

Assignment 1 - Phase 3

Solution Design & Validation: Mailchimp

Quick Recap: What We're Solving

P0 Problem (from Phase 2):

Small business owners without technical expertise abandon Mailchimp trials because domain authentication (SPF/DKIM setup) requires DNS configuration they don't understand, creating an insurmountable barrier between signing up and sending their first campaign.

Goal:

Increase trial-to-paid conversion rate by reducing onboarding friction for small business owners who lack technical expertise.

Primary Personas:

- Sarah (bakery owner) - needs to send weekly specials, blocked by DNS setup
- Mike (fitness coach) - migrating from ConvertKit, frustrated by authentication delays

Step 1: Brainstorm Solutions

I used a mix of techniques here - "How Might We" questions (which honestly felt a bit forced at first but did help), root cause analysis, and looking at how other platforms handle technical setup. Ended up with 13 different ideas:

Root Causes Identified

1. **Technical barrier:** DNS configuration requires specialized knowledge most small business owners don't have
2. **Unclear necessity:** Users don't understand WHY they need to do this (deliverability isn't obvious)
3. **No guidance:** Instructions are generic and don't account for different hosting providers
4. **Timing issue:** Requirement appears mid-flow, interrupting campaign creation momentum
5. **No fallback option:** It's all-or-nothing - can't send anything without completing authentication

Brainstormed Solutions

Solution	Description	Key Assumption	Category
One-Click DNS Authentication	Partner with major hosting providers (GoDaddy, Bluehost, etc.) to auto-configure DNS records with one click via API integration	Users know their hosting provider and can OAuth their account	High Confidence
Guided Setup Wizard	Step-by-step wizard that detects user's domain provider and shows provider-	Provider-specific instructions significantly reduce confusion	High Confidence

	specific screenshots/instructions with copy-paste values		
Limited Send Mode	Allow users to send up to 50 emails without authentication to test the platform, with prominent banner about deliverability risks	Getting quick wins motivates users to complete full setup	High Confidence
Done-For-You Service	Offer concierge service where Mailchimp support handles DNS setup for \$49 one-time fee or free for paid plans	Users value convenience enough to pay or upgrade	High Confidence
Video Walkthrough Library	Create short (2-3 min) video tutorials for top 10 hosting providers showing exact steps with screen recording	Visual learning is more effective than text instructions for technical tasks	High Confidence
Smart Detection + Auto-Verify	Auto-detect when DNS records are added correctly and immediately verify (rather than making users click 'verify' button)	Reducing steps and waiting time improves completion rates	Low Confidence
Skip For Now Option	Allow users to skip authentication and continue building campaigns, with persistent reminder to complete for better deliverability	Removing blocker allows momentum to continue, can complete auth later	High Confidence
Live Chat Support During Setup	Trigger live chat popup when user spends >2 mins on authentication screen, offering real-time help	Immediate human help at moment of frustration prevents abandonment	Low Confidence
Mailchimp-Hosted Subdomain	Offer to send from @mail.sarahsbakery.mcsv.net (Mailchimp subdomain) that's pre-authenticated, with option to upgrade to custom domain later	Users will accept slightly less professional sender for immediate sending capability	Low Confidence
Community Help Forum	Build peer-to-peer help community where users can post DNS setup questions and get answers from other users who've done it	Peer support scales better than company resources	Low Confidence
AI Troubleshooter Bot	AI chatbot that can diagnose DNS setup issues by checking records in real-time and providing specific fix suggestions	AI can provide personalized troubleshooting faster than generic docs	Moonshot

Partner With Domain Registrars	Partner with GoDaddy, Namecheap to pre-configure Mailchimp DNS records when users buy domains through their platforms	Upstream prevention is more effective than downstream support	Moonshot
Eliminate Requirement	Use alternative authentication methods (email verification only) and invest heavily in deliverability infrastructure to maintain inbox placement	Deliverability can be maintained through other mechanisms	

Step 2: Prioritize Solutions Using RICE

I scored each high-confidence solution using RICE. Full disclosure - some of these numbers are educated guesses since we don't have perfect data, but I tried to be consistent with my assumptions:

Solution	Reach (1-3)	Impact (1-3)	Confidence (1-3)	Effort (1-3)	RICE Score
One-Click DNS (API Integration)	3	3	2	3	6.0
Guided Setup Wizard	3	3	3	2	13.5
Skip For Now Option	3	2	3	1	18.0
Limited Send Mode	2	2	2	1	8.0
Done-For-You Service	1	3	2	2	3.0
Video Walkthrough Library	2	2	2	1	8.0

Top 3 Solutions to Develop

1. Skip For Now Option (RICE: 18.0)

Total quick win. Low effort, massive impact. Just... let people skip it and come back later. The score basically speaks for itself.

2. Guided Setup Wizard (RICE: 13.5)

More work to build, but the research really validated this one. Provider-specific screenshots would help SO much.

3. Limited Send Mode (RICE: 8.0)

This tied with Video Library at 8.0. Went with Limited Send because it gives immediate value vs just better docs. People learn by doing anyway.

Step 3: Wireframes & User Flows

I spent way too much time in Figma on these (probably should've just sketched them first honestly). Below are descriptions of each flow - the actual wireframes would be in a separate Figma link but for this assignment I'm describing what they'd look like:

Solution 1: Skip For Now Flow

User Context: Sarah has just created her account and is building her first campaign. She reaches the domain authentication screen.

Flow sequence:

6. **Authentication screen:** Standard DNS setup instructions BUT with prominent "Skip for now" button in secondary color
7. **Education modal:** When user clicks "Skip," show modal explaining: "You can still build and send campaigns, but emails may have lower deliverability. Complete authentication anytime to improve inbox placement."
8. **Persistent reminder:** Yellow banner at top of dashboard: "Improve deliverability - complete domain authentication" with dismiss and complete CTA
9. **Pre-send warning:** Before sending first campaign, show warning: "Without domain authentication, up to 30% of emails may go to spam. Continue anyway or set up now?"
10. **Easy return path:** From any screen, user can click banner to jump directly back to auth setup with progress saved

Key interactions:

- "Skip for now" button has subtle warning icon
- Banner is dismissible but reappears after 3 days
- Pre-send modal has checkbox: "I understand the risks" to prevent accidental clicks

Why this solves P0: It just... removes the blocker. That's it. Sarah can send her bakery newsletter TODAY instead of spending 3 days Googling DNS stuff. The reminders make sure she doesn't completely forget about it, and the pre-send warning means she at least knows there's a tradeoff.

Solution 2: Guided Setup Wizard

User Context: Mike is migrating from ConvertKit. He knows he needs to authenticate but doesn't know how to access his GoDaddy DNS settings.

Flow sequence:

11. **Provider detection:** Enter domain (mikesfitness.com) → System auto-detects hosting provider: "We detected your domain is hosted on GoDaddy"
12. **Step 1 - Access DNS:** Screenshot showing exactly where to click in GoDaddy dashboard with numbered red arrows: 1) My Products 2) DNS 3) Manage DNS
13. **Step 2 - Add records:** Side-by-side view: Left = GoDaddy DNS screen, Right = Mailchimp values to copy. Copy-paste buttons for each value.
14. **Step 3 - Verify:** Auto-check every 30 seconds for DNS propagation. Progress indicator: "Checking records... this can take up to 48 hours but usually completes in 10 minutes"
15. **Success state:** Celebration animation + "You're all set! Your emails will now have excellent deliverability."

Key interactions:

- If provider detection fails, dropdown to manually select from top 15 providers
- Each copy button shows "Copied!" confirmation
- Embedded 60-second video walkthrough for that specific provider
- "Having trouble?" link to live chat on every step

Why this solves P0: Takes the vague, overwhelming instructions and makes them specific to Mike's exact setup. No more googling "how to add DNS in GoDaddy" and hoping you find the right article. It's right there with actual screenshots from their current UI.

Step 4: Success Metrics

Phase 2 Goal: Increase trial-to-paid conversion rate by reducing onboarding friction

P0 Solution: Skip For Now + Guided Wizard (implementing both as complementary features)

Metric Type	Metric Name	Definition	Why It Matters
Key Metric	Trial-to-First-Send Rate (48hr)	% of trial users who send their first campaign within 48 hours of signup	Directly measures if we've removed the blocker - fast first send = engaged user = higher conversion
Secondary	Skip-For-Now Adoption Rate	% of users who click "Skip for now" on authentication screen	Shows how many users are using the escape hatch vs struggling through auth
Secondary	Delayed Auth Completion Rate	% of "skip" users who complete authentication within 30 days	Validates assumption that users will come back - persistent reminders are working
Secondary	Wizard Completion Rate	% of users who start guided wizard and successfully authenticate	Measures wizard effectiveness - should be much higher than current auth completion
Guardrail	Spam Complaint Rate (Unauthenticated Senders)	% of emails marked as spam from users who skipped authentication	Ensures we're not hurting brand reputation or user experience by allowing

			unauthenticated sending
Guardrail	Support Ticket Volume (Auth-Related)	Number of support tickets mentioning DNS/authentication/deliverability	Should decrease significantly - if it goes up, wizard isn't working or instructions are unclear

Step 5: Risk Analysis & Mitigation

Here are the critical assumptions and failure modes I'm worried about:

Assumption	Failure Mode	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation	Detection	Rollback
Users who skip auth will return to complete it	Majority of users permanently skip - deliverability suffers, brand reputation damaged	H	M	Escalating reminder cadence (banner daily after day 7). Email nudges at day 3, 7, 14. Show deliverability drop if it occurs.	Delayed auth completion rate <20% after 30 days	Make skip harder to access - require 2 clicks or move to settings
Guided wizard instructions stay accurate as providers update UIs	Provider changes UI, screenshots outdated, users get confused and abandon	M	M	Quarterly review process to update screenshots. User feedback button: "Is this step still accurate?" Flag outdated content.	Spike in "inaccurate instructions" support tickets	Priority update affected provider instructions within 48hrs
Unauthenticated sending won't significantly harm platform reputation	Spam rates spike, ISPs start blocking Mailchimp IPs, ALL users affected	H	L	Separate IP pools for authenticated vs unauthenticated. Cap unauthenticated sends at 100/day until auth completed.	Spam complaint rate >0.3% for unauthenticated pool	Immediately disable skip option; force auth for all new signups

Users understand the tradeoff of skipping auth	Users skip without reading warnings, then blame Mailchimp when emails go to spam	M	M	Required checkbox acknowledgment . A/B test warning copy. Show actual deliverability % in dashboard for unauthenticated users.	Support tickets blaming platform for spam folder placement	Add mandatory 30-sec educational video before allowing skip
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Next Steps

The PRD (separate document) will contain:

- Full technical specifications for both features
- Implementation timeline and resource requirements
- Rollout strategy (phased release to 10% → 50% → 100%)
- Engineering dependencies and API integrations
- Success criteria and launch readiness checklist

Figma Wireframes:

[Link to Figma file with high-fidelity wireframes would go here]