 for every *Nerd* working on this product
- ❖ Add 2, if the company has a *Big Nerd*
- ❖ Move the product's **User Marker**.

Important: When you reach the Launch Line you must immediately launch this product. Flip the **Product Chip** over.

2. Earn Product Revenue

This product is earning revenue based on the number of users and Suits.

- ❖ The brown number under your **User Marker** on the **User Track** indicates this product's base revenue.
- ❖ Add 1 for every *Suit* working on the product.
- ❖ Add 2 if the company has a *Big Suit*
- ❖ Get money tokens from the bank

Example: The player rolls a 4. His company has 3 Nerds and 3 Suits working on the product, and there is a Big Nerd. The User Marker would move $4+3+2$ or 9 spaces forward on the User Track.

Example: The User Marker is now on a space with the number 4. In the above example the revenue would be $4+3$ or 7 money tokens.

Nerds (green) overall create better products and increase user adoption. **Suits** (blue) excel at taking products to market and increase revenue.

3. Manage Employees

You can perform the following actions in any order and as often as you want, within the limits described with each action and your funds.

❖ **Hire Employees** (up to two hires per turn)

You can hire new employees for this product. You pay the money indicated below to the bank.

- i. **Nerds** (green cubes) - cost: 1 money token
You can have as many Nerds as you want.
- ii. **Suits** (blue cubes) - cost: 1 money token
You can have as many Suits as you want.
- iii. **Big Suits** (blue meeples) - cost: 6 money tokens
You can have only one Big Suit *per company*, the CEO.
- iv. **Big Nerds** (green meeples) - cost: 6 money tokens
You can have only one Big Nerd *per company*, the CTO.

New employees start on the field marked with four of *this product's* vesting track.

❖ **Poach Employees** (up to two offers per target product)

You can try to hire away employees from other companies. You can try to poach up to two employees per target product per product turn.

- i. **Identify** an employee to poach. The minimum offer in money tokens is
employee cost + vesting left
You can offer the minimum or any larger amount.
- ii. The old company can **counter** the offer by paying one more money than the offer.
- iii. If there is a counter offer, employees always take it.
The old company then moves the employee back on the vesting track equivalent to the amount of money tokens paid - but not beyond the field marked with "4". You cannot poach this employee again during this product turn.
- iv. If there is no counter offer, you move the employee to your product and pay the bank. The new employee goes on the field marked with four on *this product's* vesting track.

❖ **Retain Employees** (unlimited)

Identify an employee working *on this product* to retain. Pay one money token for every year you move the employee back.

4. User Loss

At the end of each product turn the number of users of any launched product can be reduced. You roll a die and then split the points you rolled across any *launched* products of your choice, but not more than two points per product. Then you may move these products back one field per point.

Big Suits/Nerds are super-Suits/Nerds with some extra powers. They generate twice the user adoption/twice the revenue of a Suit/Nerd and they generate it for all the products of their company, not just one. In addition, Big Nerds are worth four Nerds in competition.

At any time you can only have one executive of each kind per company (unless you have an **Executive Power** event card)

You can try to **poach** from as many companies as you like. But you cannot poach more than 2 employees from a single target product during a product turn.

You can **poach executives** if you do not have the same kind. E.g. if you have a Big Nerd, you can poach a Big Suit, but not a second Big Nerd (unless you have an **Executive Power** event card)

Vesting left is the number under the employee on the vesting track. For fully vested employees, the number is 0. They are very easy to poach.

When **poaching**, the money tokens go back to the pile - not the originating company.

Random Trivia: points on dice are called *pips*.

Example: With a 4, you can move two products back two each, or one product back two and two products back one.

YEAR END

After each product had its turn, it is time to see how they compare. Year End consists of the competition phase, and some administrative activities.

1. Competition

At the end of each year, a showdown takes place between *launched* products. The strongest and biggest marketing spend will steal users from the other companies.

Competition happens separately across each of the four product categories. Products that have not launched yet do not participate in the competition

If there is more than one product in any product area

- Compute the current product strength of each product according to the Table 1.
Big Nerds count for each product of a company.
- Add the results of one die roll.
- Rank products based on product strength
On tie: more Nerds, higher die roll wins
- Move the User Marker for each product based on Table 2.

2. Vest Employees

All Employees who are not fully vested vest one more year. Move them up one row on the vesting track.

3. Reassign Nerds and Suits

Players can shift workers from one product to another product – without changing their vesting level.

4. Discard Played Event Cards and Marketing Money Tokens

All played Event Cards expire. Move them to discard pile.

5. Replenish Event Cards

Players can hold up to four *Event Cards* in their hand. Players holding less than four cards, can fill up their hand. Players cannot play any of the newly picked cards this year and replenish again.

6. Allocate Marketing Money for next year

Players may allocate a marketing budget for the next year to each product by putting money tokens on the product chip.

7. Determine Product Turn Order for Next Year

The product with the fewest users selects its position in the order first, then the one with the second fewest users, etc. On a tie use any random mechanism to decide who selects first.

Table 1. Product Strength Contributions

Employee	Product Strength
Nerd (each)	+1 (each)
Big Nerd	+4
Marketing Money	+1 (each)

Table 2. User Adjustments

	Number of Competing Products				
	2	3	4	5	6
1	+5	+8	+9	+12	+12
2	-5	-3	+1	+3	+3
3		-5	-4	-3	-1
4			-6	-5	-2
5				-7	-5
6					-7

Competition is where investment in Nerds – and marketing – pays off. Products that have not launched yet do not participate in competitions as it is not generally known what they are all about.

Example: A product with 10 Nerds and 1 Big Nerd has a product strength of 14.

See below for Marketing Money.

Example: With 3 competitors in one product area: The winner adds 6 on the User Track, the second moves 2 back, third moves 4 back.

Because **executives'** power applies to all products, it does not matter which product track they are on – put them where there is room.

Marketing Money impacts competition at the end of the next year. Players can allocate Marketing Money at the same time - or use Turn Order if a player insists on strict order.

You can play old **Event Cards** now even if they have no impact on the target company (unless indicated differently), so you can replenish right away (within limitation).

END OF GAME

The game ends after competition in the year *after* the last product has launched – or leaked.

Determining the winner

Players add the red victory point numbers under the User Markers of their products. The player with the highest number wins. On tie: more money tokens win.

If desired, players can agree beforehand to go on another year or two.

EVENT CARDS

You can have up to four cards in your hand at any time. You replenish your hand during the Year End. Event cards can be played anytime during the year, unless indicated on the Event Card or in the rules. However, as many cards impact only a specific event, they are typically played just before that event happens. Event Cards can be played on any company or product, unless indicated on the card.

Events do not apply retroactively. E.g. if a player says “I hire two Nerds” they are hired, even if the actual transaction on the board has not taken place yet. Playing the **Hiring Failure** event at this point has no impact on these hires.

All played Event Cards expire at end of the year, unless otherwise indicated.

Antitrust (4 cards)

Played on a product. A government (EU, US) is starting an antitrust investigation. If you have over 100M users you are distracted, and you cannot Manage Employees this year. You still gain users, earn revenue and roll for user loss.

Audit (4 cards)

Played on a company. The government performs an audit and detects issues. Return half or one third of your money (depending on the card) to the bank (round down). Marketing Money allocated is not impacted.

Defense (4 cards)

Played in **defense** of your own company. A good Legal or Public Relations team – or both - is the only line of defense when things get nasty. If you have at least one Suit (your legal or PR person) and if anybody plays any card on you, **immediately** play this card, and neutralize the other card. Nothing happens. You cannot use this to neutralize a card anybody plays on a player other than yourself.

Executive Power (2 cards)

Played on a company. The board of directors of the company approved additional executives so the company can hire or poach a second CEO or CTO. If one of the two later is poached, the company is back to a single CEO or CTO respectively. The second executive has the same cost and power as the first.

Feature Creep (2 cards)

Played on a product. Some product managers do not understand that constantly changing features and adding more features will require additional work. The schedule slips. As does your product turn. Move the **Turn Order Marker** of any product that has *not already played* this year back by as many spaces as you choose.

Great Management (2 cards)

Played on a product. The company has shown outstanding management and execution. This product gets a second turn this year. You must play the card after a product's turn, but before the end of the year. Move the **Turn Order Marker** to the end of the Turn Order. After all other products play, that product gets another product turn. Any Event Cards that apply until the end of the year still apply to the extra turn.

Typically you play good events on yourself and bad events on other companies. But sometimes playing a good event on a competitor has long term benefits.

You cannot *discard* an Event Card. However, you can *play* cards right before the end of the year where most cards have no impact and you will get to pick up new cards (to a maximum of four).

When rounding always round in favor of the target company.

If the product gets another turn because of **Great Management**, **Hiring Campaign** applies again.

Hiring Campaign (6 cards)	Played on a product. You can hire up to four this product turn. You have to pay the regular price for the extras, of course.
Hiring Failure (2 cards)	Played on a product. No hiring this turn for this product. This card trumps the Hiring Campaign card if both cards are played on the same product in the same turn.
Insta-Poach (2 cards)	Played on a company. Some employees are ready to join any company that treats their employees better. Play this card on any worker and poach immediately, at any time. You do have to pay the employee cost, which is one money token for workers. Place the new worker on any of your products.
Joker (1 card)	Use this wildcard as any Event Card of your choosing.
Leak (6 cards)	Played on a product. An employee lost his cellphone, read confidential documents on a plane, had drinks with a blogger, etc. and the public learns about the product. You decide to launch quickly. Flip the Product Chip over.
Major Deal (2 cards)	Played on a company. You closed a major deal. If you have at least one Suit in the company, receive four money tokens from the bank.
Marketing Success (2 cards)	Played on a product. Applies if you have Marketing Money allocated. Your marketing campaign for this product has been successful. The Marketing Money tokens count double during competition.
Marketing Spend (2 cards)	Played on a company. You are readjusting your budgets. You can add money to the marketing budget of <i>any one</i> of your products. You have to play this card before the competition phase. You cannot play it during competition, as by then, it is too late for marketing.
Outages (2 cards)	Played on a product. The product keeps having outages. User adoption slows down. The product gets only half of the user adoption you would have in User Adoption or any extra growth because of Event Cards (round up).
Product Success (6 cards)	Played on a product. You added a lot of great features to the product and users love it – and tell their friends. In the user adoption action, you get an extra roll of the die (with two cards, you will get two extra rolls, etc.)
Retention (6 cards)	Played on a company. Your employees are very happy. You can move one employee back to the 4 field. There are different cards for different kind of employees, so double check the card.
Scandal (4 cards)	Played on a company. One of your executives went to a conference with an assistant. It looks like they might have shared a room. At this point, the board lost all confidence, and your executive is ineffective for the rest of the year. With a scandal, executives do not help in gaining users or earning revenue, and Big Nerds do not help in competition. They also do not count for events that require the presence of executives.
Switch Turn Order (4 cards)	Played on two products. The player playing the card can exchange the position of two products in the Turn Order. The card must be played before either product plays so both get their turn.

The game comes with one empty Event Cards for you to create your own “house rule” event, if you so choose.

Leak has no impact if the product is already launched.

If there is no Marketing Money allocated, **Marketing Success** has no effect.

If you play **Outages** after the **User Adoption** die roll it is too late to impact the roll as that adoption already happened, even if the User Marker is not moved yet. However it would impact future rolls e.g. because of a **Product Success** card.

To mark executives involved in a scandal topple them over on the board. At Year End, you can stand them up again.

LAWYERS (OPTIONAL)

This edition comes with 6 lawyers (black meeples). They follow the same rules as the other execs and have two special powers. They can use one out of the two **once per year**.

- **Defense:** Immediately after an event card is played on you, or a lawyer attacks, send in your own lawyer. The other card or the attack is neutralized.
- **Attack:** During product turn, Lawyers can attack any other company for patent infringement. The target company can choose to either
 - **license** the technology and pay you their current base revenue (pay number under the user marker), or
 - **remove** the technology from the product and lose users (move user marker back as many fields as the number under the user marker)
 - **defend** if the other company has a lawyer. Defense event cards cannot be used here.

After any lawyer action, topple the lawyer over on the board until the end of the year - similar to executives involved in a scandal. In an attack and defense scenario, both lawyers will be ineffective for the rest of the year.

Lawyers are part of the Venture Capital Extension.

Lawyers cost six money, vest, and can be poached. You can have one per company. There is one less than players.

Defense is very similar to the Defense event card, but also defends against Lawyer Attack.

BACKGROUND

This section provides a quick introduction into the world of startups.

In many high tech companies, employees receive stock options. These option grants **vest** over several years, which means employee only receive their stock *if they continue to work on the company* for these years. This creates a long term incentive to stay with the company (golden handcuffs). However, as time passes, the incentives are getting smaller and smaller. Employees can be retained by further grants of stock options.

In the game, this is reflected on the vesting track, where all employees start at four, and move up one line until they are fully vested. The more they have vested, the easier it becomes for other companies to hire the employees away in the **Poach Employees** action. Employees are retained by paying money and moving them towards the number 4 again on the track in the **Retain Employee** action.

Many companies develop a product first in stealth mode. Nobody knows what the product is about, except a few, hand-picked users. The product is **launched** only after it has been thoroughly tested by many users. Unfortunately sometimes products leak early, which happens in the game if someone plays a **Leak** Event Card.

CREDITS

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Finally, at the time of this writing, there are already 250 Kickstarter backers supporting the project. They will be properly listed in the rules book of the Retail Edition.

The background art is from xkcd.com, licensed under Creative Common Attribution-NonCommercial 2.5 License. The map in its full glory can be found at <http://xkcd.com/802>

Official Game Homepage: <http://www.StartupFeverGame.com/>

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