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POD Product Research System

A Repeatable System for Finding Winning Print-on-Demand Products

TEN STREAMS LAB

tenstreamslab.com

Contents

1. The Research Mindset

Most POD sellers fail because they design what they think looks cool, then wonder why it doesn't sell. Winners do the opposite: research what buyers are already searching for, then create products that match that demand.

> **The Core Principle**
>
> Don't create demand. Find demand that already exists and put your product in front of it. Research is not an optional step — it determines whether you make money or waste months on products nobody wants.

What Makes a Winning POD Product

- Passionate buyer — people who care deeply about an identity, hobby, or cause
- Gift-able — products people buy for others multiply your market size
- Low competition, growing demand — the sweet spot where new shops can rank
- Repeatable — a niche where you can create 20-50 variations, not just one product
- Sufficient margin — base cost allows 40%+ profit after all fees

2. Trend Research

Pinterest (Best for POD)

Pinterest is a visual search engine where people plan future purchases. Trending on Pinterest often predicts what sells on Etsy 2-4 weeks later.

- Go to Pinterest → search your niche + 'gift' or niche + product type
- Filter by 'This week' to see what's trending NOW
- Use Pinterest Trends (trends.pinterest.com) — free, searchable by keyword
- Note seasonal spikes (Christmas, Valentine's, Mother's Day) and evergreen trends
- Save top 20 pins to a research board — note repeating visual styles

Etsy Search Trends

- Search your niche and sort by 'Most Recent' — new listings getting traction = trending
- Look at bestseller badges (orange ribbon) — these have proven sales history
- Note sub-niches that appear in bestsellers you hadn't considered
- Check 'People also searched for' at the bottom of search results

Google Trends

- Go to trends.google.com — search your niche keywords
- Look at 5-year view to determine if interest is growing, stable, or declining
- Check 'Related queries' — rising queries = emerging opportunity
- Compare multiple niches side by side to prioritize your research

Other Research Sources

Source	What to Look For	Time Investment
TikTok #etsy #smallbusiness	Products going viral with lots of orders	15 min/week
Reddit r/Etsy r/passive_income	What's selling, seller discussions	10 min/week
Amazon Best Sellers	Physical products you could adapt for POD	20 min/session
Everbee Chrome Extension	Etsy revenue estimates on competitor listings	As needed

3. Niche Validation

Before investing time in designs, validate that your niche has real buyer demand and isn't oversaturated.

- ■ Search niche keyword on Etsy — at least 1,000 results (proves demand exists)

- ■ At least 10 shops have bestseller badges in this niche

- ■ Google Trends shows stable or growing interest (not declining)

- ■ Passionate communities exist around this interest (subreddits, Facebook groups, forums)

- ■ Products in this niche are gift-able (multiplies addressable market)

- ■ Niche is NOT dominated by 1-2 mega-shops with 10,000+ reviews

- ■ You can brainstorm 20+ design ideas for this niche (proves repeatability)

- ■ The niche has seasonal peaks you can plan around

Niche Tier Framework

Tier	Examples	Competition	Strategy
Broad (avoid)	Dog lover, Teacher	Very High	Too crowded to rank as a new shop
Mid (target)	Golden Retriever Mom, Kindergarten Teacher	Medium	Good starting point for new shops
Specific (ideal)	Golden Retriever Mom Runner, Kindergarten Teacher Plant Lady	Low	Best ROI — rank faster with less effort

4. Competition Analysis

For each of your top 5 competitors in the niche, capture the following:

Factor	What to Note
Total sales	Proves market exists; note if the volume is achievable
Review count & rating	Sets the quality bar in this market
Price points	What buyers are willing to pay
Best-selling products	What designs/products get the most favorites
Title structure	What keywords they prioritize first
Photo style	Lifestyle vs white background vs mockup-only
Number of listings	Volume strategy vs. curated strategy
What's missing	Gaps — occasions, styles, colors not covered

Finding the Gap

Your opportunity is where demand exists but supply is poor. Ask:

- What complaints appear in their reviews? ('I wish it came in X')
- What sub-niches are they ignoring?
- What occasions or recipient types aren't covered?
- Is their design quality low despite high sales? (You can win on quality)
- Are their photos poor? (Better mockups = better click-through rate)

5. Product Selection Criteria

Score each potential product 1-5 on these criteria. Total score guides your priority:

Criteria	Weight	What You're Looking For
Search Demand	High	1,000+ monthly searches for primary keyword
Competition Level	High	Under 10,000 competing listings ideally
Profit Margin	High	40%+ after all fees at a competitive price
Design Feasibility	Medium	You can create a quality design in your tools
Seasonal vs. Evergreen	Medium	Evergreen preferred; seasonal needs advance planning
Repeatability	Medium	Can create 10+ variations for this niche
Shipping Simplicity	Low	Standard Printify fulfillment, no special packaging

The 70-Point Rule

Score each product out of 35 points (7 criteria × 5 max). Only pursue products that score 25+ (70%). Below this threshold means too many red flags to overcome with effort alone.

6. Design Brief Process

Before creating designs, write a brief. This keeps your designs aligned with what buyers actually want.

Design Brief Template — Fill This Out Before Every Design

Niche: [e.g., Golden Retriever owners who run] Buyer persona: [e.g., Women 30-50, runner, treats dog like family] Occasion: [e.g., Birthday gift, self-purchase, Christmas] Emotion to evoke: [e.g., Humor, pride, belonging, nostalgia] Design style: [e.g., Minimalist line art, bold typography, watercolor] Colors: [e.g., Black + gold, pastels, earth tones] Text concept: [e.g., 'Will Run for Golden Retrievers'] Competitors doing well: [List 2-3 specific listings for reference] What makes mine different: [e.g., Better illustration, unique typography]

Design Batch Strategy

- Design in batches, not one-at-a-time
- Create 3-5 core design concepts (different styles/approaches)
- Apply each design to 3+ products (mug, shirt, tote bag)
- This gives you 9-15 listings from just 3-5 designs
- Test all — double down on designs that get favorites and views

7. Testing Strategy

The 30-Day Test Protocol

Days 1-7: Publish listing with full SEO optimization. Check views daily.

Days 8-14: If <50 views, tweak title and tags. If 50+ views but no sales, improve thumbnail.

Days 15-30: If 100+ views and 0 sales, the problem is price, photos, or product-market fit.

Day 30: Decision point — iterate or kill the listing.

Key Metrics to Track

Metric	Healthy Range	Action if Below
Views (30 days)	100+	Fix SEO — title and tags first
Click-through rate	3-8%	Improve thumbnail photo
Conversion rate	1-5%	Improve price, description, or photos
Favorites-to-sales	10:1 or better	Good sign — may just need more traffic

When to Kill vs. Iterate vs. Scale

Kill: Less than 50 views after 30 days + SEO optimization. Demand doesn't exist for this specific product.

Iterate: 100+ views but low conversion. Demand exists — improve the offer (better photos, price test, stronger description).

Scale: Sales with positive reviews. Create 5-10 variations in the same niche immediately.

8. Research Worksheet Template

Copy this for each niche you research:

Field	Your Notes
Niche	
Date researched	
Etsy result count	
Google Trends direction	Growing / Stable / Declining
Pinterest trending?	Yes / No
Top 3 competitors	1. 2. 3.
Avg price in niche	
Identified gaps	
Best product types	
Design concepts (3+)	1. 2. 3.
Validation score (/35)	
Decision	Pursue / Monitor / Skip