

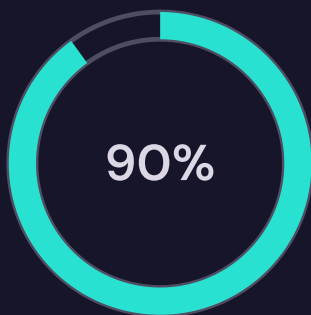


## Why Early Hires Fail Post-Seed (and How to Avoid It)

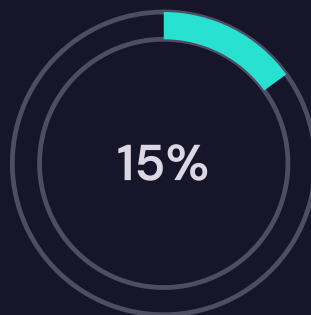
Raising a seed round is one of the most exciting moments in a cyber security startup's journey. It's validation, momentum, and a clear sign that people believe in what you're building.

But it's also a critical inflection point. Because once the money lands, expectations shift quickly. Investors want rapid, efficient growth – and suddenly the decisions you made when you were a scrappy team of builders are being tested in a very different environment.

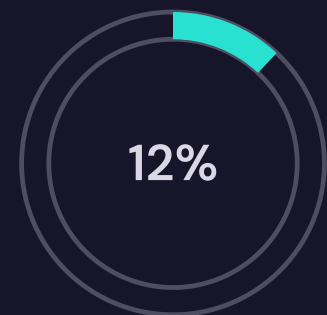
This is where many cyber security startups enter the “valley of death” between Seed and Series A. The numbers paint a tough picture:



**Nine out of 10** startups fail to progress from Seed to Series A



European success rates fell to just **10–15%** in 2024



For SaaS startups, success rates dropped from **37% in 2020** to just **12% by H1 2022**

We all know product-market fit is a huge part of survival, but what founders often underestimate is the impact of people strategy at this stage. The team you build, and the hires you make in the first 6–12 months post-seed, can either accelerate momentum or quietly stall it. From our perspective, having the wrong people at this crucial junction has monumental effects on long-term success. If you want to be that one in ten, you need to get your people strategy right.

### The real issue: Builders vs Scalers

Post-seed, cyber security startups face what many call the “Series A Crunch”. The business needs to prove traction and show a repeatable, scalable go-to-market model, and that creates pressure on every part of the organisation. It's also the point where early hires can start to struggle, not because they're bad, but because the company has moved into a different phase of growth.

Often, founders have hired a brilliant team of builders. These are the people who thrive in ambiguity, move fast, and do whatever it takes to ship product. But the next phase requires scalers – people who know how to accelerate ARR, build repeatable systems, and execute under investor expectations. If you have a strong builder team but no scaler capability, you can feel the shift overnight: the business is no longer just trying to create something valuable, it's trying to turn that value into predictable growth.

## Why early hires struggle after seed

Your first employees shape your culture, your standards, and your ability to attract the next wave of talent. In cyber security, where top talent has options, nobody wants to report into mediocre leadership or join a business that feels like it's standing still.

Another common challenge is the “big-name hire” trap. Post-seed, there's often pressure to bring in talent from the biggest and most recognisable cyber security brands. On paper, it looks like a shortcut, in practice, it can backfire because the skills that drive success in large organisations don't always translate to early-stage reality.

Sales is the clearest example of this. Selling at a large vendor often means a steady flow of inbound demand, mature enablement, polished collateral, pre-sales support, and strong brand trust. Sales at a startup is completely different. A revenue-focused hire at seed stage has to be an agile educator, ready to hear “no” most of the time, adjust messaging every few weeks as the company iterates, and survive long periods of silence from prospects. When someone isn't built for that environment, it can look like underperformance, when really it's a stage mismatch.

The same dynamic applies in product leadership too. Early-stage product hires can struggle because there's no infrastructure for research, feedback loops, or structured discovery. It's fast, founder-heavy, and often reactive, which can feel uncomfortable for someone used to formal processes and stable roadmaps.



## Hiring too fast or too slow

When teams expand rapidly without a plan, they become bloated, burn increases, and progress slows because the business hasn't defined ownership, responsibilities, and what success looks like. Founders can fall into the trap of thinking headcount will unlock revenue, but without clarity and sequencing it often just creates noise and cost. On the other side, hiring too slowly can be just as damaging, because understaffing causes missed opportunities, slows delivery, and creates burnout in the people you already have.

Finally, the crunch point tends to come down to lack of planning and unclear success metrics. Early hires flounder when founders haven't mapped out what they need long-term, when job definitions are vague, or when expectations aren't aligned. If nobody has thought through what success looks like in the first 90 days, it becomes difficult to measure progress, give feedback, or course-correct early.

## What "good" looks like: a practical hiring roadmap

### Seed Stage (Pre-Series A):

At this stage, the focus is on validating the product and building initial credibility. The Technical AE should be hired around six months before MVP completion to engage customers and provide real-world feedback. A Sales Engineer becomes necessary once ARR hits \$150–250k (5+ POCs), to relieve the founder/CTO from technical pre-sales. Finally, in many cases, a founder relocation to the US follows to support relationship building with customers and investors.

### Series A Stage:

As the company prepares for Series A and beyond, the GTM build accelerates. A VP Sales should be in place before the raise, ensuring investors see a credible revenue leader. Following funding, a Head of Marketing joins to establish brand presence and demand generation, supported by SDR hires to feed the pipeline. At least two Account Executives, a Customer Success team, and additional Sales Engineers round out the foundation for scalable growth



## Scaling isn't about having money – it's about using it well

Scaling a cyber security startup isn't just about getting funding in the bank, it's about making smart moves with it. The companies that win are the ones that hire in the right order, expand into the US at the right moment, and keep spending tied to measurable outcomes that actually matter. In a network-driven market like cyber security, reputation and trust often outweigh logos, and that means early hires need to bring credibility as well as capability.

If you're post-seed (or approaching it), now is the time to pressure-test your people plan. Look out for our Hiring Readiness Checklist soon, and if you want to talk through your talent strategy with someone who lives and breathes cyber growth hiring, book a call with one of our industry experts.

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### Contact us

E: [info@tridentsearch.io](mailto:info@tridentsearch.io)

W: [www.tridentsearch.co.uk](http://www.tridentsearch.co.uk)

