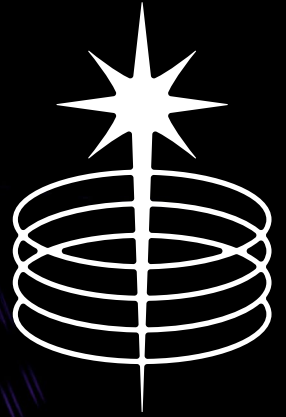


GTM Strategy
MKT479-002 Final

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GuardLock®

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Version 23

Executive Summary

Guard Lock addresses a specific, persistent gap in the athletic equipment market: athletes in non-helmeted contact sports such as rugby, lacrosse, and field hockey; lack a sanitary, secure storage solution for their mouthguards during breaks in play. Currently, athletes resort to makeshift storage methods, often placing mouthguards on the turf, in equipment pockets, or tucked into waistbands. This not only exposes users to bacterial contamination but frequently results in lost equipment, leading to unnecessary replacement costs for parents and athletes.

To solve this, Guard Lock introduces a dedicated retention system built around a soft, high-tension band. Designed to attach seamlessly to an athlete's existing apparel, the mechanism secures the mouthguard close to the body. This ensures the equipment remains stationary and unobtrusive during high-intensity movement while allowing for quick, one-handed access. Utilizing lightweight, moisture-wicking materials, the holder meets high-performance athletic standards without adding physical distractions or interfering with a player's mobility.

The primary value proposition of Guard Lock extends beyond convenience; actively mitigating health risks and reduces the financial friction of replacing custom-fitted mouthguards. In a market where sports programs, coaches, and parents increasingly prioritize player safety and hygiene, Guard Lock provides a pragmatic solution. By giving the mouthguard a designated, easily accessible storage space, the product naturally encourages better equipment maintenance habits on the sidelines.

Ultimately, Guard Lock is positioned to serve competitors across all levels of play, from youth leagues to professional organizations. By functioning as an add-on accessory rather than competing directly with the uniform constraints of major athletic brands, Guard Lock establishes a unique market niche. The product effectively merges sports hygiene with functional apparel design, offering a straightforward, practical solution to an overlooked problem in athletic performance.

Artificial Intelligence Disclosure

The following mentions of artificial intelligence (AI) are specifically referring to foundational models (FMs, or LxMs), such as transformer architecture large language models (LLMs) and diffusion models for images. Non-foundational (but AI) tools such as Grammarly were used without citation. No AI-generated ideas were used, and all proofreading was done by a human (thank you Gigi!). The following document-wide uses are given attribution here, but not throughout the document:

- ChatGPT¹ and AI in Google Search were used as source engines for market research, providing sources that we can click on and read. AI is better with natural language processing, allowing us to find information on hard-to-search topics. Similarly, AI was used to help format footnote citations using either manual inputs or URL context (browsing).
- Typesetting with markup languages and data restructuring. For example, tables were provided in .html or Word .xml to AI², which output tab delimited plaintext for importing clean tables into InDesign. Some sections were converted to Markdown by AI before being imported to resolve style conflicts and determine structure with semantics. These use cases retained human written content and were strictly for adding syntax and reformatting data.

On our honour as students, we pledge that we have not received or given any unauthorized assistance in this academic work.

Any other citation of AI is for cases where:

1. AI altered a human-written section.
2. AI generated the section, a requirement for one, we the Financial Analysis chapter.
3. The AI text or image was used like a traditional source would be.

¹ OpenAI, ChatGPT, 2026, <https://chat.openai.com>

² Open AI, ChatGPT (version 5.4), OpenAI Platform, <https://platform.openai.com/chat>

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Chapter 001

Situational Analysis

Company Analysis

Synopsis on Strategy

To provide a clean, secure, and unobtrusive place for athletes to store their mouthguards during an athletic event.

Guard Lock is a company built around a product that fills a gap in the athletic garment space, specifically that athletes in contact sports that do not require a helmet do not have a clean and secure place to store their mouthguard.

There are multiple go-to-market strategies that Guard Lock could employ, each involving different business-to-customer relationships and competitive landscapes. Our goal is to enter a non-competitive market by targeting different customers in a non-traditional way, creating a new market niche – a “Blue Ocean” strategy^I.

Launching a short or shirt with the Guard Lock mechanism built into it would be a strategic error, as these would be classified as uniforms. Large incumbents like Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour pay teams massive sponsorship fees to be the exclusive provider of their uniforms^{II}. As a startup, Guard Lock lacks the funding and reserves to continuously out-bid them, as well as the brand recognition required to ensure a return on such an investment. Additionally, because our value proposition is directed at end users—the players—it would be difficult to pitch to teams in a business-to-business (B2B) relationship. This also eliminates the

current possibility of licensing the patented mechanism to incumbents; they would likely see little incentive to pay a licensing fee for a product feature that teams might not pay a premium for.

Players can choose their undergarments freely though, and they bypass some of the strict adherence to player safety regulations. However, the differential value (in dollars) that the mouthguard locking mechanism provides does not exceed the price of the next best competitive alternative, meaning in order for players to switch the undergarment alone would have to be good enough to make the value exceed the reference price.

Furthermore, while undergarments are often hidden – reducing the aspirational identity positioning used by the incumbents and lowering qualitative switching costs – consumer risk remains high. Incumbents have entrenched trust and brand recognition for performance that a small startup cannot reach yet. Currently Guard Lock lacks specialized knowledge, skills, and resources to produce an undergarment that competes with industry leaders on quality alone.

Our “Blue Ocean,” therefore, is to sell a product that attaches to existing undergarments, not uniforms, allowing athletes to leave it attached during gameplay and be able to still use their favorite undergarment manufacturer. Designed as a bright colored, soft, tag-style mechanism, it would hang over the athlete’s shorts. If used by professionals, its utility would be televised live, building product recognition without the need for exclusive provider fees or direct competition with existing brands. Once trust and recognition are built, we anticipate having the resources to launch a full lineup of undergarments with the mechanism pre-integrated.

I “Understanding the Red Ocean vs Blue Ocean Strategies.” *The Strategy Institute*, <https://www.thestrategyinstitute.org/insights/understanding-the-red-ocean-vs-blue-ocean-strategies>

II Stitt, Anthony. “For a Cool \$3 Billion, MLB Adds Nike Swoosh to Uniforms.” *Forbes*, 19 Dec. 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anthony-stitt/2019/12/19/for-a-cool-3-billion-mlb-adds-nike-swoosh-to-uniforms>

Business Model Canvas

Value Propositions

Providing a clean, secure place to store a mouthguard during an athletic event + Eliminates contamination from turf, floors, or pockets + Improves convenience and accessibility for athletes + Lightweight, durable, and sport-compatible + Improves hygiene and athlete safety + Cuts down on time trying to find a mouthguard, saving game time

Key Partners

Sporting goods manufacturers + Mouthguard brands (SISU, Shock Doctor, Venum, etc.) + Collegiate and high school athletic programs + Equipment distributors + Professional training facilities + E-commerce platforms + Plastic/silicone suppliers

Key Activities

Product design and testing + Manufacturing oversight + Brand development + Marketing & social media campaigns + Athlete partnerships + E-commerce operations

Customer Relationships

Social media engagement + Athlete sponsorships and ambassadors + Email marketing + Loyalty discounts and bulk orders from teams + Engagement tabling/tenting at sports matches

Customer Segments

Primary Market:

Rugby, Lacrosse, Flag Football, and Field Hockey + Wrestlers + Martial Artists

Secondary Market:

High school and Youth sports + Club sports and Collegiate athletics + Adult leagues

Buyer vs. User Insight:

- **Users:** Athletes
- **Buyers:** Coaches, parents, and athletic programs

Key Resources

Manufacturing partners + Product design + Brand identity + Website and e-commerce infrastructure + Athlete partnerships + Local sponsorships

Channels

Amazon + Sports goods retailers + Team equipment dealers + Company website + Bulk sales to schools + Social media shops

Cost Structures

Fixed Costs:

Website maintenance + Salaries + Trademarks + Insurance

Variable Costs:

Shipping and packaging + Marketing ads + Manufacturing

Revenue Streams

Primary

Wholesale contracts with teams and retailers + Direct product sales via online

Secondary

Bundle package deals with mouthguards + Custom team-branded Guard Locks

Customer Analysis

Product Market

Guard Lock is positioned within the sports performance apparel market, specifically targeting athletes in high-contact sports where mouthguards are required. Guard Lock offers an immediate impact on the protective gear market by offering a unique, integrated solution for secure and hygienic storage. Our initial objective is to enter the performance appeal space with our Guard Lock Mouthguard Holder, offering athletes a convenient, safe, and performance-focused method for managing their gear during active play.

Target Market

Guard Lock serves a broad target market with different motivations for adoption. Our primary audience includes across all levels of competition—youth, high school, collegiate, and professional—as well as sports clubs, teams, and parents of youth athletes.

Our largest consumer segments are athletes in sports such as lacrosse, rugby, field hockey, and hockey. These athletes frequently remove their mouthguards during breaks or substitutions, creating a clear need for hygienic and secure storage solutions. By providing a dedicated “home” for the mouthguard, our product directly addresses the common pain points of equipment loss and bacterial contamination, ultimately saving time and money while reducing health risks.

Guard Lock also appeals to parents and coaches who prioritize hygiene and convenience. Youth and collegiate athletes, in particular, benefit from a product that minimizes sideline distractions and promotes better equipment care. For parents, the value lies in reducing the recurring costs of replacement mouthguards and ensuring their children remain healthy and focused on the game.

By merging high-performance apparel with protective gear management, Guard Lock uniquely resonates with

athletes who want to stay “locked in” without compromising safety or comfort.

Location

Guard Lock will initially target consumers across the United States through a Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) online sales model. By launching as an e-commerce focused brand, Guard Lock can reach athletes in mouthguard-reliant sports regardless of geographic location. This digital-first approach allows the company to efficiently access a national customer base without the overhead and physical limitations of traditional retail.

Because participation in sports such as lacrosse, football, rugby, and field hockey is widespread across the country, an online storefront provides the most versatile platform to serve athletes at the youth, high school, collegiate, and professional levels. This model also facilitates direct marketing to parents, teams, and organizations who prioritize athlete safety and convenience when purchasing athletic equipment.

To support this distribution strategy and maintain competitive pricing, Guard Lock plans to leverage global manufacturing expertise. Product will be centered in regions such as Mexico, Vietnam, or China, where there is significant technical infrastructure for high-performance athletic apparel. Manufacturing in these regions allows for lower production costs and access to specialized technical fabrics while ensuring scalable production capabilities and rigorous quality control.

As brand equity and consumer demand increases, Guard Lock will evaluate expansion into additional sales channels. This may include strategic partnerships with national sporting goods retailers, specialized team distributors, and collegiate athletic organizations. This phased location strategy minimizes overhead during early operations while positioning the company for rapid market penetration and long-term growth.

Age & Income

Guard Lock is primarily designed for athletes between the ages of 8 and 35, a range that represents the vast majority of participants in organized contact sports. Youth, high school and collegiate athletes comprise the largest portion of this demographic, while professional and recreational adult athletes extend the upper end of the spectrum. The scale of this opportunity is significant, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), over 8 million students participate in high school sports annually in the United States, many of which require mouthguards^I.

Regarding financial demographics, Guard Lock targets households with discretionary income necessary to support athletic pursuits. According to the U.S. Census Bureau^{II}, the median household income in the United States was approximately \$74,580 as of 2022, with households that spend on youth sports and athletic equipment typically earning above the national median. This income bracket aligns closely with Guard Lock's pricing strategy and value proposition. Consumers in this segment have demonstrated a willingness to pay for innovative products that mitigate health risks, prevent the recurring cost of equipment loss, and enhance overall athletic performance.

Psychographics

To better understand the characteristics of our consumers within the athletic apparel industry it is essential to examine the behaviours and needs of athletes participating in mouthguard-reliant contact sports. These athletes frequently remove their mouthguards during breaks, substitutions, or between drills, often placing them on the ground, turf, or in equipment pockets. Studies have shown that athletic equipment exposed to shared or outdoor environments can harbour harmful bacteria significantly increasing the risk of illness and infection^{III}.

Guard Lock's primary consumers are performance-focused athletes who value hygiene, convenience, and efficiency. Younger athletes—particularly those in youth,

high school, and collegiate programs—operate in fast-paced environments where ease of access and distraction-free gear management are essential. These athletes are less likely to pause play to search for dropped equipment and more inclined to adopt products that seamlessly integrate into their existing gear.

Parents and coaches also represent a vital consumer segment, as they prioritize safety, cleanliness, and cost efficiency. Parents of youth athletes are especially motivated to purchase products that mitigate health risks and prevent frequent replacement of lost or contaminated mouthguards. Similarly, coaches and team staff value solutions that help athletes remain focused and prepared during high-stakes competitions.

Furthermore, today's athletes are increasingly drawn to innovative, performance enhanced apparel that evolves beyond traditional design. Compression gear has become a standard across all levels of sport for its comfort, mobility and support. By combining compression apparel with functional storage solutions, Guard Lock aligns with modern athletic preferences for multi-functional streamlined equipment that enhances performance without adding unnecessary bulk or distraction^{IV}.

Needs

Athletes at every stage of their career lack proper equipment that simultaneously supports both performance and hygiene. While mouthguards are a cornerstone of mandatory protective gear, athletes consistently struggle to find a place to store them when they are not in practice or a game.

During an athlete's participation in their sport, they tend to take their mouthguard out of their mouth frequently, especially when play stops, to catch their breath, etc. This leads to the problem that certain sports do not have a proper place to store their mouthguards when they are not engaged in their sport. This leads athletes to tuck them into an easily accessible place (usually a jersey, bra strap, or shorts), put them on the ground, or simply hold them in their hand. Furthermore leading to a chance of getting sick through unsanitary practices and an annoying inconvenience.

I National Federation of State High School Associations. "High School Athletics Participation Survey." NFHS, 2022. <https://nfhs.org/resources/sports/high-school-participation-survey-archive>

II U.S. Census Bureau. "Income and Poverty in the United States." 2022. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/income-poverty/p60-279.html>

III CDC. (2024, June 26). Healthy Schools: About. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-schools/about/index.html>

IV High Performance Apparel Market Size, Share, Trend Report, 2035, Market Growth Reports, accessed February 13, 2026 <https://www.marketgrowthreports.com/market-reports/high-performance-apparel-market-103807?utm>

The demand for sports equipment continues to grow as more people participate in athletics. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), 8,266,244 students participated in high school sports during the 2024-25 school year. This demonstrates that sports participation in the United States is increasing rapidly and athletics remain highly relevant. The growing number of athletes also increases the risk of injury and highlights the importance of protective equipment such as mouthguards, along with a safe place to store them.

Furthermore, the sporting goods industry is experiencing solid expansion nationwide. McKinsey & Company stated that big sporting goods stores are seeing growth of nearly 7% annually from 2021-2025 and are projected to continue increasing at around 6% every year until 2029. The increase in people getting involved in athletics and the market growing at a long-term rate create demand for creative accessories that enhance athletes' involvement in sports^I.

Guard Lock thoroughly focuses on the needs and wants of athletes and provides a clean storage solution that effectively limits bacteria and loss while making a mouthguard easy to access. By highlighting the product's strength, convenience, and safety, it aligns with the constantly changing consumer forecast for sports gear, which emphasizes both readiness to compete and proper health precautions.

Customer Segments

Guard Lock's main customer segment is student-athletes, particularly those engaged in contact sports such as rugby, flag football, lacrosse, field hockey, hockey, and wrestling. Even though there are 8 million high school athletes nationwide, this demographic represents a large and reliable market, as new students enter athletic programs each year. As long as equipment is consistently mandated or strongly encouraged, athletes will be open to accessories that ensure proper usage and safety^{II}.

The secondary segment comprises competitive club teams and college athletes seeking convenient, performance-enhancing accessories. These athletes show a strong preference for high-quality materials and

innovative design, making this segment likely to adopt the product early while also encouraging positive market trends through word of mouth within athletic clubs or teams.

Guard Lock is also targeting parents of children and teens getting into sports who tend to spend money on products that significantly reduce injury and promote proper hygiene. Athletic programs and their coaches also represent an additional segment as they seek to purchase equipment in bulk while ensuring team safety.

From an industry perspective, the rapidly growing market supports this segment strategy. The global sporting goods market was valued at \$102.29 billion in 2024 and is estimated to reach upwards of \$168.20 billion by 2032, **+ 64.43%** driven by heightened health awareness, e-commerce growth, and sports associations. This consistent increase shows significant opportunities for niche products that address convenience limitations in athletics^{III}.

By honing in on athletes specifically and targeting institutions, parents, and coaches, Guard Lock can serve a diverse customer base, helping both individuals and athletic organizations looking to order in bulk.

Awareness & Attitude

Awareness of safety in sports, specifically around mouthguards, is high among athletes in organized sports because most sports require athletes to wear a mouthguard to prevent dental damage. Although athletes know how crucial it is to wear a mouth guard, there is no product on the market that addresses the problem of where to keep it while you're playing.

The constant growth in high school sports shows that individuals are prioritizing sports and recognizing the benefits they offer in developing young adults. NFHS research shows that sports participation has increased by more than 645,000 students over the last three years, highlighting that athletics contribute to educational development and increased student engagement within their communities. As participation in sport increases,

I McKinsey & Company. "Sporting Goods 2025—The new balancing act: Turning uncertainty into opportunity" 2025. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/sporting-goods-industry-trends>

II NFHS News "Participation in High School Sports Tops Eight Million for First Time in 2023-24." NFHS, 10 Sep. 2024, <https://www.nfhs.org/stories/participation-in-high-school-sports-tops-eight-million-for-first-time-in-2023-24>

III {Sporting Goods Market. "Global Sporting Goods Market to Reach USD 168.20 Billion by 2032, Supported by Rising & Fitness Awareness, Sports Participation, and E-Commerce Expansion, Project Kings Research." 2025. <https://www.kingsresearch.com/press-release/sporting-goods-market>

awareness of safety and sanitation is also promoted^I.

Yet, even though most sports require athletes to wear a mouthguard, many athletes do not consider the risks of illness associated with storing it improperly. This problem creates an opportunity for Guard Lock to present itself not just as another sports accessory but as a tool for preventing illness. The marketing strategies will allow coaches or sports organizations to educate their athletes about the potential growth of bacteria on their mouth guard and provide a place to properly store to limit damage to the mouth guard too.

Nevertheless, today's sports environment shows that consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of providing athletes with up-to-date equipment. McKinsey discusses how leaders in the sports industry recognize the growth potential even amid economic uncertainty, showing confidence in consumers' willingness to purchase products that offer clear benefits aligned with their personal values and goals. Guard Lock will capitalize on consumer interest by making consumers aware of the product's simplicity and its role as an upgrade to traditional gear currently on the market^{II}.

Access

Guardlock will sell and distribute through retail and online channels to make this product as accessible as possible. Selling on e-commerce platforms like our own website, Amazon, and a sporting goods retail website will ensure customers don't have trouble finding our product and can simply buy it, no matter where they are located.

E-commerce will also be utilized, with accessibility in mind. Projections indicate that the expansion of e-commerce in the sporting goods industry will be a major driver of market growth, reflecting shifts in consumer preferences toward easy, efficient delivery. Selling Guard Lock through e-commerce platforms like Amazon and maintaining a dedicated company website would also make our company more multidimensional in the market and allow the collection of consumer data that would be highly beneficial^{III}.

Partnerships with sports institutions would be another

access point with great upside. Forming partnerships with athletic departments, schools, and leagues could lead to entire teams adopting the product, sustain constant demand, and improve the brand's credibility within the industry. Seeing participation trends increase nationwide makes these partnerships a viable channel for long-term success.

Linking e-commerce, partnerships, and sporting goods retail will help Guard Lock increase product visibility and ensure athletes can easily find and purchase the accessory through the multiple purchasing options available.

Customer Alternatives

Currently, athletes rely on makeshift storage methods, such as equipment bags, pockets, or simply holding the mouthguard by hand when not in use. While these methods are simple, they significantly increase the risk of contamination and loss. A usual alternative method to storing your mouthguard would be on the court or field when there is a top of play which then leads to bacteria or dirt getting on the mouthguard which leads to them getting contaminated and risk of illness.

Healthy competition in the sports industry continues to drive growth in the sporting goods equipment sector. The North American sporting goods market is estimated to reach approximately \$209 billion by 2029, reflecting a rise in companies striving to keep pace with constant innovation. Guard Lock's specialized focus allows it to operate in an untapped niche, minimizing the risk of direct competition with established equipment giants^{IV}.

Indirect competitors include mouthguard companies that offer integrated straps or separate plastic cases. However, these solutions tend to be generic and are often not designed for convenience during active play. Guard Lock differentiates itself by promoting a secure attachment process, an athlete-focused design, and superior durability.

Simple, effective problem-solving products like Guard Lock are increasingly likely to gain traction in this expanding market.

I National Federation of State High School Associations. "Participation in High School Sports Hits Record High with Sizable Increase in 2024-25" NFHS, 2025. <https://www.nfhs.org/stories/participation-in-high-school-sports-hits-record-high-with-sizable-increase-in-2024-25>

II McKinsey & Company. "Turning uncertainty into opportunity" 2025. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/sporting-goods-industry-trends>

III Sporting Goods Market. "Global Sporting Goods Market to Reach USD 168.20 Billion by 2032" 2025. <https://www.kingsresearch.com/press-release/sporting-goods-market-theirholdingmarket>

IV McKinsey & Company. "Sporting Goods 2025--The new balancing act: Turning uncertainty into opportunity" 2025. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/sporting-goods-industry-trends>

Types of Competitors

Direct Competition

- OPRO
- SISU Mouth Guard
- Shock Doctor
- Game On Mouth Guards
- Gladiator Custom Mouth Guards
- Venum
- Optium
- Oral Mart

Indirect Competition

- Under Armor Mouth Guard Holders
- Velo Mouth Guard Cases
- SKLZ Sport Accessories
- Battle Sports Science Mouthguard Cases and Accessories

Substitutions & Replacements

- Shock Doctor Anti-Bacterial Mouthguard Case¹

¹ Woodmont Sports DMV. (n.d.). Shock Doctor mouthguard case. [https:// woodmontsportsdmv.com/product/shock-doctor-mouthguard-case/](https://woodmontsportsdmv.com/product/shock-doctor-mouthguard-case/)

Competitor Profile Matrices

Comprehensive Profile Matrix

Factors	Weight	Score 1-5	Weighted Score
<i>Competitor Profile Matrix: OPRO</i>			
Price	0.15	3	$0.15 \times 3 = 0.45$
Usability	0.25	5	$0.25 \times 5 = 1.25$
Packaging	0.05	4	$0.05 \times 4 = 0.20$
Quality	0.25	5	$0.25 \times 5 = 1.25$
Variety	0.05	3	$0.05 \times 3 = 0.15$
Age Range	0.10	4	$0.10 \times 4 = 0.40$
Uniqueness	0.15	4	$0.15 \times 4 = 0.60$
Sum	1	-	4.30
<i>Competitor Profile Matrix: SISU Mouthguards</i>			
Price	0.15	4	$0.15 \times 4 = 0.60$
Usability	0.25	4	$0.25 \times 4 = 1.00$
Packaging	0.05	3	$0.05 \times 3 = 0.15$
Quality	0.25	4	$0.25 \times 4 = 1.00$
Variety	0.05	3	$0.05 \times 3 = 0.15$
Age Range	0.10	4	$0.10 \times 4 = 0.40$
Uniqueness	0.15	4	$0.15 \times 4 = 0.60$
Sum	1	-	3.90
<i>Competitor Profile Matrix: Shock Doctor</i>			
Price	0.15	3	$0.15 \times 3 = 0.45$
Usability	0.25	4	$0.25 \times 4 = 1.00$
Packaging	0.05	4	$0.05 \times 4 = 0.20$
Quality	0.25	4	$0.25 \times 4 = 1.00$
Variety	0.05	4	$0.05 \times 4 = 0.20$
Age Range	0.10	4	$0.10 \times 4 = 0.40$
Uniqueness	0.15	3	$0.15 \times 3 = 0.45$
Sum	1	-	3.70

Factors	Weight	Score 1-5	Weighted Score
<i>Competitor Profile Matrix: Game On Mouthguards</i>			
Price	0.15	4	$0.15 \times 4 = 0.60$
Usability	0.25	3	$0.25 \times 3 = 0.75$
Packaging	0.05	3	$0.05 \times 3 = 0.15$
Quality	0.25	3	$0.25 \times 3 = 0.75$
Variety	0.05	3	$0.05 \times 3 = 0.15$
Age Range	0.10	3	$0.10 \times 3 = 0.30$
Uniqueness	0.15	3	$0.15 \times 3 = 0.45$
Sum	1	-	3.15

With the use of this competitive profile matrix^I, we are able to compare the advantages and disadvantages of our product with those of our competitors across multiple categories, allowing us to use a visual representation to evaluate how our product stands against various competitors in the market. This chart provides a usable visual based on our pricing advantages, and our differentiation from current competitors.

Price -0.15 (Moderately High)

Associated Weight Score: The price is based on the current pricing of the top ten most commonly used mouthpiece companies across the contact sports market. This represents how our product will fit into the existing market and compete with the other competitors in the contact sports market.

Usability - 0.25 (Very High)

Associated Weight Score: The usability score is based on our product's competitive advantage across all uses within various sports that use a mouthpiece, and its ability to be effective at all levels of sports that require a mouthpiece.

Packaging - 0.05 (Very Low)

Associated Weight Score: As packaging for a smaller product is very hard to make unique, we found this to be a smaller factor in the market and less likely to bring in more customers based solely on packaging.

Quality - 0.25 (Very High)

Associated Weight Score: The quality of the product is very high due to the need for this product to be rugged

and adaptable in order for it to be usable across multiple sports. Because it is made for high-impact sports, the product must be high quality to withstand contact between athletes during action.

Variety - 0.05 (Very Low)

Associated Weight Score: Given that most non-helmeted sports have very limited products that solve the issue of where to put your mouthpiece when you are not using it, there are very few adaptations of a similar product. But overall, it is not as important because there is currently not a high demand for a product of this nature and a lack of awareness among athletes about products that can keep mouthguards clean and reduce the need to replace them as often.

Age range -0.1 (Moderately Low)

Associated Weight Score: The age range is of moderate importance due to the fact that it is mainly based on sport usage rather than age. But overall, the product's usability applies to a wide range of athletes who use a mouthguard, ranging from ages 6–18 years old. Our product ensures that athletes of any age can keep their mouthguards clean for a longer period of time^{II}.

Uniqueness -0.15 (Moderately Low)

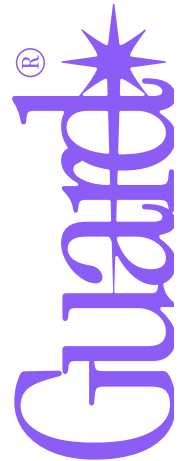
Associated Weight Score: The uniqueness score shows how our product will stand out in the market. We found this score to be relatively high based on the lack of access to this type of product across non-helmeted mouthpiece sports. Although this is a small market, which is why its overall importance is relatively low despite its usability across multiple sports.

I Best athletic mouthguards. (n.d.). Chicago Tribune. Retrieved February 25, 2026, from <https://reviews.chicagotribune.com/sports-and-fitness/fitness-equipment/best-athletic-mouthguards>

II American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. "Prevention of Sports-Related Orofacial Injuries." AAPD Oral Health Policies & Recommendations, 2026. <https://www.aapd.org/research/oral-health-policies--recommendations/prevention-of-sports-related-orofacial-injuries>

Contextual Analysis

A broad contextual analysis improves the understanding of the macro-environmental influences on Guard Lock market reach and growth. This is a sports accessory product entering a competitive market; however, Guard Lock is affected by economic purchasing patterns, technological modernization, regulatory changes, and social trends. Learning about the external factors provides valuable information about what consumers are purchasing and how they behave, long term trends, and the products become mainstream. This analysis will cover the economic, technological, legal, political, social, and cultural factors that demonstrate Guard Lock's potential.



Economic Environment

The equipment and sporting goods industry is a strong market, and it is always open to new, up-and-coming accessory products that could benefit athletes. According to Grand View Research, the global sports market was valued at \$331.4 billion in 2023 and is expected to

\$331.4 billion

grow at a 6.6% rate through 2030. With market consistency driven by increased participation in sports, greater income potential, and greater attention to athletes' health and fitness^I.

However, in the United States, it is unique in that sports are part of a broad and large market. According to information from the U.S. Census Bureau, markets like bookstores, sporting goods stores, and musical instrument stores generate as much as \$67 billion in annual sales as of 2023, indicating a dependable market for retail sales^{II}.

In particular, spending is much more prevalent in youth sports, even with inflation playing a crucial role. Families

spend a significant amount of money on their children; however, according to the Aspen Institute Project Play, families spend around \$1,016 **\$1,016 per child** per child each year on sports participation, including all the equipment and accessories they need for their specific sport. This shows that families with children in sports who need accessories are an effective market to target for Guard Lock^{III}.

With all of these economic indicators in mind, it is clear that consumers are spending a large amount of money on youth sports, which makes it easier for a company like Guard Lock to fit into the market because it enhances safety, convenience, and hygiene. Even though our product complements, rather than replaces, the equipment needed for their sport, the company can expect consistent profit margins amid growing spending in a rapidly developing industry.

I Grand View Research. "Sports Equipment Market (2026 -2033)" 2025. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/sports-equipment-market/dashboard>

II United States Census Bureau. "Monthly Retail Trade Data" 2025. https://www.census.gov/retail/marts/historic_releassignificanttechnologicalroleunderscoresstheeasees.html

III Aspen Institute Project Play. "Project Play survey: Family spending on youth sports rises 46% over five years" 2025. <https://projectplay.org/news/2025/2/24/project-play-survey-family-spending-on-youth-sports-rises-46-over-five-year>

Technological Environment

In today's society, technology is advancing rapidly, transforming the manufacturing and distribution of sports equipment. An example of this is the advancement of materials used in sports equipment, such as lightweight composite plastics, antimicrobial treatments, and impact polymers. This gives manufacturers the opportunity to produce high-quality, high-impact sports products that prioritize safety.

A report from Fortune Business Insights shows that growth in the sports equipment industry is driven by innovation, particularly in design and materials, as well as products that are safer and more convenient for consumers^I. Consumers who need products like this have certain standards or expectations that small accessory items will be designed for better performance and convenience.

Additionally, as manufacturing evolves, e-commerce plays a significant technological role. The U.S. Department of Commerce found that e-commerce was responsible for 15.4% of retail sales in 2023, and this percentage continues to grow each year^{II}.

Seeing the growth in digital purchases of sports accessories underscores the ease and convenience of comparing product pricing. This benefits Guard Lock by limiting the challenges of getting our product to market through direct-to-consumer sales while also allowing the company to benefit from retail distribution. The innovation of technology in the marketplace shows how companies like Guard Lock can use these advancements to achieve success.

Political, Legal Status, and Trends

When taking a deep dive into the political and legal aspects of sport, particularly in youth sports, it highlights the importance of having proper safety and equipment rules in place. With both national and state standards, organizations create and enforce rules that prioritize safety, thereby protecting athletes from injury at all levels of their specific

sport. An example of this is USA Football, which has an organization within its structure that creates and enforces safety rules to help reduce injury risk in youth sports^{III}.

Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has highlighted that around 7 out of 10 emergency department visits for children and adolescents are related to sports and recreation injuries each year.

7/10

All of these examples show how politics and institutional rules play a huge role in preventing injuries and ensuring that equipment is properly tested and safe for the public. Every school and league constantly considers liability concerns, which makes safety assurance products appear more like necessities rather than optional purchases for consumers interested in Guard Lock^{IV}.

Even though Guard Lock is not protective equipment, it is correlated with mouthguards and is also based on the belief that it offers better hygiene and convenience for athletes. The product works with existing mouthguards rather than introducing a new type of protective equipment, which means regulation around the product is less of a concern; however, aligning with organizations' values remains important.

Social, Cultural, and Status Trends

The social and cultural behaviour around sport remains strong and has always centred on athletes' health, performance, and identity. Recent trends show an increase in participation, which is also related to personal development, discipline, and growth in youth and young athletes.

The Sport & Fitness Industry Association conducted a study and found that more than 70% of Americans participated in fitness or sports-related activities in 2023^V (study concluded 236 million, population was 336 million).

This increased engagement shows how people are committed to staying active and maintaining that lifestyle through athletic activities. Additionally, participation among

70%

I Fortune Business Insights. "Sports Equipment Market Size" 2026. <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/sports-equipment-market-107963>

II United States Census Bureau. "Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales" 2025. <https://www.census.gov/retail/ecommerce.html>

III USA Football. "Health & Safety Resources" 2026. <https://usafootball.com/health-safety>

IV Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Data on Sports And Recreation Activities" 2026. <https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/data/>

V Sport & Fitness Industry Association. "PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RATES INCREASED FOR A FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR" 2026. <https://sfia.org/re-sources/sfias-topline-report-shows-physical-activity-rates-increased-for-a-fifth-consecutive-year/>

children in sports has increased, which shows a renewed interest in team sports and healthy competition.

Looking beyond participation, people are more aware of hygiene and health factors following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Consumers are conscious of illness caused by bacteria on shared or frequently used sports equipment, especially in sports that involve more contact. Having a product designed to reduce sickness and improve sanitation and responsibility is a trend that continues to grow and aligns with consumer expectations.

Athletes, now more than ever, value the status that comes with being prepared and professional. Consumers are interested in accessories that improve organization and preparation, creating an image of being highly competitive and prepared. Guard Lock associates with this mindset, appearing like a small accessory but actually serving as a meaningful upgrade that supports athletic identity, health, and hygiene.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive look at internal and external factors that can either help or harm Guard Lock. Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) directly feed into the [Internal Factors Analysis, or IFAS](#). External factors (opportunities and threats) directly feed into the [External Factors Analysis, or EFAS](#). They are summarized in the [Summary Factors Matrix, or SFAS](#).

Strengths

- Offers a convenient, sanitary, place to store a mouthguard when it is not in use.
- Prevents the loss of mouthguards.
- Reduces the need to replace lost mouthguards.
- Reduces distractions caused by searching for a misplaced mouthguard.
- Universal design that works across all sports requiring mouthguards

Weaknesses

- Concerns about durability and material quality.
- No brand recognition as a new niche product.
- New to the market, low consumer awareness.
- Considered a “want” rather than a “need,” and may be viewed as a nonessential convenience product.

Opportunities

- Increased focus on hygiene and athlete health in sports.
- E-commerce and online sales opportunities, including worldwide shipping within a growing industry.
- Partnership and bundling opportunities with organizations aligned with the brand (e.g., large schools and sports teams).
- Potential for product line extensions, including new variations, jerseys, and team kits.

Threats

- Must comply with government safety regulations.
- Must meet sport-specific governing body regulations (e.g., NCR and CRAA for rugby).
- Risk of idea replication due to its simplicity.
- Potential difficulty securing brand collaborations because of legal issues (e.g., Under Armour).
- Material limitations (cannot use plastic or hard materials).

Internal, External & Summary Analysis

Factors from the SWOT analysis are now assigned weight rankings and ratings. We use a mild departure from the typical IFAS and EFAS methodologies. Instead of manually assigning weights that must scale between 0 and 1, we assign a weight ranking between 1 and 5. These are then input into a sum normalization function that scales them all between 0 and 1, arriving at the variable weight, the typical calculation.

Weighted Score (W) is equal to assigned weight (w) × assigned rating (r) where:

$$w_i' = \frac{w_i}{\sum_{j=1}^n w_j}$$

A 4.24 total EFAS weighted score indicates that Guard Lock is responding well to external opportunities and threats.

- The company is strongly positioned in hygiene trends and first-mover advantage.
- The largest risks are imitation and regulatory compliance.
- E-commerce expansion significantly strengthens its strategic position.

Total Weight = 1.00

Total Weighted EFAS Score = 4.24

A 3.74 total weighted IFAS score shows that Guard Lock is effectively leveraging its strengths in functionality, hygiene, and universal applicability. Key weaknesses include low brand recognition and dependence on specific sports. Overall, the company is well-positioned to capitalize on its unique features and convenience advantages.

Total Weight = 1.00

Total Weighted IFAS Score = 3.74

Internal Factors Matrix

Internal Factors	Rating	Weight Ranking	Weight	Weighted Score
<i>Strengths</i>				
Offers a convenient, sanitary, place to store a mouthguard when it is not in use.	5	5	0.14	0.68
Prevents the loss of mouthguards.	4	5	0.14	0.54
Saves money by reducing the need to replace lost mouthguards.	5	5	0.14	0.68
Reduces distractions caused by searching for a misplaced mouthguard.	5	3	0.08	0.41
Design that works across all mouthguard sports.	3	4	0.11	0.32
<i>Weaknesses</i>				
Concerns about durability and material quality.	2	4	0.11	0.22
No brand recognition as a new niche product.	3	3	0.08	0.24
New to the market, resulting in low consumer awareness.	2	4	0.11	0.22
Considered a “want” rather than a “need,” and may be viewed as a nonessential convenience product.	4	4	0.11	0.43
Total			1.00	3.74

External Factors Matrix

External Factors	Rating	Weight Ranking	Weight	Weighted Score
<i>Opportunities</i>				
Increased focus on hygiene and athlete health in sports.	5	4	0.12	0.61
E-commerce and online sales opportunities, including worldwide shipping within a growing industry.	4	5	0.15	0.61
Partnership and bundling opportunities with organizations aligned with the brand (e.g., large schools and sports teams).	3	3	0.09	0.27
Potential for product line extensions, including new variations, jerseys, and team kits.	2	3	0.09	0.18
<i>Threats</i>				
Must comply with government safety regulations.	5	5	0.15	0.76
Must meet sport-specific governing body regulations (e.g., NCR and CRAA for rugby).	5	5	0.15	0.76
Risk of idea replication due to its simplicity.	4	2	0.06	0.24
Potential difficulty securing brand collaborations because of legal issues (e.g., Under Armour).	2	1	0.03	0.06
Material limitations (cannot use plastic or hard materials).	5	5	0.15	0.76
Total			1.00	4.24

Summary Factors Analysis

Strategic Factors	Weight	Rating	Weighted Score	Duration	Comments
<i>Strengths</i>					
Sanitary storage and hygiene functionality (S)	0.15	5	0.75	Short	Addresses immediate health concerns and prevents contamination.
Universal design across sports (S)	0.10	4	0.40	Long	Expandable market into football, lacrosse, hockey, etc.
<i>Weaknesses</i>					
Low initial brand recognition (W)	0.10	2	0.20	Short	Requires aggressive early marketing to build credibility.
Perceived as a “want” rather than a “need” (W)	0.10	3	0.30	Intermediate	Education is required to shift perception to an essential safety item.
<i>Opportunities</i>					
E-commerce and DTC sales growth (O)	0.15	4	0.60	Intermediate	Primary sales channel; allows for rapid nationwide scaling.
Increased cultural focus on athlete hygiene (O)	0.15	5	0.75	Long	Aligns with increasing post-pandemic sanitation awareness.
<i>Threats</i>					
Sport-specific governing body regulations (T)	0.15	4	0.60	Short	Must ensure immediate compliance with NCR, CRAA, etc.
Risk of idea replication (T)	0.10	2	0.20	Long	Simple concept requires strong, long-term IP protection.
Total	1.00		3.80		



Amis du Louvre

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

Chapter 002

Objectives

Objectives

Marketing Objectives

Market Penetration and Unit Volume

By the conclusion of year three, Guard Lock aims to achieve a total sales volume of 33,000 physical units. This objective is rooted in the conservative floor established in our [sales & revenue](#) forecast, which focuses on high school and youth participation in lacrosse, rugby, and field hockey. Reaching this volume validates our [blue ocean strategy](#) by proving that a dedicated, sanitary storage solution can successfully capture a significant share of the performance accessory market. Additionally, establishing ourselves as a market leader is critical in accomplishing our [differentiation strategy](#).

Institutional Channel Development

Establish long-term brand credibility by securing bulk sales partnerships with at least 50 athletic programs or collegiate departments by the end of year three. As noted in the [growth strategy](#), institutional sales are expected to become the primary engine of growth, eventually accounting for 50% of our total unit volume. This objective is critical for reducing customer acquisition costs and building the walking advertisement effect described in our section on [customer retention](#).

Product Integration and Regulatory Approval

Successfully transition from a standalone accessory to an integrated apparel provider by launching the Guard Lock

compression short line and securing governing body approvals in at least two major sports (such as lacrosse and rugby) by the start of year three. This objective addresses the material and durability concerns mentioned in the [SWOT analysis](#), while fulfilling the expansion goals outlined in our [strategy plan](#). Integration into undergarments increases switching costs for athletes and solidifies our niche against potential [competitor replication](#).

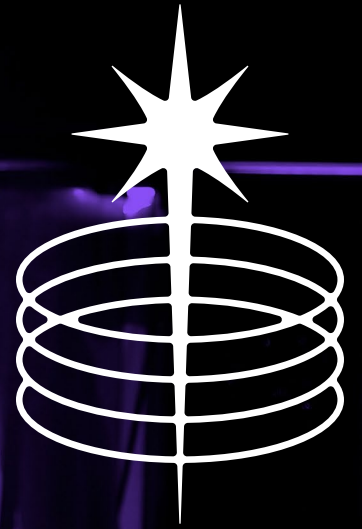
Financial Objectives

Annual Net Sales Growth

Achieve annual net sales of \$756,525 by the end of year three. This target reflects the successful implementation of our [pricing strategy](#), which utilizes value-based pricing and multi-degree segmentation to maximize revenue across both direct-to-consumer and team channels. Meeting this milestone ensures the company has the necessary reserves to explore the licensing opportunities and international expansion mentioned in the [strategic deployment matrix](#).

Marketing Efficiency and Investment Return

Maintain a marketing return on investment (MROI) of 306.2% by year three, ensuring the initial \$56,000 capital requirement is recovered within a 14.6-month payback period. As detailed in the [MROI analysis](#), our financial model relies on high-efficiency awareness spend rather than broad, untargeted media. Achieving these efficiency metrics demonstrates the economic productivity of our launch plan and positions the firm as an attractive target for the [exit strategy](#) involving acquisition by a major athletic brand.



Chapter 003

Strategic Direction

Differentiation & Positioning

It's no secret that Guard Lock has a relatively simple product. A cost leader strategy would be a sure way to end up competing on price. Commoditization has been the proven demise of many companies, and it would be easy for a new market entrant to sell a similar product at a lower price. Our differentiation strategy leverages that we are the first in the market. Consumers know that they can trust us, and that our product will stand up to the abuse we expect it to at the time it matters.

Mentioned in our [Synopsis on Strategy](#) is the Blue Ocean strategy we plan to leverage. We aren't entering the market in competition with mouthguard brands, nor are we competing with undergarments, or uniforms. This prevents head-on competition, and positions us as a unique product in the athletic space.

Customer Equity

And while the Blue Ocean strategy gives the necessary headroom to grow, we need the competitive advantage to make that happen. We adopted a "resource-based view of the firm" since the [Key Resources](#) are VRIN: Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non Substitutable. A competitive advantage is rooted in our Core Competencies, what our customers see us as in the marketplace. Capabilities become a Core Competency once they pass four tests:

- 1. Makes a significant contribution to our value proposition
- 2. Clearly a source of differentiation
- 3. Allows us to enter new markets
- 4. The capability is VRIN

We have three of those, between the Business Model Canvas and Blue Ocean Strategy, so let's discuss our Value Proposition.

Customer Acquisition

*People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill [bit].
They want a quarter-inch hole!*
-Theodore Levitt

It's not so much about the product as it is the means to solve it (if you don't start with a need then you're left with a solution looking for a problem), and our customers do face a serious problem. 91% of survey respondents had lost their mouthguard before. Differentiation is hard to speak on when it comes to a revolutionary product like ourselves- take a look at where these respondents keep their mouthguard when not in use:

Storage Location (multi-select)	Count
Sports bra strap	24
Pocket	21
Waistband	20
Hand	20
Sock	15
Around ear	9

Out of all female respondents, assuming they wear a sports bra, 85.7% use it to store their mouthguard when not in use. That means that an overwhelming majority of people who have a better place to put the mouthguard use it. And, with mouthguards being as expensive as they are, it makes financial sense to spend money on a solution. Thus, we aren't concerned about customer acquisition, customer retention is where we need to put our effort.

85.7%

Customer Retention

Retention is interesting, because we would like to sell a product that lasts forever, but there's no recurring revenue there. However, we won't compromise on our quality and sell a product with planned obsolescence. It's not what we stand for.

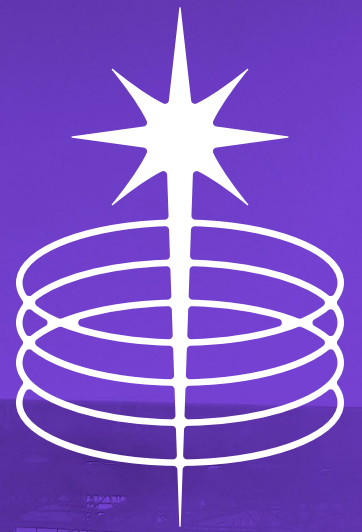
As the product lifecycle progresses, accessories such as cleaning kits could be introduced, and we fully plan on introducing new colorways or design modifications for aesthetics. It's not a stretch in judgement to assume that it might, at one point and especially in collegiate or official sports, be expected to be matched to uniforms; which requires additional purchases.

Additionally, if individual players are purchasing it, they might become internal advocates. Coaches take notice and eventually purchase units for the team. We've factored this into our [Financial Analysis](#), with bulk orders matching direct to consumer in quantity sold by year three. Those teams might eventually want their own custom branded Guard Lock.

Finally, we are willing to spend significant capital on Customer Experience (CX). Maximizing impact in all touchpoints is important to us, and it goes without saying that it in turn maximizes Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). In fact, companies that prioritize CX report 1.7x higher revenue growth and 2.3x greater increases in customer lifetime value CLV than those that do not¹. A strong warranty builds trust with consumers, and keeps the ones who do have any sub-par experiences from jumping ship. Due to the design of our product hanging down from an athlete's waistband, they become walking advertisements for us, so it's important they stick around.

2.3x

¹ Horatio. "Customer Experience ROI and Its Importance for Your Business." Horatio Blog, October 13, 2025. <https://www.hirehoratio.com/blog/customer-experience-roi>



Chapter 004

Market Strategy

Guard Lock's market strategy is to coordinate and align target customers, promotional strategies, and distribution channels to ensure that we're entering the market with preparation and long term growth. Our strategy covers the primary customers who want to purchase the product and promotional channels which persuade purchasing behavior and increase brand awareness.

The primary market will be high school and collegiate athletes playing in contact sports and programs who buy equipment in bulk. This demographic of customers will be reached through e-commerce platforms that are direct-to-consumer and sports team sales channels to guarantee accessibility for the consumer and institutional purchasers.

We will also focus our promotional strategy toward convincing our target customers through channels like athlete endorsements, social media platforms, and having direct contact to programs and their coaches.

Differentiating who Guard Lock is selling to and how the product is getting promoted will correlate with our distribution channels and this allows the company to be more effective with our marketing strategy, creating sustainable growth.

Target Market

Guard Lock is targeting athletes in collision sports such as rugby, lacrosse, and martial arts, which are all sports where you must have a mouthguard during gameplay. We have a stricter focus on sports that don't require a helmet, since that often acts as a solution to the problem we seek to solve (athletes will have a strap from the mouthguard to the helmet which allows it to hang down).

Tapping into a market where people are constantly joining or participating in organized sports makes a strong and less risky market. According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, over 236 million Americans participated in at least one sport or fitness activity in 2023, a strong total addressable market¹. However, youth sports participation is a rapidly growing market and a strong target, with leagues and school programs consistently offering competitive sports.

The primary segments will include high school and collegiate athletes, as these are the demographics who are constantly playing in organized sports and frequently need equipment. They are also more likely to be financially

burdened by the loss of a mouthguard. Families tend to spend a substantial amount of money every year on their children's participation in sports, indicating a willingness to pay for equipment and accessories that enhance performance and safety.

The secondary target market will consist of athletic programs, coaches, and equipment programs associated with sports organizations. These are the people who make purchasing decisions and would consider investing in Guard Lock for bulk orders. By looking into targeting both individual buyers and institutions, Guard Lock can make sure they are maximizing on the target reach but having their consumers being teams that are constantly in need of equipment for their athletes.

Positioning Strategy

Existing products often sacrifice quality and lack positioning as a sanitary device. Guard Lock positions itself in the market as a sanitary and durable solution, such a position prevents us from competing on price. The silicone materials used are inert and medical grade, unlike a cheap elastic band that would promote bacterial growth and break easily.

The trends seen with consumers support this as well. According to the Global Consumer Insights Survey, 70% of athletes say that convenience and ease of use contribute mightily to purchasing sports gear². This shows that there is a high demand for sports products that increase accessibility and ease during play. Furthermore, recent public health epidemics have conditioned consumers to value products that are associated with cleanliness, and this is something that can be important with sports equipment and storage.

Guard Lock's product position is split into 3 different beneficial factors:

- **Convenience:** Efficient and easy storage during play
- **Performance readiness:** Limits distractions and improves focus during gameplay
- **Hygiene:** Eliminates exposure to bacteria and dirt

By highlighting the importance of these benefits, Guard Lock will be established as a reasonable addition to an athlete's routine rather than an optional sports accessory.

¹ Sport & Fitness Industry Association. "Topline Participation Report" 2025. <https://sfia.org/reports/participation-report/>
² PwC. "Global Consumer Insights Survey" 2023. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/consumer-markets/consumer-insights-survey.html>

Price

Guard Lock will adopt a value-based pricing system, rather than basing it solely on production costs or competitors' prices. Consumers are looking for a way to address the problem of mouthguards being lost, dropped, or left in unhygienic areas; thus, there's a lot of value in a product that can accomplish that, not to mention the perception of quality typically is rooted in a higher price point. We stand behind our product and know that it will hold up to the abuse our customers will put it through.

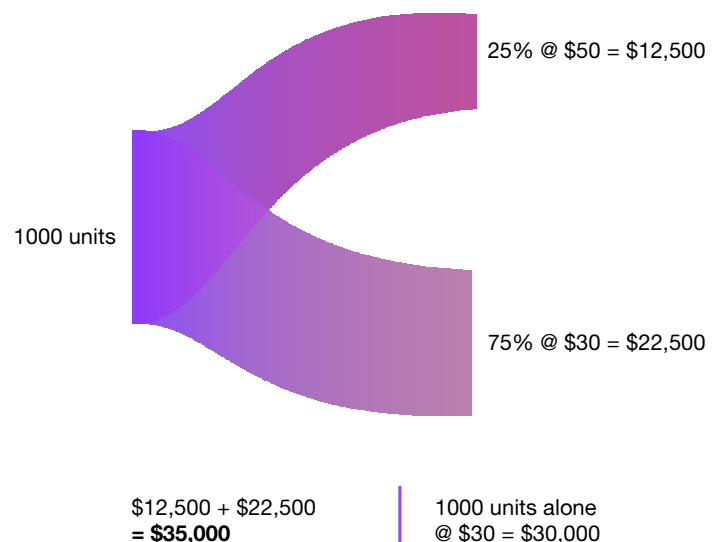
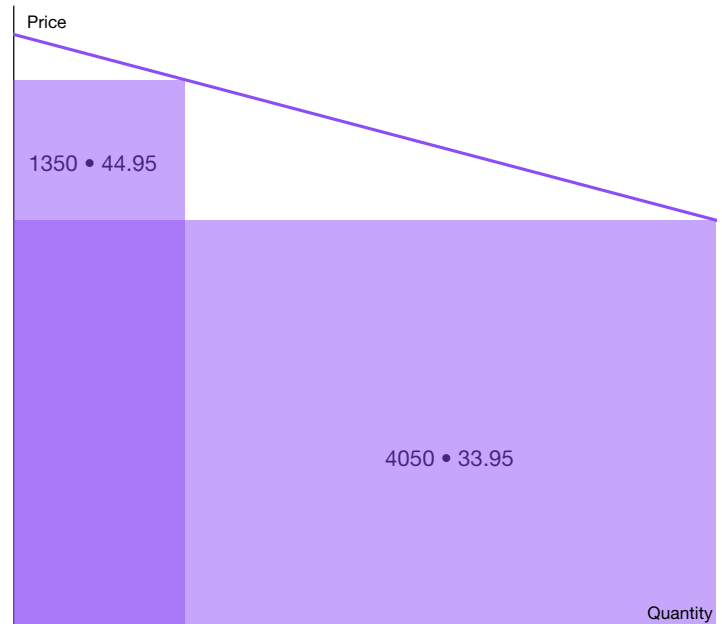
The product will be priced at \$33.95 for a single pack and a pack of two will be priced at \$44.95 with exclusive colors for direct-to-consumer purchases. This is a Second Degree Pricing Segmentation strategy, one of the most profitable decisions a company can make¹.

We will use price fences to introduce a third price version in the Third Degree, bulk discounts for teams or athletic programs priced at \$16.49. This approach promotes consumers' purchase of the product at the organizational level while maintaining perceived value in the dDTC market.

Having different price points captures significantly more revenue, as demonstrated in the first chart. The price versions closer align to a customer's willingness to pay, covering more area under the demand curve. Shown in the second chart is how the numbers come out to more revenue by doing so.

Our value proposition is backed by the product's ability to solve multiple problems at once, including reducing bacteria and contamination, making it more accessible during gameplay, and eliminating the need for makeshift storage methods. Having these benefits in place makes the product extremely practical rather than just another accessory, which increases its perceived value in our consumer market.

The pricing strategy for Guard Lock has been strengthened because there is no similar product in the sports equipment market. A standard mouthguard costs between \$10 to \$30, depending on reputation and quality, while other small accessories are priced similarly. This price reflects higher quality and functionality, as well as our position as a premium sports equipment product, such a price point makes that position immediately obvious to consumers. We are confident we provide the value to justify it. Having no direct competitor already creates a retention solution, and we focus on delivering value rather than competing on price, further promoting its premium positioning in the market.



Place

Guard Lock will use a multi-channel distribution strategy to guarantee accessibility at a widespread level. The main distribution channel will be direct-to-consumer e-commerce, allowing consumers to purchase our product on the Guard Lock website and other popular platforms such as Amazon.

E-commerce is a constantly growing platform. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, online sales accounted for over 15% of total retail sales and have been increasing steadily over time^I. Younger consumers are more likely to purchase online, which aligns well with our ideal personas.

Other channels that Guard Lock will pursue through our distribution:

- Team equipment suppliers
- Sporting equipment retailers
- Schools and athletic programs deals

Having bulk team sales will be a major channel to see growth within the company. Our internal projection shows that we are estimating thousands of units sold via team partnerships in the first year, and its continued growth as attention around the product increases. This is supported by recent purchasing trends in athletics, with sports organizations buying in bulk to be more cost-efficient and ensure consistency.

Promotion

Since Guard Lock introduces a new product class, our promotional strategy will focus on demand generation.

Having an effective digital marketing plan is crucial for our consumers we want to target. According to studies, Gen Z wants brands that reflect their values, expectations of themselves, and those of their peers^{II}. An authentic digital presence is crucial to accomplishing this, a field in marketing called User Generated Content (UGC). UGC methods like utilizing influencers makes owned/paid media appear to earned/organic, and can create up to 11 times higher ROI than traditional advertising^{III}.

Primary promotional strategies will be:

- Utilizing social media marketing through targeting athletes and parents
- Having videos showing the product used during a game or practice
- Having influencers partner with the brands and NIL and give reviews
- Creating communication and outreach to athletic programs and their coaches

Implementing this strategy will emphasize the product's visual display and problem-solving aspects, helping it not struggle as much as a new product.

I "E-commerce Sales Soared During the Pandemic," U.S. Census Bureau, November 12, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/04/ecommerce-sales-surged-during-pandemic.html>

II Hubspot, "Marketing to Gen Z: What Everyone Over the Age of 30 Ought to Know" 2018. https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/marketing-to-gen-z?hubs_content=blog.hubspot.com

III Influencer Marketing Hub, "Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report" 2026. <https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/>

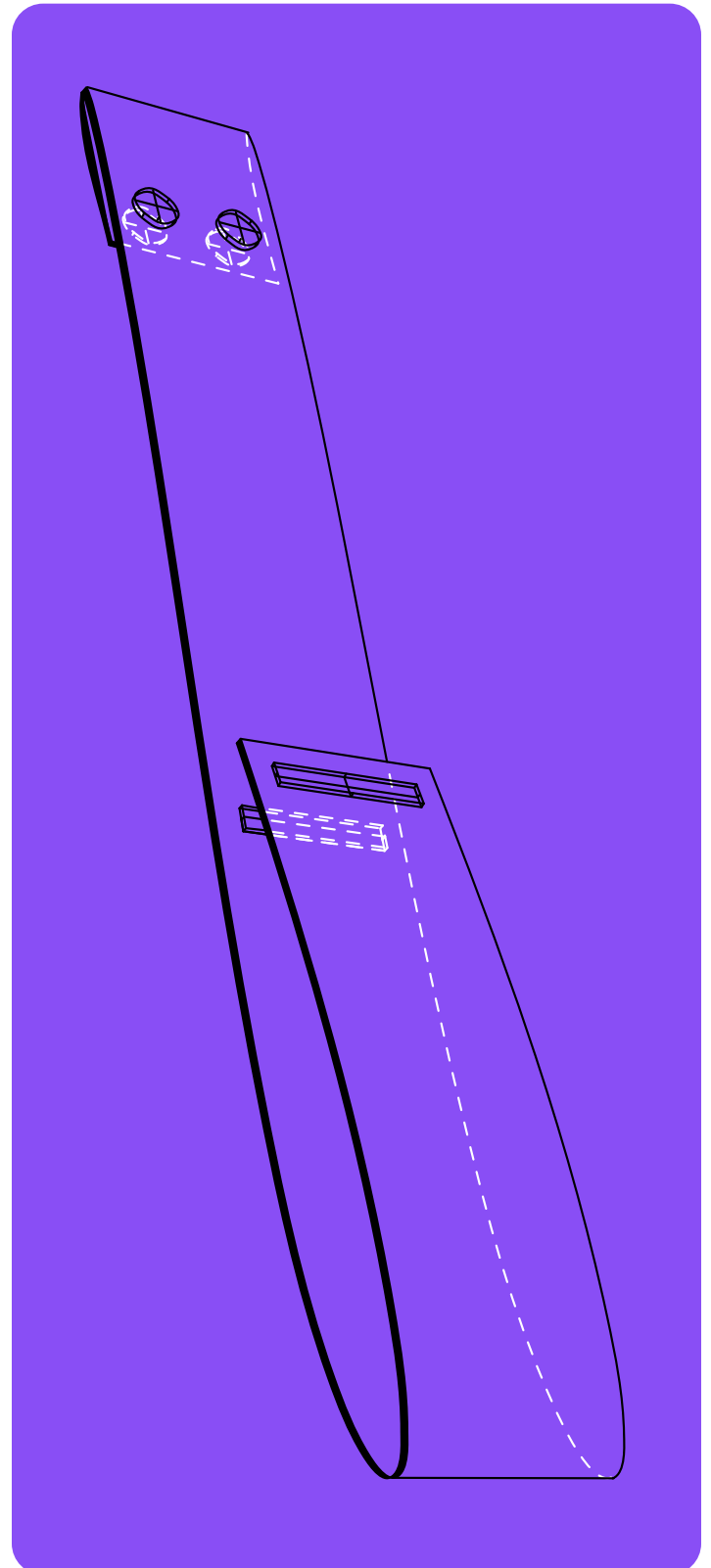
Product

Designed from durable, medical grade silicone, the loop attaches on to your undergarments via buttons and hangs down over the athletes shorts. Silicone is considered chemically inert at normal temperatures, and its smooth surface prevents bacterial growth, unlike elastic, where bacteria would grow in the grooves. Silicone is soft, which allows it to pass regulations preventing hard devices, and stretchy; which is important to allow it to absorb the impacts it will experience during play.

A simple magnet mechanism allows athletes to very easily place the mouthguard into the loop and snap it into place. These magnets are embedded directly in the silicone. Made from rare earth neodymium magnets, the strongest in the world, athletes never have to worry about their mouthguard dropping on the floor. These magnets can hold 100 times their own weight.

The magnets being embedded in the silicone solves a number of issues typically associated with neodymium. These magnets are typically shatter-prone, but impact resistant ones on the market come with a plastic casing. Similarly, our product shields the magnets from impacts and provides a cushion to absorb the force. Being embedded in silicone also solves any concern of them being able to pinch in a dangerous manner, or swallowed if they break off, which could be fatal.

Simplicity is key in allowing it to be adopted across a wide variety of sports and regulating authorities, which is why after many iterations, we landed on this design.



Growth Strategy

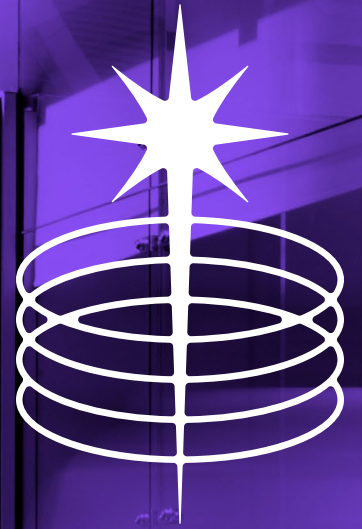
Guard Lock's growth strategy will adopt both institutional and consumer partnerships, which will be the focal point. Our main sales will come from direct-to-consumer marketing, which will create early buzz and build brand awareness.

The market as a whole ensures long-term growth. Research on growth strategies shows that the global sports retail market is projected to grow 6% annually, driven by rising consumer spending on athletic gear and accessories¹.

Main growth boosters include:

- Increasing partnerships with schools and the athletic programs
- Earned media, like the product showcased during a live stream
- Improving brand awareness through athlete sponsorships

With the awareness and adoption increasing, Guard Lock will be able to also explore product line extensions like different versions or bundle offerings, this will overall create more attention in the sports equipment market.



Chapter 005

Financial Analysis*

*AI generated. To protect instructor, textbook author, and previous student intellectual property, we used a billed developer API interface; [which does not train models](#) on data inputs, [unlike ChatGPT Plus and Free tiers](#). You can read more about how we used AI to generate this section in [Appendix A](#).

Marketing Budget

Guard Lock’s launch budget is designed to commercialize a new category in sports accessories by making the product visible in the settings where its value is most obvious: substitutions, drills, sideline breaks, and team environments. Because the product solves a recurring hygiene and performance problem during play, the financial plan emphasizes awareness, trial, and field-level proof rather than broad, untargeted media spending^I.

A value-based pricing approach begins with the customer’s problem and the perceived value of solving it, then works backward to the offer and the economics required to deliver that value profitably^{II}. Guard Lock is therefore priced as a premium hygiene and performance upgrade rather than as a generic storage accessory. The product gives athletes a secure, accessible place for a required piece of equipment during play, while also supporting cleanliness, retention, and faster transitions on the field.

The price structure is constant across years one through three: a \$33.95 direct-to-consumer single unit, a \$44.95 pack of two, and a \$16.49 team / bulk price. This structure is consistent with strategic pricing principles that emphasize profitable growth and disciplined value capture rather than low-price market entry^{III}. The single-unit DTC offer serves as the premium anchor, which is especially useful in a category where buyers have limited reference points and may rely on price as a signal of quality^{IV}. The two-pack creates a self-selected segmentation option for buyers who want a spare unit, manage multiple equipment setups, or purchase for more than one athlete^V. The team / bulk price reflects channel economics and order density, not discretionary price cutting, which aligns with policy-

based pricing guidance for value-driven buyers^{VI}.

Category	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Paid social and search	\$24,000	\$38,000	\$50,000
Creator / athlete seeding	\$9,000	\$14,000	\$18,000
Team samples and trial inventory	\$8,400	\$12,000	\$18,000
Tournament / sideline activations	\$7,200	\$10,000	\$14,000
Content production	\$6,000	\$9,000	\$12,000
Email / SMS / CRM	\$3,000	\$5,000	\$6,000
SEO and analytics	\$2,400	\$7,000	\$12,000
Total Budget	Marketing \$60,000	\$95,000	\$130,000

The budget allocation follows the same strategic logic. Paid social and search create initial discovery. Creator seeding, team samples, and sideline activations generate the observational proof that accelerates adoption in unfamiliar categories^{VII}. That approach is supported by the continued scale of U.S. e-commerce and by digital acquisition benchmarks suggesting that paid media works best when combined with mechanisms that improve trust, visibility, and conversion quality rather than functioning as the sole engine of demand^{VIII}.

I Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026; Nagle, Thomas T., John E. Hogan, and Joseph Zale. The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.

II Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026; Nagle, Hogan, and Zale, The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.

III Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026.

IV Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026.

V Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026.

VI Nagle, Hogan, and Zale. The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.

VII Nagle, Hogan, and Zale. The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.

VIII United States Census Bureau. “Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales.” 2026. <https://www.census.gov/retail/ecommerce.html>; WordStream. “Facebook Ads Benchmarks 2025.” 2025. <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/facebook-ads-benchmarks-2025>; Triple Whale. “Ecommerce Benchmarks 2025.” 2026. <https://www.triplewhale.com/blog/ecommerce-benchmarks>

Sales & Revenue

Guard Lock's sales forecast is intentionally focused on the sports in which the mouthguard problem is visible, recurrent, and behaviorally costly. NFHS participation data indicate more than 209,000 high-school lacrosse athletes and more than 53,000 high-school field hockey athletes in the accessible pipeline, while USA Youth and High School Rugby has surpassed 50,000 registrations^I. Those figures exclude collegiate, club, adult, and future retail-channel demand, so they represent a conservative floor for the opportunity.

The revenue model uses a three-part pricing architecture held constant across years one through three: a \$33.95 DTC single unit, a \$44.95 DTC pack of two, and a \$16.49 team / bulk unit price. In the DTC channel, the model assumes that 25% of orders self-select into the two-pack offer in each year of the forecast^{II}. That assumption reflects second-degree price segmentation through versioning, allowing buyers with stronger willingness to pay or multi-unit use cases to choose a higher-value offer without weakening the premium positioning of the single-unit product^{III}.

Under this structure, the realized DTC selling price equals \$29.36 per physical unit. The DTC channel therefore captures more of Guard Lock's consumer value while preserving a larger-format option for households, repeat users, and buyers seeking redundancy. The team channel serves a different purpose: it lowers acquisition friction, increases order density, and strengthens category visibility once coaches, parents, and athletes observe the product in use.

Line / Channel	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
DTC single units sold	3,240	6,480	9,900
DTC two-pack units sold (packs)	1,080	2,160	3,300
DTC physical units sold	5,400	10,800	16,500
Team / bulk units sold	2,100	7,200	16,500
Total physical units sold	7,500	18,000	33,000
DTC single revenue	\$109,998	\$219,996	\$336,105
DTC two-pack revenue	\$48,546	\$97,092	\$148,335
DTC revenue	\$158,544	\$317,088	\$484,440
Team / bulk revenue	\$34,629	\$118,728	\$272,085
Total net sales	\$193,173	\$435,816	\$756,525

The resulting forecast produces \$193,173 in year-one net sales on 7,500 physical units. Year-two sales rise to \$435,816, and year-three sales reach \$756,525 as team adoption deepens and DTC volume continues to scale. The model does not rely on national sporting-goods retail placement, licensing income, or movement into adjacent apparel categories. It is built around the direct monetization of Guard Lock's core product-market fit.

I National Federation of State High School Associations. "2023-24 NFHS Handbook." 2025. https://assets.nfhs.org/umbraco/media/7212441/2023-24-nfhs-handbook_w-cover.pdf; USA Rugby. "USA Youth and High School Rugby Celebrates Milestone of Over 50,000 Registrations." 2024. <https://usa.rugby/news/usa-youth-and-high-school-rugby-celebrates-milestone-of-over-50000-registrations-202477>

II Guard Lock management forecast assumption used in the financial model. (Author note, financial model = Excel file it made)

III Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026.

Expense Structure & Unit Economics

Guard Lock's cost structure reflects the economics of a focused accessory launch rather than a full technical-apparel launch. Startup capital is concentrated in tooling, compliance, launch assets, initial inventory, and working capital, producing a total launch requirement of \$56,000¹.

Launch Cost Category	Amount
Tooling and final prototype validation	\$12,000
IP, legal, and compliance setup	\$10,000
Shopify build, photography, and launch assets	\$6,000
Initial inventory deposit	\$18,000
Working-capital reserve	\$10,000
Total Initial Capital Requirement	\$56,000

The operating model distinguishes among DTC single-unit sales, DTC two-pack sales, and team / bulk sales. This allows the forecast to connect price structure directly to contribution economics. In the equations below, s denotes DTC single-unit sales, p denotes DTC two-pack sales, and b denotes team / bulk sales.

$$R_t = P_s Q_{s,t} + P_p Q_{p,t} + P_b Q_{b,t}$$

$$VC_t = c_t^{mfg} (Q_{s,t} + 2Q_{p,t} + Q_{b,t}) + c_{d,t}^{chan} (Q_{s,t} + 2Q_{p,t}) + c_{b,t}^{chan} Q_{b,t}$$

$$\Pi_t = R_t - VC_t - M_t - F_t$$

Metric	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
DTC single selling price	\$33.95	\$33.95	\$33.95
DTC two-pack selling price	\$44.95	\$44.95	\$44.95
Team / bulk selling price	\$16.49	\$16.49	\$16.49

Metric	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Two-pack share of DTC orders	25%	25%	25%
Implied DTC realized selling price per physical unit	\$29.36	\$29.36	\$29.36
Manufacturing cost per unit	\$5.25	\$4.95	\$4.65
DTC channel servicing per unit	\$3.10	\$3.10	\$3.20
Team / bulk channel servicing per unit	\$1.40	\$1.35	\$1.35
Blended average selling price	\$25.76	\$24.21	\$22.93
Blended contribution margin per unit	\$17.88	\$16.86	\$16.00

The model assumes the same manufacturing cost per physical unit and the same per-unit servicing structure within each channel regardless of DTC format. That treatment is deliberately conservative because it avoids overstating the margin benefit of the two-pack. Under those assumptions, the realized DTC selling price equals \$29.36 per physical unit across the forecast horizon, while blended contribution margin ranges from \$17.88 per unit in year one to \$16.00 per unit in year three.

The moderation in blended per-unit contribution over time is driven by channel mix rather than by weakening economics. As team / bulk volume becomes a larger share of total units, the blended figure reflects that lower-price channel. Even so, total contribution and operating profit expand strongly because volume scales across a disciplined cost base. The business therefore retains attractive accessory-style economics while supporting broader adoption.

¹ Guard Lock management financial assumptions used in the financial model.

Marketing Return on Investment (MROI)

Marketing performance for Guard Lock should be evaluated at the contribution level rather than on revenue alone. Because the product is a durable performance accessory rather than a low-price consumable, the relevant question is whether marketing creates contribution dollars in excess of the spend required to generate them¹.

$$MROI_t = \frac{R_t - COGS_t - S_t - M_t}{M_t}$$

On that basis, year-one MROI is 123.5%, followed by 219.5% in year two and 306.2% in year three. Break-even volume is 6,151 units in year one, 9,133 units in year two, and 12,625 units in year three. Each threshold sits below projected unit volume, indicating that the marketing plan is supported by operating economics rather than by subsidized demand.

These results also show strong alignment between pricing strategy and customer acquisition. When price captures a greater share of the product’s differential value, awareness spend does not need to compensate for weak monetization. Instead, each marketing dollar works against a higher-contribution offer, improving payback and increasing the economic productivity of the launch plan.

Metric	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Contribution before marketing	\$134,118	\$303,516	\$528,000
Marketing budget	\$60,000	\$95,000	\$130,000
Net contribution after marketing	\$74,118	\$208,516	\$398,000
Break-even units	6,151	9,133	12,625
MROI	123.5%	219.5%	306.2%

Sensitivity Analysis

A robust financial plan must remain viable even when demand develops more slowly than expected. One of the most useful financial tests in pricing is the volume-hurdle concept, which asks how much unit volume is required to preserve profit after a pricing decision is made¹. That framework is particularly relevant for Guard Lock because the company is creating a category and educating the market simultaneously.

$$Q_f \geq \frac{CM_i}{CM_f} \times Q_i$$

The base-case pro forma is shown below.

Line Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
DTC physical units	5,400	10,800	16,500
Team / bulk units	2,100	7,200	16,500
Total units	7,500	18,000	33,000
DTC revenue	\$158,544	\$317,088	\$484,440
Team / bulk revenue	\$34,629	\$118,728	\$272,085
Total net sales	\$193,173	\$435,816	\$756,525
Cost of goods sold	\$39,375	\$89,100	\$153,450
Channel servicing and fulfillment	\$19,680	\$43,200	\$75,075
Gross margin	\$153,798	\$346,716	\$603,075
Contribution before marketing	\$134,118	\$303,516	\$528,000
Marketing budget	\$60,000	\$95,000	\$130,000
Net contribution after marketing	\$74,118	\$208,516	\$398,000
Fixed operating costs	\$50,000	\$59,000	\$72,000
Operating profit / (loss)	\$24,118	\$149,516	\$326,000

To test durability, unit demand is varied by plus or minus 20% while holding pricing, marketing spend, and fixed operating expense constant. This is a demanding stress test because it does not assume that management can immediately offset weaker demand with lower overhead.

Scenario	Volume Multiplier	Year 1 Op Profit	Year 3 Op Profit	3-Year Cum Op Profit
Pessimistic	0.80x	\$-2,706	\$220,400	\$306,507
Base	1.00x	\$24,118	\$326,000	\$499,634
Optimistic	1.20x	\$50,942	\$431,600	\$692,761

The base case generates \$24,118 of operating profit in year one and \$499,634 of cumulative operating profit over three years. The pessimistic case produces a modest year-one operating loss of (\$2,706) but still delivers \$306,507 of cumulative operating profit over the three-year horizon. The optimistic case produces \$692,761 of cumulative operating profit.

The implication is clear: Guard Lock does not require perfect execution to justify launch. It requires disciplined channel execution, effective market education, and enough in-use visibility for buyers to recognize the product's value. The downside case is manageable, while the base and upside cases are financially attractive.

¹ Mitchell, L. A. MKT 440 course materials, Colorado State University, Spring 2026; Nagle, Thomas T., John E. Hogan, and Joseph Zale. The Strategy and Tactics of Pricing. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.

Investment Returns

The launch is evaluated using three capital-budgeting measures: payback period, net present value, and internal rate of return. Together, these measures indicate whether the initial capital required to commercialize Guard Lock is recovered quickly enough and profitably enough to justify launch¹.

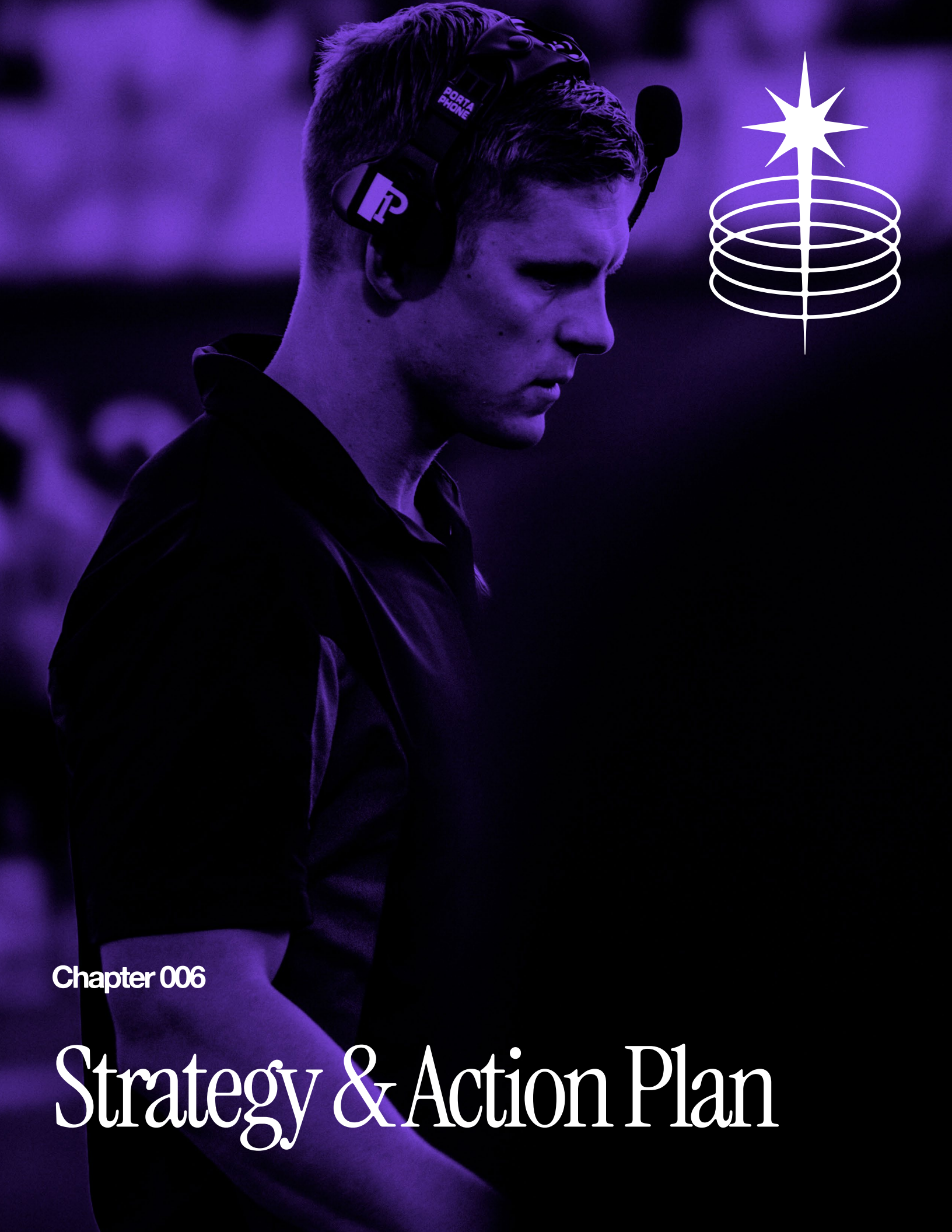
$$NPV = -I_0 + \sum_{t=1}^3 \frac{FCF_t}{(1 + r)^t}$$
$$0 = -I_0 + \sum_{t=1}^3 \frac{FCF_t}{(1 + IRR)^t}$$

Metric	Value
Initial capital requirement	\$56,000
Discount rate	15.0%
Year 1 operating cash flow	\$24,118
Year 2 operating cash flow	\$149,516
Year 3 operating cash flow	\$326,000
3-year cumulative operating cash flow	\$499,634
Payback period	14.6 months
Net present value (NPV)	\$292,378
Internal rate of return (IRR)	146.8%

Using a \$56,000 initial capital requirement and a 15% discount rate, the forecast produces an NPV of \$292,378, an IRR of 146.8%, and payback in approximately 14.6 months. Year-one operating cash flow begins recovering the initial outlay immediately, while years two and three produce substantial incremental cash generation.

These returns exclude terminal value, licensing income, national retail expansion, and movement into adjacent product categories. The projected return is therefore being generated by the Guard Lock launch strategy itself rather than by speculative upside beyond the modeled plan.

¹ Guard Lock management financial assumptions used in the financial model.



Chapter 006

Strategy & Action Plan

Strategy Plan

Guard Lock's strategy unfolds in three phases: **Launch, Scale, and Expand**, with each stage building on the credibility and infrastructure established in the previous phase.

At its core, this plan follows a Blue Ocean approach introduced earlier. Rather than competing directly with established uniform brands for sponsorships or shelf space, Guard Lock enters through a focused, defensible niche: on-body mouthguard retention for athletes in non-helmeted contact sports. This allows the company to avoid direct competition while addressing a clear and underserved need.

The strategy is supported by defined financial targets that guide decision-making across each phase. With an initial investment of \$56,000 and strong projected returns over a three-year period, the business is structured to scale efficiently while maintaining positive unit economics. Detailed financial projections and assumptions are outlined in Section 7.

Three-Year Breakthrough Objectives

By the end of Year 3, Guard Lock must achieve several key milestones to validate both its strategy and financial viability. These objectives reflect where the company needs to be, not just financially, but operationally and strategically.

First, the company aims to reach \$756,525 in annual net sales, supported by strong cumulative cash flow and a positive NPV. Alongside this, total unit sales are projected to grow from 7,500 in Year 1 to 33,000 units by Year 3, driven largely by expansion into institutional channels.

A major priority is building a scalable team and bulk sales channel, which is expected to reach 16,500 units by Year 3. This channel lowers customer acquisition costs, strengthens margins, and creates more predictable,

recurring revenue compared to a purely direct-to-consumer approach.

On the product side, the long-term vision includes integrating Guard Lock into compression undergarments. This step expands the total addressable market but depends on first establishing brand trust and manufacturing capability.

To support growth and credibility, Guard Lock must also secure governing body approvals in at least two sports, such as lacrosse and rugby. These approvals enable institutional purchasing and reduce regulatory risk.

Finally, achieving payback on the initial \$56,000 investment within roughly 14.6 months serves as a key proof point for the business model's efficiency and overall return potential.

Taken together, these objectives outline a clear trajectory: prove the concept in Year 1, build scalable channels in Year 2, and expand into new products and markets by Year 3, without requiring an unprofitable year.

Annual Goals

The annual goals break down these long-term objectives into specific, measurable steps across each year.

In Year 1, the focus is on validating demand. Direct-to-consumer sales are expected to grow from 5,400 to 10,800 units, supported by early retention efforts like email and SMS reordering. At the same time, the company begins testing institutional demand, targeting 2,100 team/bulk units through outreach to over 50 programs. Early marketing efforts center on paid media, NIL partnerships, and user-generated content, with a goal of achieving a 123.5% return on marketing investment. Foundational work, including patent filing and legal setup, is also completed.

In Year 2, the strategy shifts toward scaling. DTC sales increase to 16,500 units, with a greater share coming from organic and repeat customers rather than paid acquisition.

The team/bulk channel expands significantly to 7,200 units, including partnerships with at least three collegiate athletic departments. Marketing becomes more efficient, with stronger SEO and CRM systems, and overall MROI rises to 219.5%. This is also the point where the company reaches payback on its initial investment.

By Year 3, Guard Lock moves into expansion. Team/bulk sales become the primary growth driver, reaching 16,500 units, while DTC continues to grow internationally across markets like the UK, Canada, and Australia. The product line evolves with the introduction of a compression undergarment integration. Marketing efforts scale to include professional athlete endorsements and broader media exposure, pushing MROI to 306.2%. At this stage, the company also begins exploring licensing opportunities with major athletic brands from a position of established credibility.

Across all three years, there is a clear shift in channel strategy: DTC drives early adoption, while institutional sales become the main engine of growth over time. This transition lowers acquisition costs and improves margins, aligning directly with the financial model.

Strategic Deployment Matrix

The Strategic Deployment Matrix brings everything together by showing how key areas of the business evolve across each phase.

In Year 1 (Launch), Guard Lock focuses on direct-to-consumer distribution through its website and Amazon. Pricing is simple, marketing relies on paid social and athlete seeding, and the product offering is limited to the core accessory. The priority here is proving demand and establishing a foothold.

In Year 2 (Scale), the company adds institutional sales, introducing team and bulk pricing. Marketing expands into tournaments and CRM-driven retention, while the product line begins to diversify with bundles and variations. At the same time, Guard Lock works to secure governing body approvals and strengthen its intellectual property position.

By Year 3 (Expand), the strategy broadens significantly. Distribution includes retail partnerships and international e-commerce, pricing becomes more flexible with volume tiers, and marketing shifts toward sponsorships and professional-level exposure. Product innovation advances with integration into compression apparel, and the company begins exploring licensing opportunities with major industry players.

Financially, this progression is reflected in steady growth across revenue, units sold, operating profit, and marketing efficiency. Importantly, the strategy does not require any major pivots. Instead, each phase builds logically on the last: prove the concept, scale what works, then expand from a position of strength.

Improvement Priorities

Without accomplishing the following priorities, GuardLock will struggle to achieve widespread adoption and brand recognition within the athletic market. These initiatives are essential to successfully launching the product and establishing a competitive position in the sports apparel industry.

1. Finalize product design and begin production of GuardLock compression shorts with integrated mouthguard band
2. Conduct product testing with athletes (rugby, football, lacrosse, etc.) to refine comfort, durability, and functionality
3. Establish a strong brand identity and social media presence through athlete-driven and viral sports content
4. Partner with teams, clubs, and athletic programs to promote product awareness and encourage trial usage
5. Develop distribution channels through online platforms and select sporting goods retailers
6. Create educational marketing campaigns emphasizing hygiene, convenience, and performance benefits

Targets to Improve

To ensure that our product launch will be successful in this competitive market the company will implement measurable and time-sensitive goals aligned with the product launch timeline. The goals/ targets will allow the company to help keep track of progress and allow for adjustments as needed.

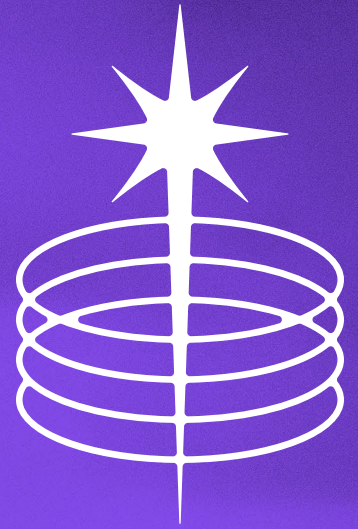
7. Complete prototype development and athlete testing feedback (October 1 – November 15)
8. Begin initial production of GuardLock inventory (December 1)
9. Launch pre-marketing campaigns on social media platforms and build audience engagement (December 15)
10. Secure partnerships with at least 3–5 athletic teams or programs for early adoption (January 1)
11. Official product launch through e-commerce platform and promotional events (February 1)
12. Collect customer feedback and performance data through surveys and reviews (February 1 – February 28)
13. Scale production and expand distribution channels based on demand (March 1)

Exit Strategy

If the founders of GuardLock choose to exit the company, the most viable strategy would be acquisition by larger, athletic apparel or sports equipment company. After establishing a strong market presence and demonstrating consistent brand reputation, GuardLock would become an attractive target due to its innovative and problem-solving design that focuses on a niche within contact sports.

Potential acquisition targets include major athletic brands seeking to expand their product lines with functional high performance gear. Companies such as Nike, Under Armour, and Adidas could benefit greatly from integrating GuardLock technology into their existing compression apparel lines. By positioning GuardLock as a unique and scalable solution that improves athletic hygiene, convenience, time, replacement costs, and performance. The company increases its value as a strategic acquisition.

Upon possession, profits would be evenly distributed among founders and investors based on ownership, stakes and initial investments. The strategy allows Guard Lock to maximize its value while transitioning the product into a larger company capable of distributing global goods among the long-term growth. this exit strategy would ideally occur after scale, the production and achieving consistent revenue growth. as well as after securing partnerships with teams and athletic organizations and establishing a strong brand recognition in the mouthguard field.



Chapter 007

Contingency Plans

Marketplace Threats

Replication

Considering our products' simplistic design and usage, it can be easy for others to replicate or modify and resell as their own idea to the same markets. If an indirect competitor with established equity in the marketplace decides to release their own version, circumventing our [blue ocean](#) strategy, it could be a significant threat.

Response

We've made sure to patent our technology to help protect against the threat of replication. Our plan isn't to introduce a lawsuit and win it against the company, rather, we would force our [exit plan](#). Oftentimes, these companies would rather settle than enter into costly legal battles. Instead of a settlement we will propose the solution of acquisition. This tilts the playing field on its head, transitioning a zero-sum game into a non-zero, positive, sum game; where we both walk away winners.

Less Demand than Expected

Given the sheer size of our total addressable market, making a statistically significant inference could be difficult. For instance, rugby has about 732,500 players in the United States as of 2021^I. At a fairly standard confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the required sample size would be 384. While our survey showed a strong 82.6% of respondents interested in the product, we only managed to sample 46 people. Considering the originality of our product, all data on demand estimation is essentially primary sourced. For rugby alone, with our sample size of 46, population size of 732,500, and proportion percentage of 82.6%; at a 95% confidence level our margin of error is 11%^{II}. All of that is to say that there is a decent possibility of variability in consumer demand sans externalities. For that reason, we accounted for it in our [financial analysis](#) with a conservative estimate of -20%.

Response

We predict that the primary cause for a lack of demand would stem from doubts about if they could actually use the product in a sporting game. Players may understandably have some questions about if the device is considered legal in play. Luckily, we've made sure that it is, so to ease their doubts we would shift our marketing strategy to be the official sponsor of sporting leagues. Having co-branded packaging and advertisements with the governing agency would ease the doubts of consumers on whether or not they could wear Guard Lock during a game.

I Statista, "Number of participants in rugby union in the United States from 2017 to 2021." <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191684/participants-in-rugby-in-the-us-since-2006/>

II Will Webster and Aaron Carpenter, "Margin of Error Guide & Calculator," Qualtrics, March 18, 2021, <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/strategy-research/margin-of-error/>

Fault in Price Strategy

We have planned to price based on value. Since we are a new product category solving a significant problem, the value is rather high, and the price outlined in our [pricing strategy](#) reflects that. One source of value is that mouthguards are expensive and our product would save customers a decent amount of money.

That can also be a disadvantage. If we step into the shoes of our customers, it's a reasonable assumption that they would be considering the purchase of Guard Lock when they have recently lost a mouthguard. Would they really be willing to spend another \$33.95 on top of being annoyed about spending \$20 on a new one? Consumers probably haven't kept a perfect record of how much they spend on lost mouthguards, which means that the immediate value of \$54 isn't available to them, since that's how much they'd be spending at once.

Responses

There's a number of possible responses we could take. The first would be to initially undercut the market, utilizing a market penetration strategy to gain consumer trust and market share, before eventually hiking up our prices. It takes about five years to raise prices up to where they'd need to be following a price cut, and we'd have to be careful to frame it as a sale, which leverages the heuristic of anchoring without destroying the perceived value of the product.

We could leverage a different heuristic, too, that being the scarcity principle. If we launch a "founders edition," that would raise the value, possibly covering the additional ~\$20 we need to make up.

Another strategy would be to partner with a mouthguard brand and offer a bundle of a mouthguard with Guard Lock at a discounted price. This would be mutually beneficial for both parties, because it raises the perceived value quite significantly. It also solves the problem of viewing us as an accessory that would require a high upfront cost, when they're already annoyed about the amount of money they're spending.

In general, though, even if we aren't purchased by someone looking for mouthguards, it's still critical for us to retain that touchpoint of being seen by someone who recently lost their mouthguard and is in the consideration phase of the buyer's journey. A final strategy would be to shift towards heavily targeting parents of child athletes, since they are more likely to see the long-term importance and cost saving benefits of our product.

Marketplace Opportunities

Partnership with Distributors

The first major opportunity that we as a company could exploit is the use of company sponsorships to improve the outreach of our product and brand. Due to Guard Lock being a brand starting from the ground up, the use of partnership such as specific sports agencies, as well as partnerships with already established brands such as Nike, Dicks Sporting Goods, etc. we can partner with those companies to provide a greater outreach to all levels of sport, as well as introducing it to one of our main targets which is parents.

Response

Our response would be to implement partner branding with various distributors such as sporting goods stores. This can increase the ease of licensing cost, integration of products specific features, as well as helping branding for specific team names, and events.

Partner with Sport Agencies

Working with governing agencies is a commonplace tactic in the industry. Any athlete that wants to compete in sports has to register with these agencies such as USA Wrestling and USA Rugby. For a startup like Guard Lock, this could add the necessary credibility to scale to and beyond our initial expectations.

Response

The mentioned component of required registration means we have a natural channel to reach customers in our service obtainable market (SOM). Creating different

marketing pitches, including pop up booths, and having company representatives at the USA sporting events allows for increased customer outreach, broader customer variety, and is a cheaper and easier way to advertise to a large group of people who already have this problem and are looking for the easy fix that Guard Lock can provide.

Athlete Endorsement

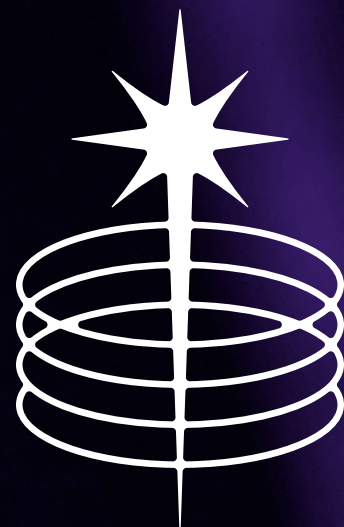
Professional athlete sponsorship is incredibly popular, and for good reason. From a recent 2023 study it is stated that athlete endorsers have created over 2.1 billion dollars in revenue to various companies due to their outreach and ethos¹.

Response

As a part of our marketing and customer outreach plan, Guard Lock seeks to use the popularity of well known athletes in sports that primarily use mouthguards to promote this product and highlight the advantages.. Our first endorsers we would look at would be in the Rugby field, reaching a niche, passionate, and quickly growing market. Ilona Maher is known as the most dominant American Female Rugby player ever and has risen to stardom being a part of Dancing with the Stars, Sports Illustrated, and others. This would add credibility and expand our reach in the U.S. to all of Ilona's fans.

Partnering with Antonie Dupont, one of the most well known and best rugby players in the world, would increase our reach from within the U.S. to a global audience. If we decide to do this before we're ready to scale, we would use horizontally integrated supply chain strategies. Conversely, if we have a foothold and the cash reserves to support it, we would utilize vertical integration and have full control over our distribution worldwide.

¹ Levin, M. (2024, April 3). The power of athlete endorsements: Why they drive brand success. Blue Sky Sports & Entertainment. <https://www.blueskyse.com/blog/the-power-of-athlete-endorsements-why-they-drive-brand-success>



Appendix A

AI Generated Section

A1. Model Parameters

GPT 5.4 in OpenAI Platform was used to create the AI generated section, [Financial Analysis](#).

- Model: GPT5.4
- Text format: text
- Reasoning effort: high
- Verbosity: medium
- Summary: concise
- Tools: Vector stores containing marketing plan instructions, the LaTeX for previous financial analysis section¹ before we switched to InDesign for typesetting, Markdown notes from MKT440 (pricing) class, the two example marketing plans, SKILL.md for .xlxs, the textbook from MKT440, and the previous Excel file from the last financial analysis attempt in JSON.
- Web search
- Code interpreter

clarification on the structure:

```
|___figures
|___tables
| |___sfas.txt
| |___business_model_canvas.txt
| |___SWOT.txt
| |___efas.txt
| |___competitor_profile_matrix.txt
| |___ifas.txt
|___chapters
| |___preamble
| | |___ai_disclosure.txt
| | |___executive_summary.txt
| | |___situational_analysis
| | |___internal_external_summary_analysis.
txt
| | |___customer_analysis.txt
| | |___swot_analysis.txt
| | |___company_analysis.txt
| | |___competitor_analysis.txt
| | |___contextual_analysis.txt
|___main.txt
```

A2. Attempt One

This is the inputs for our first attempt, when the document was in LaTeX, to give some full background into what the second (and in this report) AI based its response on.

A1.1. Developer Message

The users LaTeX folder file tree is as follows. Note that files had to be uploaded in .txt, although .tex is preferred if supported. In the vector store you access, only files can be uploaded, not folders, so here is some

You are a masterful LaTeX writer and assisting the user in adding sections to their project in your outputs.

¹ We regenerated the section to reflect the addition of a bundled pricing strategy. We previously had our report written in LaTeX.

AIII

- Each chapter gets its own folder
- Each section goes into a separate file, in the respective chapter folder
- Tables go into their respective files, in the tables folder
- Sections are placed into main.txt

Use the example papers and instructions on marketing plans, along with the users paper (though it is not yet complete), as context for your output. You have web search turned on, which means you should do research on behalf of the user. This also means you must cite your sources using footnotes like how the user does.

If prompted to make a chapter, output:

- Each table in a separate file
- Each section in a separate file
- A summary of the files you created and the new file tree in a plaintext code block
- An excel spreadsheet showing your calculations (as a summary, do calculations in the manner best for you) if you are asked to make the finance section of the paper

A2.2. Prompt

- Please create finance chapter of the report.
- Lean into industry standard practices.
- Use the pdf files as references for how the finances relate to the rest of the paper and their general contents
- Do research on behalf of the user, cite it using their footnote method, and use numbers that would align with the company using their paper as context
- Use more advanced financial analysis methods
- Describe your operations using LaTeX math
- Adhere to the papers structure
- Use the same writing style as that which is

found in the “synopsis on strategy” part of the report

- Use tables

A3. Attempt Two

A1.1. Developer Message

Read this entire document before proceeding with executing on any instructions.

Your Task

You are a deterministic model, assisting the user in regenerating their Financial Analysis section. Files are provided to you in .txt, since .tex and .bib are not valid file formats.

Your Assets

You have the following assets available to you as context. They are in vector stores. One vector store has skill files in it, and the other has any other following context mentioned.

- Example marketing plans, for 19th Hole Beverage Company and Thrive, created by previous students
- Marketing plan instructions for this assignment
- The LaTeX of the users report, this is their document (note that they are no longer writing it in LaTeX)
- The excel file you previously made, which is available to you as JSON

Below is the LaTeX file tree for their report. You have previously created any table beginning in “finance_” and all of the files in the financial analysis folder, as well as the excel spreadsheet.

AIV

```

...
|___tables
| |___finance_mroi.tex.txt
| |___finance_marketing_budget.tex.txt
| |___finance_startup_costs.tex.txt
| |___SWOT.tex.txt
| |___finance_proforma.tex.txt
| |___ifas.tex.txt
| |___finance_sales_forecast.tex.txt
| |___business_model_canvas.tex.txt
| |___finance_sensitivity.tex.txt
| |___finance_investment_returns.tex.txt
| |___competitor_profile_matrix.tex.txt
| |___sfas.tex.txt
| |___finance_unit_economics.tex.txt
| |___efas.tex.txt
|___appendix
| |___ai_generated_section.tex.txt
|___main.tex.txt
|___chapters
| |___preamble
| | |___executive_summary.tex.txt
| | |___ai_disclosure.tex.txt
| | |___situational_analysis
| | |___internal_external_summary_analysis.
tex.txt
| | |___company_analysis.tex.txt
| | |___customer_analysis.tex.txt
| | |___contextual_analysis.tex.txt
| | |___competitor_analysis.tex.txt
| | |___swot_analysis.tex.txt
| |___financial_analysis
| | |___marketing_budget.tex.txt
| | |___investment_returns.tex.txt
| | |___marketing_roi.tex.txt

```

```

| | |___sales_revenue.tex.txt
| | |___sensitivity_analysis.tex.txt
| | |___expenses_unit_economics.tex.txt
|___bibliographies
| |___ai_section_bibliography.bib.txt
...

```

Output Structure

You previously generated the financial analysis section, and did a splendid job. Your updates are exactly that. There should not be any extensive changes in methodology of anything you've made, only content and calculation updates, and where applicable, different justifications following the change. They may provide notes and books on pricing that you can use to justify the price.

You should never mention that this is a “price increase.” To the reader, they’ve never seen this before.

You are now going to be creating a suite of .txt, and tab-delimited table .txt files since the user has transitioned to InDesign instead of LaTeX. Your output should be structured like the following:

Tables

All tables must be tab-delimited .txt files

```

...
|___tables
| |___finance_mroi.txt
| |___finance_marketing_budget.txt
| |___finance_startup_costs.txt
| |___finance_proforma.txt
| |___finance_sales_forecast.txt

```

AV

```
| |___finance_sensitivity.txt
| |___finance_investment_returns.txt
| |___finance_unit_economics.txt
...
```

Documents

***NOTE:** the text documents will not be containing the tables or equations. Instead, type:

“%%INSERT directory/filename.txt%%”

```
...
| |___financial_analysis
| | |___marketing_budget.txt
| | |___investment_returns.txt
| | |___marketing_roi.txt
| | |___sales_revenue.txt
| | |___sensitivity_analysis.txt
| | |___expenses_unit_economics.txt
...
```

Footnotes must appear as such:

Text to be cited^[n]

Then, at the bottom of the .txt file,

[n]: citation

[n]: citation

Equations

These are InDesign compatible MathML .txt files that the user can insert.

```
...
|___math
| | |___equation.txt
...
```

Closing Notes

- Advanced financial methods are preferred
- You will need to scan the bibliography file to do footnotes this time, since you can't use a .bib file.
- Excel spreadsheet must use formulas, like you did last time
- The user will be asking you for simple content updates, such as a price change, and/or new introduction of a product. Recognize what numbers need to change following that requested change. For example, a change in price impacts revenue and profit calculations, ROI, etc.
- Be cautious not to exceed your rate limit of 500,000 tokens/minute when compiling a .zip. If you think that will happen, package the files individually.
- Calculations should be completed in the manner best for you. Like previously, the equations are a representation of what you did

A2.2. Prompt

I need the following changes made:

- Update DTC price to \$33.95
- Introduce another product: a pack of two guard locks for \$44.95
- Team price remains the same
- The price reflects the value to the consumer. Recognize that it's a brand new category, and the brand is positioned as a high quality product, a hygiene/performance upgrade
- I've uploaded my pricing class obsidian notes for you to use as methods to justify the price, replacing areas where you previously

talked about deliberate pricing choices with methodologies from the textbook and from the notes. The pricing class notes are the ones that say “MKT440-” at the beginning, and are Obsidian notes.

- Prices are the same for year 1, 2, 3 across all (DTC, bulk, bundle, etc)

- The requirements for the paper are that one section has to be AI generated, that’s what you’re doing. Therefore you must recognize that we get graded on the “WOW” factor, and on sound methodologies.

A4. Results

- Cost: \$1.59
- Input tokens: 310,191
- Output tokens: 51,306
- Thought for: 23 minutes