

GROWTH MARKETING · RETENTION

How to build a growth marketing function grounded in retention

Work backwards from your most retentive users — not from the growth target.

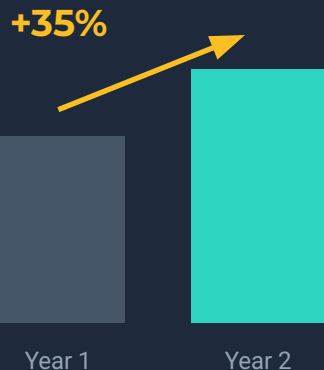
Farrukh Zafar · Head of Global Wolt Lifecycle at DoorDash



Growth never slows down: 30–40% Y/Y, at any scale

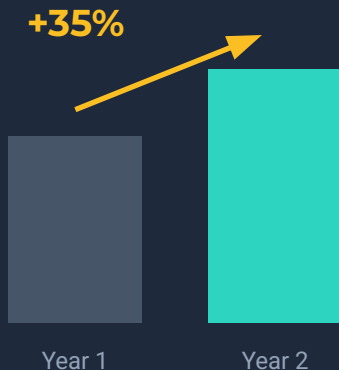
\$40K GMV

a startup



\$40B GMV

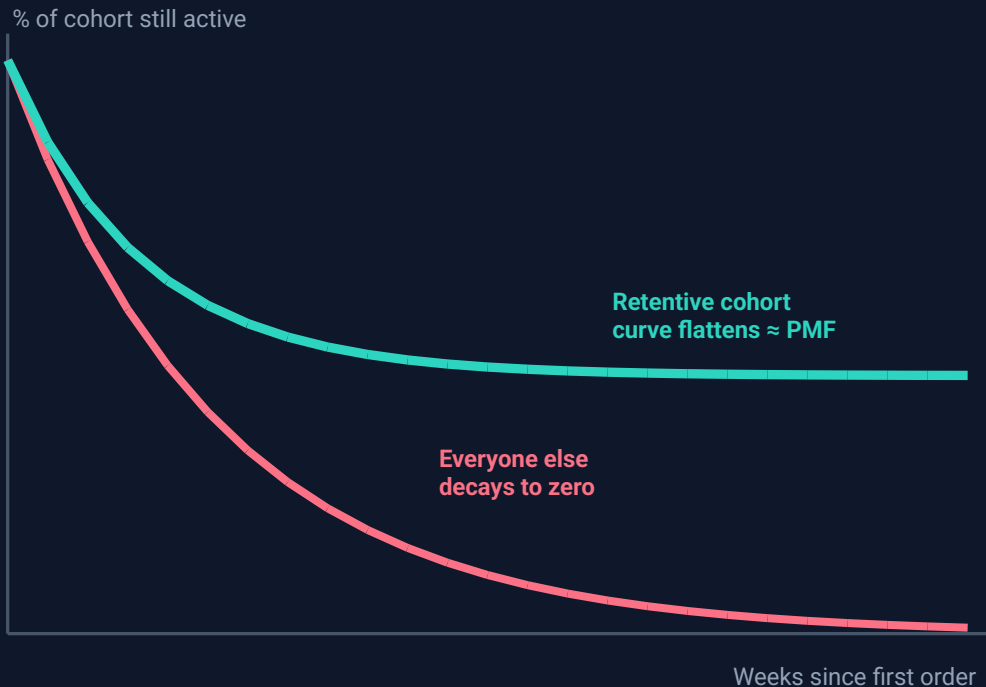
a category leader



So... do you just work backwards from the target?
Not quite. You work backwards from retention.

WHERE TO START

Start with users who've found product-market fit



Ask of the flat curve:

- What did they do in their first days that others didn't?
- Which high-value actions do they repeat?
- Those actions are your **candidate aha moments**.

THE IDEA

Aha moments: an idea with a pedigree

FACEBOOK

7 friends in 7 days

Chamath and Facebook's early growth team: users who hit 7 friends in their first 7 days had a superior retention curve.

EVERNOTE

Tenure → paid retention

Evernote's founder: active tenure on the platform correlated directly with paid subscription retention.

THE RESULT

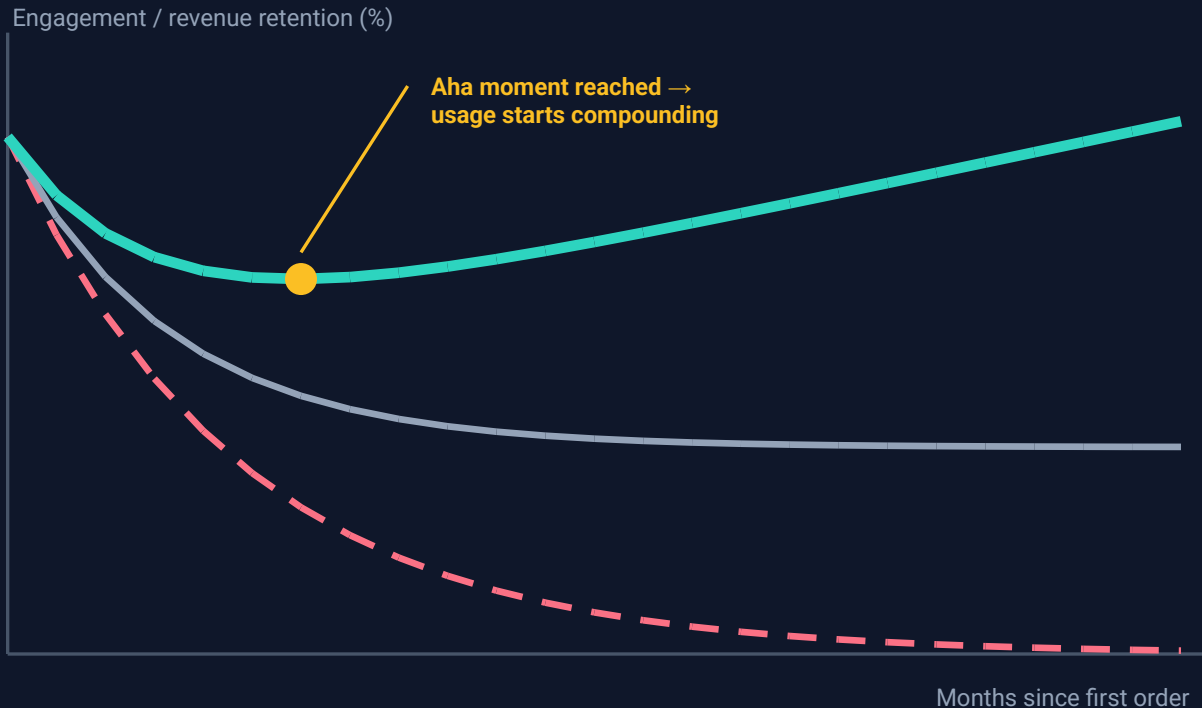
Smile curves

Cohorts that reach value don't just stop decaying — engagement and revenue climb back up over time.

Aha moment · magic moment · activation moment — same idea: the early action that predicts long-term retention.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Decay, flatten, or smile



Smile

Great: retention bends back up

Flatten

Good: a stable core emerges

Decay

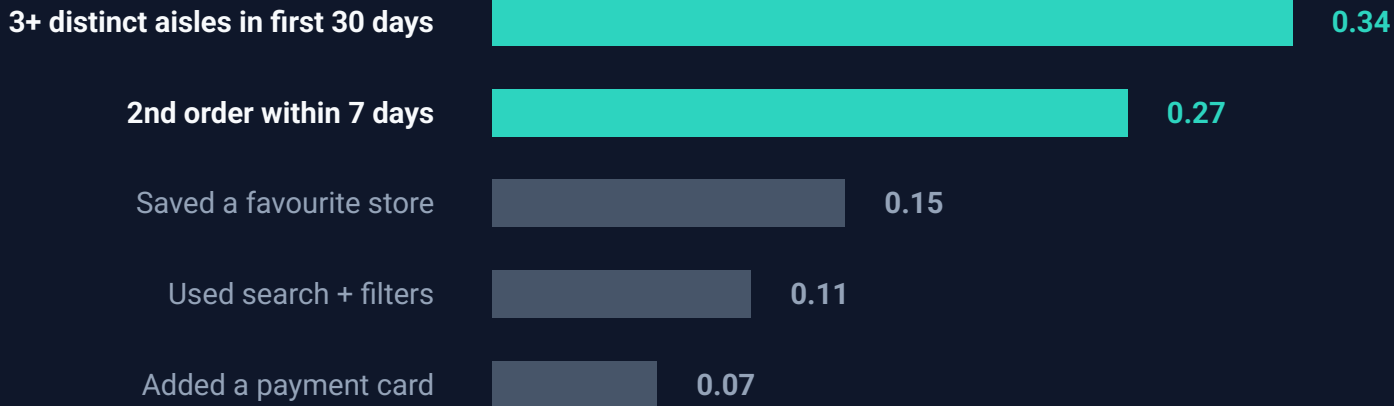
Leaky: no habit formed

STEP 1 · DISCOVER

Find them with a lookback analysis

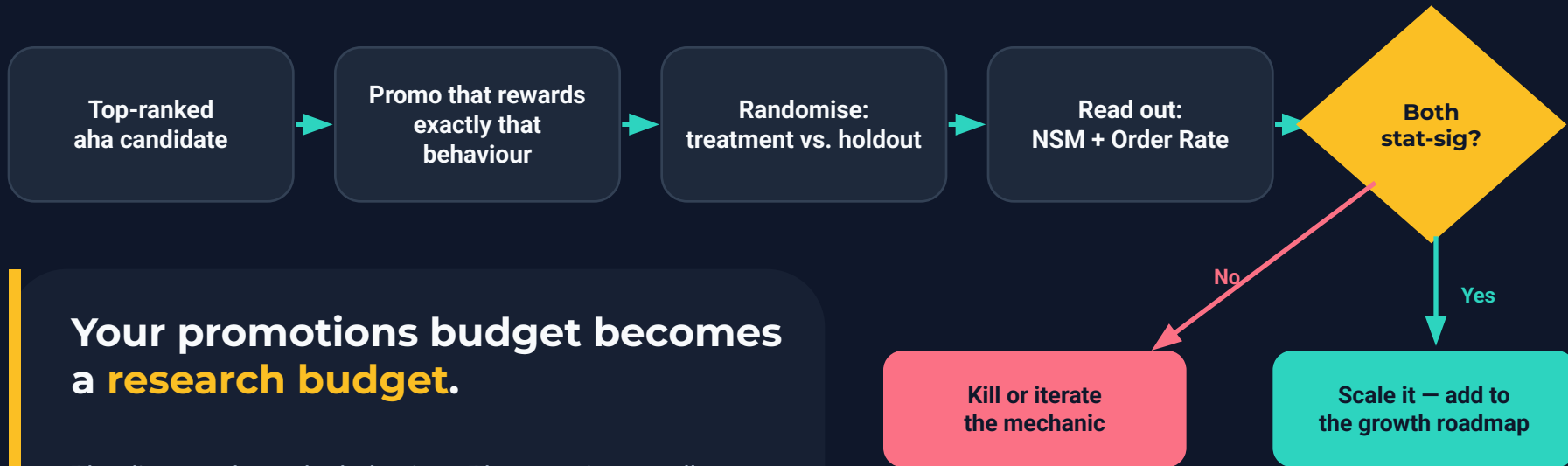


FEATURE WEIGHT ON 90-DAY RETENTION (illustrative)



Method options: logistic regression coefficients, SHAP values, or uplift vs. matched cohorts.

Correlation isn't causation: test every aha



Your promotions budget becomes a **research budget.**

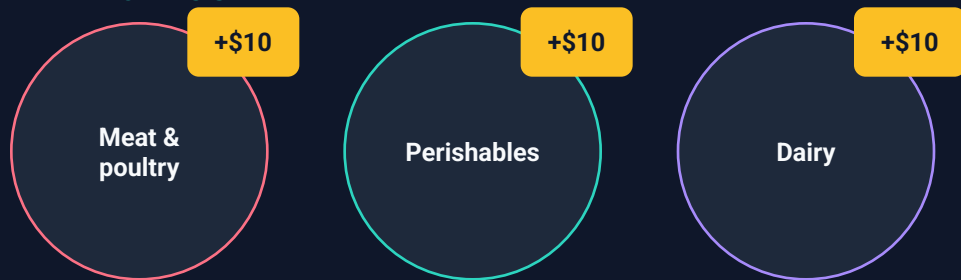
The discount buys the behaviour. The experiment tells you whether that behaviour buys retention.

Every experiment either adds a proven lever to the roadmap or removes a false one.

WORKED EXAMPLE

An online grocery store

AHA HYPOTHESIS



3 deliveries from 3 distinct aisles in the first 30 days → high retention

THE PROMO

\$10 off every new aisle you try — up to 3×

Rewards the behaviour, not just the order.

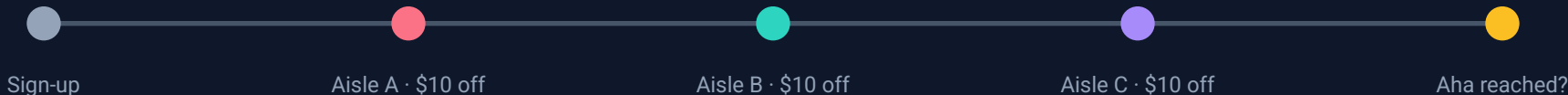
Day 0

Order 1

Order 2

Order 3

Day 30



STEP 3 · READ OUT

Was it the discount — or the aha moment?

THE RETENTION IDENTITY

$$\text{Retention} = \text{Order Rate} \div \text{Order Frequency}$$

Move Order Rate significantly → you move retention.

Both must clear 95% confidence ($p < 0.05$):

North-star: distinct aisles tried

Input to retention: Order Rate uplift

Discount alone moves orders. Only a real aha moment moves both.

ORDER RATE UPLIFT STAT-SIG?

Yes

No

North
Star
Metric

Yes

Causation proven
✓ Scale it

**Behaviour
moved, retention
didn't**
Weak aha — deprioritise

No

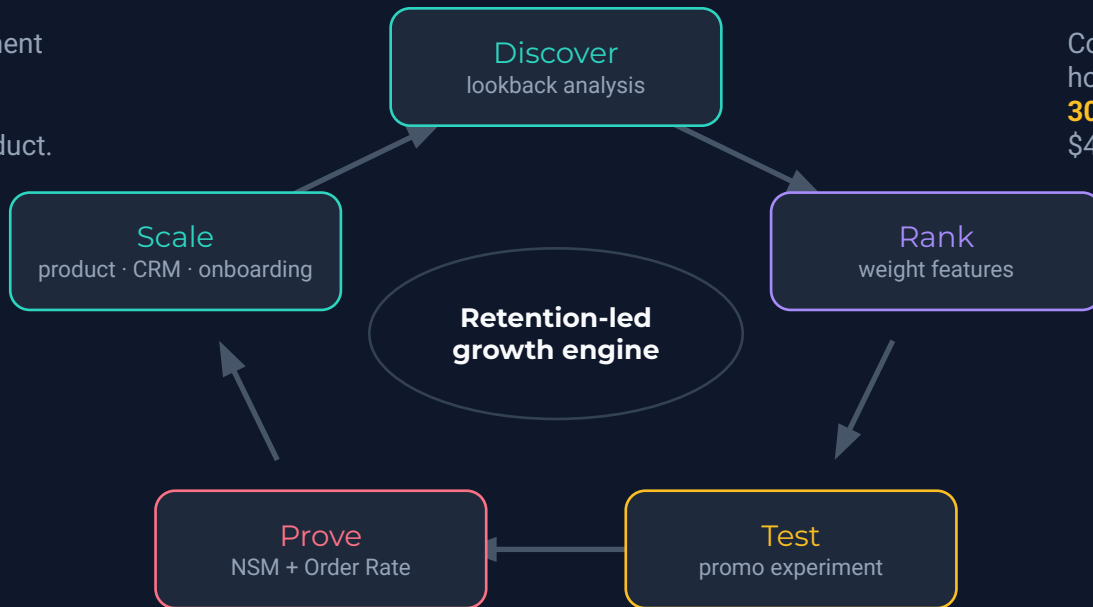
Discount effect
You bought orders, not
habits

No effect
Kill it

STEP 4 • REPEAT

Repeat it: a needle-moving growth roadmap

Every proven aha moment becomes a permanent lever — in onboarding, lifecycle CRM and product.



Compounding retention is how you keep hitting **30–40% Y/Y** — at \$40K or \$40B.

PART 2

From aha moments to growth loops

You've proven which behaviours cause retention. How do you turn them into something repeatable, not a one-off lift?

ONE-OFF PROMO



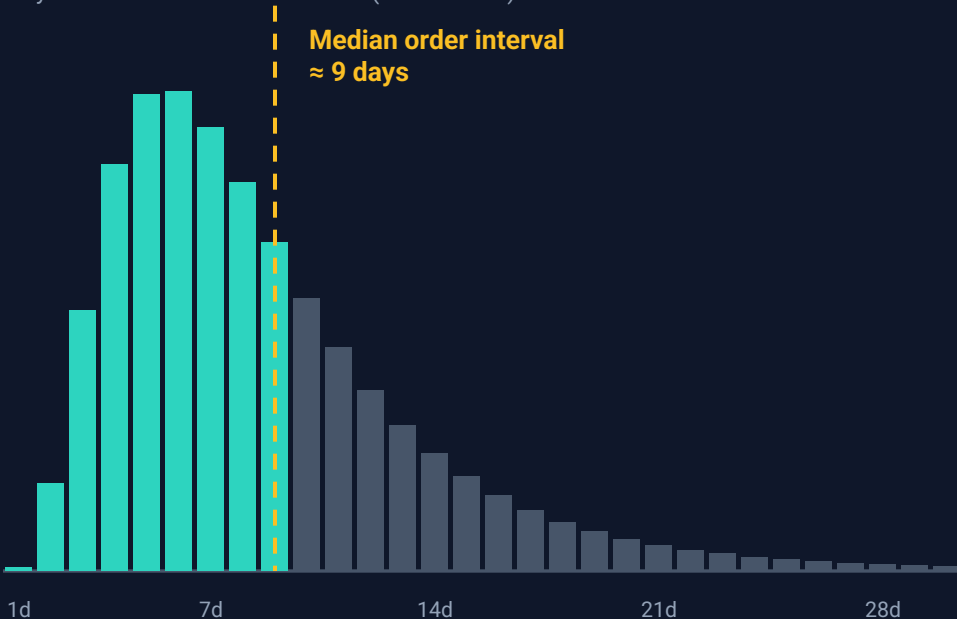
GROWTH LOOP



STEP 5 • MODEL

Find your natural cadence with a second lookback

Days between consecutive orders (active users)



Half of repeat orders land within ~9 days, so a weekly lens fits this business.

PICK THE LENS THAT MATCHES THE CADENCE

DAU daily habits: social, messaging, games

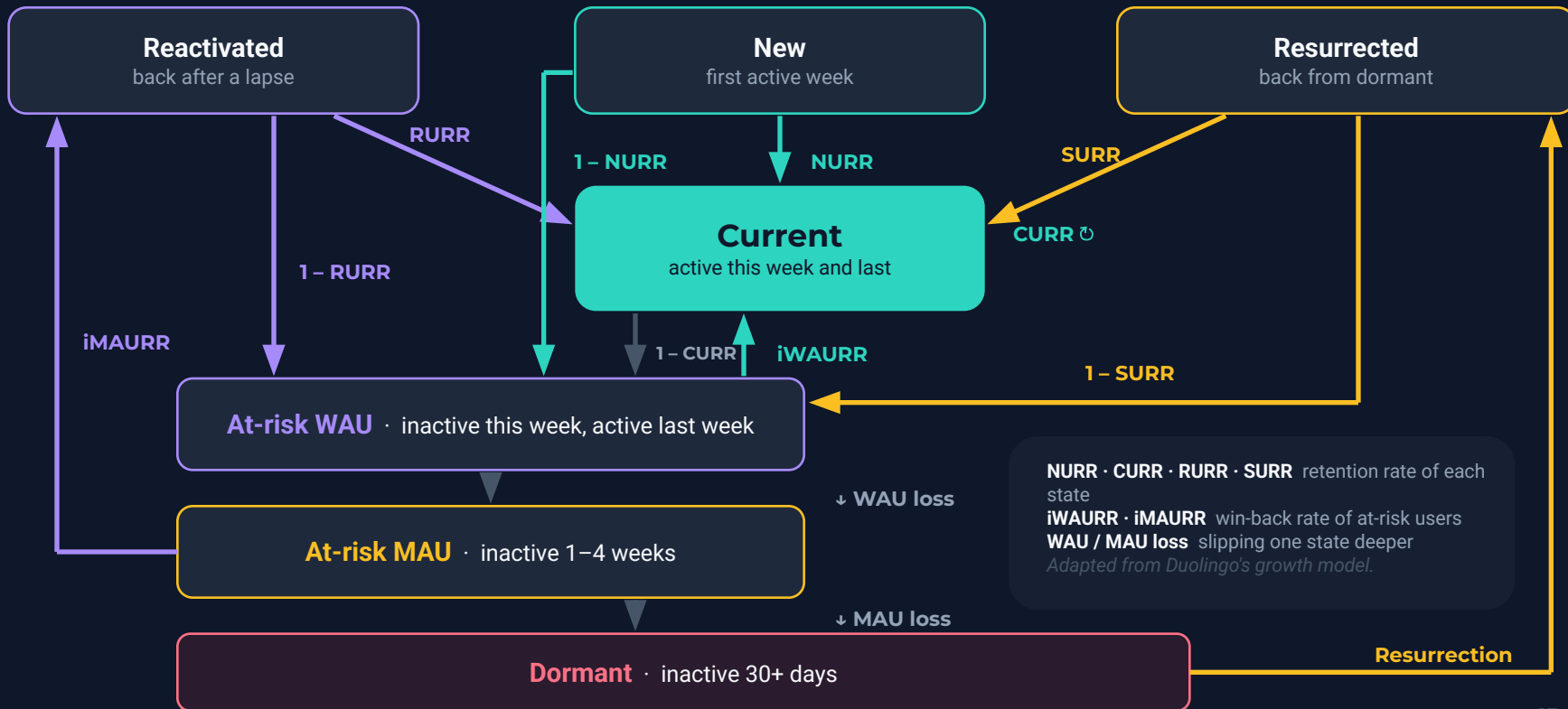
WAU weekly habits: grocery, food delivery

MAU monthly or occasional: travel, fintech

Then carve the base into **sharper sub-cohorts**, and activate each one at the right moment in its cycle.

STEP 5 • MODEL

Map the states inside your active base



STEP 6 • MEASURE

Measure how users move between states

		TO STATE (next week) →						
FROM ↓		New	React.	Resurr.	Current	Risk WAU	Risk MAU	Dormant
	New				45%	55%		
	React.				35%	65%		
	Resurr.				30%	70%		
	Current				85%	15%		
	Risk WAU				30%		70%	
	Risk MAU		12%				60%	28%
	Dormant				1%	99%		

Each row sums to 100%.

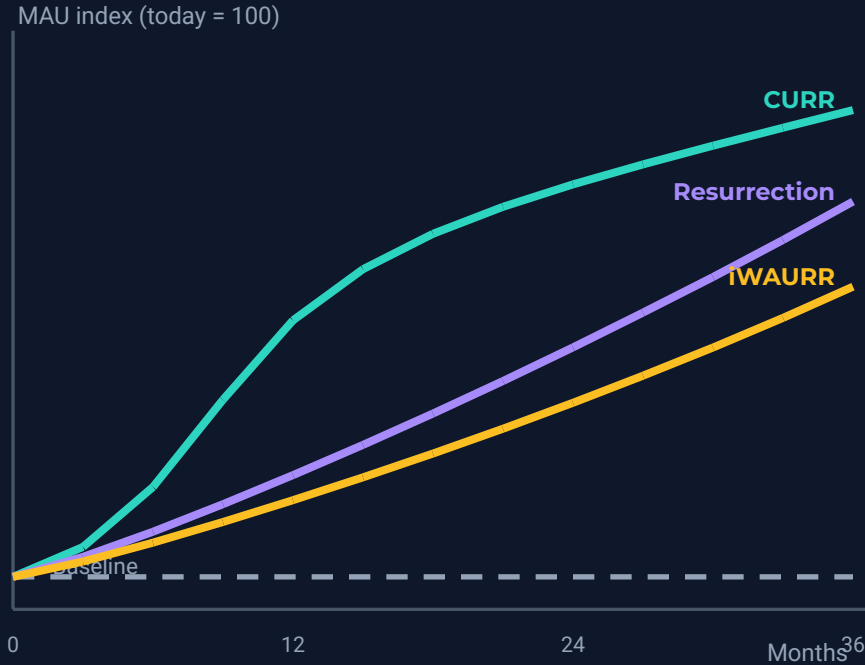
The diagonal is who stays put.

Everything else is **a rate you can try to move.**

Recompute weekly. Watch for drift after launches, seasonality and pricing changes.

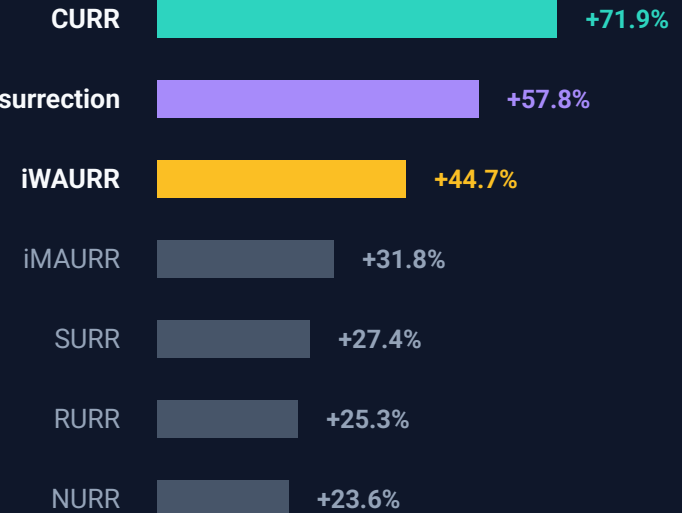
STEP 7 • SIMULATE

Simulate +1% a month on each rate, one at a time



Toy model, illustrative rates. Each rate +1% a month (relative), others held constant.

MAU UPLIFT IN YEAR 3 VS. BASELINE



Top 3 = your focus rates

Point proven aha moments at your focus rates

PROVEN AHA MOMENTS

3+ aisles in first 30 days

2nd order within 7 days

Tried a new category

Experiment
treatment vs. holdout

FOCUS RATES

CURR

Resurrection

iWAURR

Win condition: a stat-sig lift in the transition rate
($p < 0.05$)

Each proven lift becomes a brick in the 35–40% Y/Y target.

Scale test actuals into annualised impact and budget

TEST CELL

10% of eligible base
stat-sig Δ in the rate



SCALE

100% of eligible base
same mechanic, same cost



SIZE

annualised impact
+ exact budget

ANNUALISED IMPACT

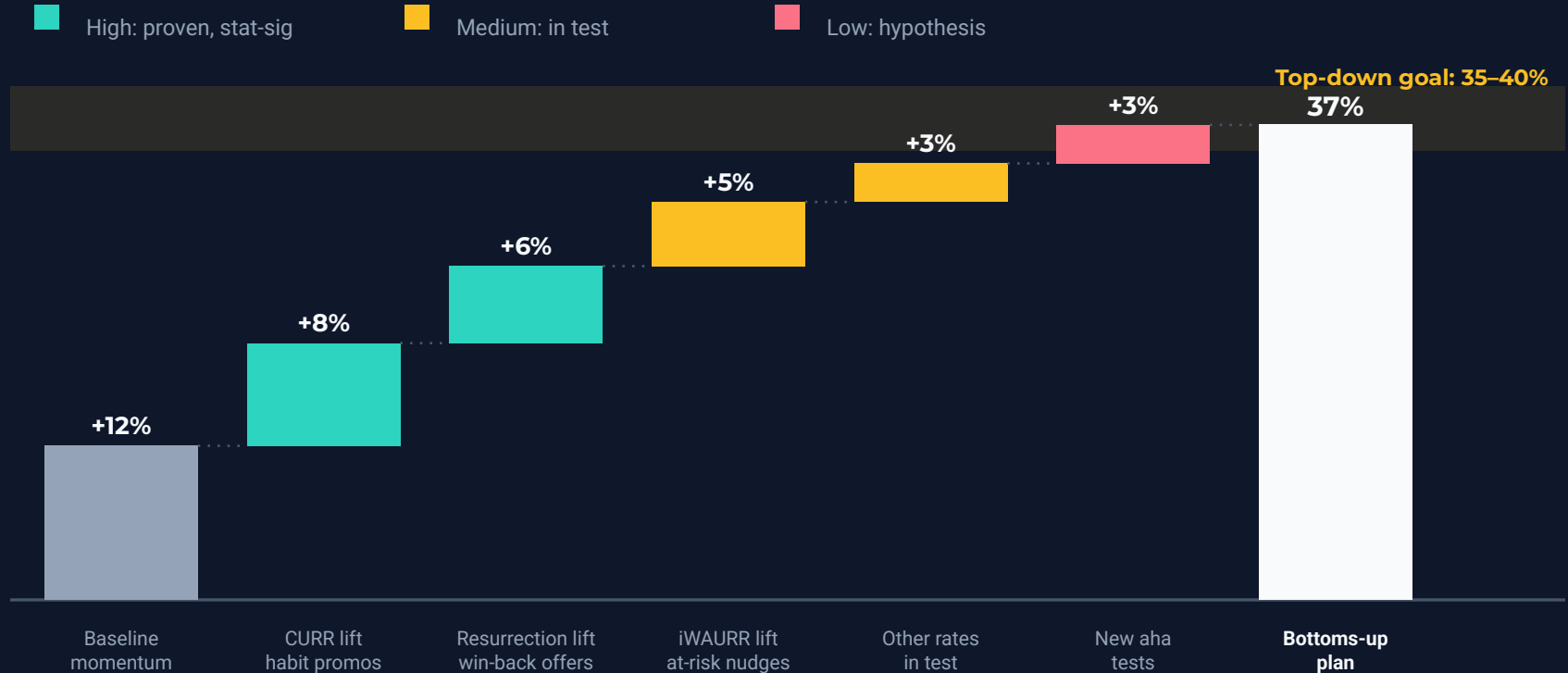
Δ transition rate × eligible users per week × value per incremental transition × 52

BUDGET REQUIRED

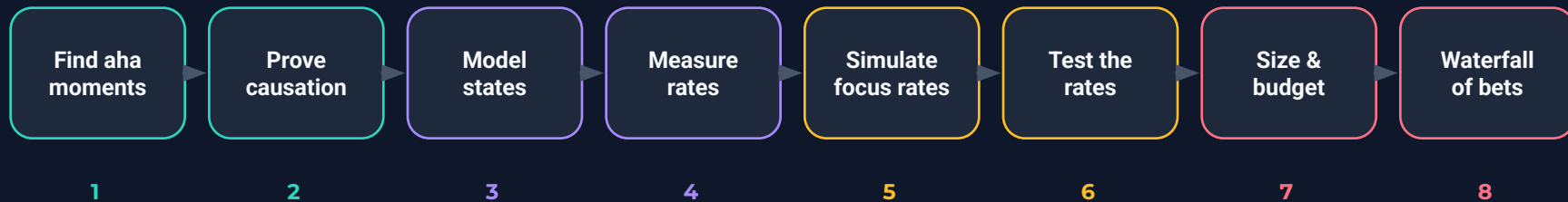
cost per incremental transition (test actual) × incremental transitions at scale

STEP 10 · PLAN

A bottoms-up walk to the top-down goal



THE PLAYBOOK



That's how you build a growth marketing function grounded in retention.

Work backwards from your best users, not from the target.

Thank you · Farrukh Zafar · farrukh.zafar@me.com