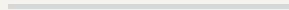
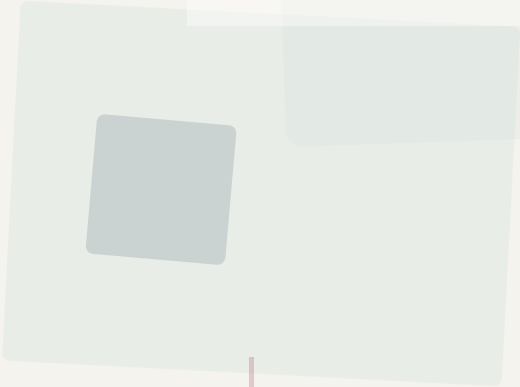


Brainstorming in the age of AI



January 15, 2025

Session Overview

4

ACTION ITEMS

3

DECISIONS MADE

1

PRIORITY ITEMS

Jordan Lee is CPO at NimbusSoft, a B2B SaaS platform (\$120M revenue, ~500 employees). His board wants an 'AI story' before the next fundraising round. His team is at capacity. His brand is built on reliability, not flashy innovation. This is the tension: how do you satisfy investor expectations without breaking what works? This brainstorming session helped Jordan navigate three simultaneous pressures—brand reliability, team capacity, and board expectations—to identify clear paths forward and a concrete validation framework.

Key Insights

1

Brand Risk: Reliability vs. Innovation

NimbusSoft's competitive advantage is reliability. Customers trust them to deliver consistent, predictable tools. Shipping half-baked AI could damage that trust permanently. Any AI initiative must feel like an extension of that promise, not a departure from it.

2

Team Capacity: Already Stretched Thin

Engineering and product teams are at capacity delivering the core roadmap. Adding an AI workstream means something else stops. Without clear prioritization and buy-in, this breeds cynicism. Define 'what good looks like' before asking anyone to build.

3

Board Expectations: The AI Story Narrative

Competitors have AI features. Investors expect an AI narrative. But NimbusSoft's customers value predictability—they may resist AI that feels rushed or trendy. Frame this as 'moving fast by moving thoughtfully'—strategic discipline, not reactive scrambling.

Executive Insights from Harvard Experts

"Most organizations overestimate execution capacity by 3-5x. Your capacity audit must answer: who owns this? What stops? When? If you can't answer with names and dates, you're not ready. This isn't pessimism—it's execution realism."

— Inspired by Raffaella Sadun

Insights to remember

"The question isn't 'what AI should we build?' but 'what job does our customer need AI to do?'"

— Inspired by Clayton Christensen

"Innovation theater is worse than doing nothing. Show them you're asking the right questions, not rushing to the wrong answers."

— Inspired by Rosabeth Moss Kanter

"Your competitive advantage is your reliability—any AI initiative must reinforce that, not compromise it."

— Inspired by Michael Porter

"Define 'what good looks like' before you ask anyone to build."

— Inspired by Amy Edmondson

"You can't serve both early adopters and mainstream B2B customers with the same product. Choose your beachhead carefully."

— Inspired by Geoffrey Moore

Action Items

Immediate Actions

□ **The 5-Conversation Test**

Schedule five 30-minute conversations with NimbusSoft's most trusted customers. Show them the three AI paths (Ingredient, Adjacent, Partnership) without pitching. Ask: 'Which of these feels most like NimbusSoft to you?' Listen for hesitation, not enthusiasm. Customers will tell you what's authentic if you let them.

Owner: Jordan Lee

HIGH

□ **Capacity Audit**

Once Jordan knows which path resonates with customers, run a brutal capacity audit with engineering leads. Ask: 'If we pursue this, what stops?' Document specific projects, timelines, and team assignments that must shift.

Owner: Jordan Lee + Engineering Leads

□ **Board Decision Memo**

Draft a one-page memo for the board that defines success as customer value + team sustainability, not 'we have AI.' This memo is Jordan's contract with himself—no compromises.

Owner: Jordan Lee

□ **Track Three Signals**

Watch three signals closely: customer trust in the AI story, team energy and engagement, and the board's confidence as reflected in the questions they ask. Review them in two weeks, and refine based on what held up and what didn't.

Owner: Jordan Lee

Decisions & Agreements

Key Decisions

- Path 1: AI as Ingredient, Not Announcement** — Embed AI into NimbusSoft's existing workflow automation—making current products smarter, not launching new ones. Lowest risk, reinforces brand, but may feel incremental to the board.
- Path 2: The Adjacent Bet** — Build a standalone AI capability—like intelligent meeting summarization or document analysis—that complements NimbusSoft's core but stands alone. Higher visibility, bigger execution risk.
- Path 3: Strategic Partnership** — Integrate a best-in-class AI tool via partnership—embed an AI writing assistant or smart search. Fast, low internal cost, but less proprietary and differentiated.
- Final Path Selection** — Pending customer validation through the 5-conversation test. Decision will be based on which path customers find most authentic to NimbusSoft's brand.

Next Steps



Week 1

Customer Validation Sprint

Schedule and conduct 5 customer conversations with key customers. Show them the three AI paths (Ingredient, Adjacent, Partnership) without pitching. Ask: 'Which of these feels most like NimbusSoft to you?' Listen for hesitation, not enthusiasm.

Week 2

Internal Capacity Assessment

Complete capacity audit with engineering leads and identify what must stop. Ask: 'If we pursue this, what stops?' Document specific projects, timelines, and team assignments that must shift. Frame as: 'Help me understand what's realistic'—not 'figure out how to make this work.'

Week 3

Strategic Alignment & Signal Tracking

Draft and finalize board memo defining success as customer value + team sustainability, not 'we have AI.' Begin tracking three signals: customer trust in the AI story, team energy and engagement, and board confidence. Review indicators and refine approach based on what held up and what didn't.

Ideas for Future Exploration

- ◆ Consider organizational ambidexterity for parallel exploration—run AI initiatives separately from core execution with different metrics, timelines, and risk tolerance
- ◆ Explore platform strategy for ecosystem partners—determine where proprietary control is needed vs. where to leverage ecosystem partners
- ◆ Investigate AI as ingredient in existing workflows—use AI to surface patterns, predict bottlenecks, and suggest optimizations in current automation tools
- ◆ Assess build vs. partner positioning—determine if AI is core to future differentiation (must own) or table stakes (partner fast)
- ◆ Plan for iterative validation cycles—build muscle to pressure-test options without committing to premature execution, keep iterating based on signals

This session demonstrates the power of leading with alignment, not velocity. Jordan now has three validated options, a clear decision framework, and an alignment process—but this is iterative, not final. The key is to watch the signals closely: customer trust in the AI story, team energy and engagement, and board confidence as reflected in their questions. Track these indicators, review them in two weeks, and refine based on what held up and what didn't. Organizational ambidexterity isn't a one-time decision—it's a continuous balancing act. Strategic credibility is built through consistency over time.

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