Building is cheap; verifying and keeping a lead are now the hard parts

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Hiten Shah's essay on what happens when models catch up, Bolt's view of the PM job when building is nearly free, and the verification problem both point to. Also: a weak PM hiring-replacement rate and AI feedback-triage practices.

When the models catch up

Hiten Shah's new essay uses Gamma to separate finding a customer problem from being able to solve it. Gamma interviewed 100 people before building. They named the same frustrations: the blank page, hours spent formatting, and worry that a weak deck would make them look less capable [1]. The first product made arranging slides easier, but users still had to write most of the content. Co-founder Jon Noronha estimates, looking back, that only about 5–10% of signups reached value [1]. After a three-month rebuild around generative AI, users could describe an idea and react to a GPT-4 draft [1]. Shah says the result can't be credited to that change alone, because onboarding and infrastructure changed at the same time [1].

His main lessons for PMs: - **A demo isn't a product.** In his illustration, five independent steps that each succeed 80% of the time finish the whole job only about 33% of the time. At 95% per step, it's about 77% [1]. The product has to make the model dependable through context, tools, verification and recovery, at a price customers will pay [1]. - **Scaffolding expires.** Layout restrictions that made 2023 models usable were later holding stronger models back. What has to stay dependable is the customer's commitments: saved work, permissions, editability [1]. - **Before the models are ready**, ship work customers can finish today. Watch where they get stuck and whether they come back, and log failures at the level of complete tasks so they become reusable evals. Moats

such as customer context, integrations and distribution are earned through use [1]. Shah points to KISSmetrics, which was early in its market until competitors closed the gap: “Being early gives you time” [1].

He also posted a prompt to run after a coding agent builds a feature. It asks the agent to list up to three consequential user-facing choices you didn’t specify, with evidence, without changing anything. Examples include whether users can skip signup or what happens when a customer cancels [2].

The PM job when building is nearly free

Bolt’s Eric Simons argues that the classic product process was a “rationing protocol” for expensive software. Now PMs can skip low-fidelity prototypes and build the real thing [3]. In Bolt’s survey of PMs who use Bolt, 38% now bring engineering in earlier with a real prototype, and 30% bring engineering in only after validating the idea [3]. In his view, the lasting advantage is customer context: ongoing conversations and pain points, not “a golden idea” [3].

The bottleneck moves to verification. Blacksmith’s founder says writing 100x the code doesn’t help if you can’t validate it, and the company is building autonomous QA that collects screenshots and video as evidence [4]. A principal engineer on Reddit says he can produce 100 PRs a week, but finding the roughly 10% that are bad “is such a slog” [5]. A caution for anyone building in this space: Synathic, an agent-write verifier, got no trials from 8 design partners because people patch the problem themselves cheaply. Its builder’s takeaway is that adoption cost decides everything and that detection latency matters more than failure type [6].

PM careers: fewer backfills, more negotiation

Aakash Gupta reports that in 2025, companies hired 0.92 outside PMs for every PM who left, meaning roles were closed rather than refilled [7]. His negotiation playbook: - Set walk-away, target and anchor numbers before the first call [8]. - Let the employer name a number first [8]. - When base pay hits the top of the band, trade for sign-on, equity or an earlier review [8].

All five 2026 cohort negotiations he wrote up got more money, and none lost the offer [8]. He also shares a heuristic from Mark Pincus: a change is “better” only if 10 out of 10 users would pick it; otherwise call it “new” [9].

Practices worth stealing

- **AI feedback triage with guardrails.** One PM runs a weekly Claude automation that themes feedback, sends uncertain items to human review, and never lets the model create or change themes [10]. Another commenter recommends labeling 100 items by hand and using them as an eval to compare models over time [11].

- **Frame the outcome first.** Strategyzer's new Problem Framing Map rests on the idea that "the problem is when you can't get to where you want to go." In their example, contractor interviews showed nobody owned the end-to-end system, which led to very different fixes [12].
- **A daily pre-mortem.** Reed Hastings spent 10 minutes a day assuming Netflix had crashed and asking what he did to cause it. He calls it "a quiet little reservoir of darkness" [13].

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