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When do SaaS trials convert? What the published data shows

Trial conversions peak in week one, and a 7-day trial beat a 30-day one in a randomized test. What the published SaaS trial data shows, and can't prove.

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SUMMARY

SaaS trial conversion: what the published data shows

We read the largest published data on SaaS trials, two surveys of software companies and two randomized experiments, and traced each figure to its source. Trials are decided in the first week or on the last day, and a shorter trial did not convert worse. Here is what holds up, and what the numbers can't prove.

KEY FINDINGS

1 **The decision comes in week one, or on the last day.** In billing data from 2,500 SaaS companies, trial-to-paid conversions peak in the first week, and daily conversion stays close to zero until the trial's final day (ChartMogul[1]).

2 **A typical product converts 8%.** The median free-to-paid conversion rate within six months is 8% across 200 software products, and 62% of free trials last 14 days (ChartMogul and ProductLed[2]).

3 **Asking for a card converts a larger share of fewer people.** Trials that require a card convert 30%, more than five times those that don't. But in a randomized test with more than a million newspaper readers, trials that renewed into a paid plan by themselves cut take-up by 35% and total subscribers by 23% over 20 months (Miller, Sahni and Strulov-Shlain[3]).

4 **A shorter trial did not convert worse.** In a randomized test with 337,724 users of a software firm, a 7-day trial brought 5.59% more subscriptions than a 30-day one; 14 days made no significant difference (Management Science, 2023[4]).

5 **Early activation goes with keeping users, but no public test shows what trial emails add.** 69% of products with strong early activation also kept users well at three months (Amplitude[5]). We found no public controlled study of onboarding or trial emails in SaaS.

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A free trial is a short window, and most SaaS teams argue about the same three things inside it: how long it should be, whether to ask for a card, and which emails to send when. We wanted to know what the public data says about each, so we read the largest published datasets on SaaS trials, two surveys of software companies and two randomized experiments, and traced every figure to its source.

This is a review of published data, not a controlled experiment of our own, and the section on what the numbers can't prove matters as much as the findings.

01 The decision comes in week one, or on the last day

ChartMogul looked at billing data from 2,500 SaaS companies, from the first quarter of 2024 to the first quarter of 2025. Trial-to-paid conversions peak in week one and drop off quickly afterward, for B2B and B2C alike. Looking at each day of the first week, the median conversion rate stayed close to zero until the final day, which suggests most people pay only when the trial runs out. B2C companies see much higher 7-day conversion rates than B2B, 16% against 2.5% (ChartMogul SaaS Go-To-Market Report[1]).

ChartMogul and ProductLed surveyed 200 software products in January 2026. The most common trial is 14 days (62% of products), then 7 days (14%) and 30 days (14%). The median free-to-paid conversion rate is 8% within six months, and products focused on B2B convert somewhat higher than B2C or hybrid ones (SaaS Conversion Report[2]).

8%

Median free-to-paid conversion rate within six months, across 200 software products.

Source: ChartMogul and ProductLed, SaaS Conversion Report, 2026[2]

An earlier survey of more than 1,000 products, mostly B2B SaaS, set the bands many teams still quote: for a free trial, 8% to 12% is good and 15% to 25% is great; for a freemium product, 3% to 5% is good and 6% to 8% is great (Kyle Poyar and Lenny Rachitsky, 2023[6]). The two surveys asked different

companies in different years, so compare your product with one of them, not with a mix of both.

02 Asking for a card: a larger share of fewer people

In the 2026 survey, 20% of free-trial products ask for a card up front, and those trials convert 30% of people to paid, more than five times the rate of trials that don't. The report itself warns that asking for a card can cut sign-ups (ChartMogul and ProductLed[2]).

Recurly counted 22 million free trials on 803 subscription sites from January to August 2022. 87.4% of the trials required billing information and converted 39.0% on average; trials without it converted 12.0%, with an average length of 39 days. Most of those sites sell to consumers (Recurly, State of Subscriptions[7]).

Both compare different products, not one product tried both ways, and a conversion rate says nothing about how many people started. The one randomized test we found is from a newspaper: Klaus Miller, Navdeep Sahni and Avner Strulov-Shlain offered more than a million readers of a European newspaper a trial that either renewed into a paid subscription by itself or ended on its own. Automatic renewal helped in the short term, but it lowered take-up of the offer by 35%, and the total number of subscribers by 23% over 20 months (working paper, 2026[3]).

Source	Data	Method	What it found
ChartMogul and ProductLed	200 software products, January 2026	Survey	Card required: 30% convert, more than 5x trials without one
Recurly	22 million trials on 803 sites, 2022	Billing data	Card required: 39.0% convert; no card: 12.0%
Miller, Sahni and Strulov-Shlain	More than a million newspaper readers, 2018 to 2020	Randomized experiment	Trials that renew by themselves: 35% lower take-up, 23% fewer subscribers after 20 months

03 Trial length: shorter did not hurt

Hema Yoganarasimhan, Ebrahim Barzegary and Abhishek Pani ran the largest published experiment on trial length. A software firm randomly gave 337,724 new users a 7-, 14- or 30-day trial in December 2015 and January 2016 and followed them for about two years. The 7-day trial brought 5.59% more subscriptions than the 30-day one (15.44% of users against 14.63%), and 14 days made no significant difference. In the authors' words, shorter trials "(surprisingly) maximize customer acquisition, retention, and profitability" on average (Management Science, 2023[4]).

Recurly's billing data points the same way without being a test: trials of seven days or less had the highest conversion rate, 40.4%, and trials longer than 61 days the lowest, 30.6%. Software changed least of the industries it covers (Recurly[7]).

04 Activation goes with keeping users

Amplitude looked at product data from more than 2,600 companies, September 2023 to September 2024: 69% of products with strong early activation were also strong at three-month retention. At three months, the top B2B products keep 15.6% of their customers and the median B2B product 2.5% (Amplitude product benchmarks[5]). It is a pattern across products, not proof that faster activation causes retention.

Userpilot measured 62 B2B companies: on average, 37.5% of new users reached activation, and it took them 1 day and 12 hours. Each company defines activation its own way (Userpilot[8]).

One study looked inside a single SaaS firm's trials. **Yan Li** found that using the trial more often went with converting, but trying a wider variety of the software went with a lower conversion rate. Touchpoints the customer started helped, while messages the company started that tried to persuade went with less conversion (Production and Operations Management, 2022[9]). The study observes one firm; it is not an experiment.

05 What these numbers can't prove

It is tempting to read these figures as rules: ask for a card, shorten the trial. The data is weaker than that, for four reasons.

Different products	The surveys and billing data compare different companies, not one product tried both ways. Only the two randomized experiments change one thing at a time, and neither is a recent B2B SaaS product.
Surveys and self-grading	The ChartMogul and ProductLed survey and the 2023 survey are what companies reported about themselves. Amplitude, Userpilot and Recurly measure their own customers.
Definitions differ	Conversion, activation and retention mean different things in each source and over different windows. ChartMogul's week-one data has B2C converting more; its six-month survey has B2B converting more. That is why we don't put them on one chart.
Old or not SaaS	The trial-length experiment ran in 2015 and 2016, and the card experiment is from newspapers.

We found no public controlled study that measures what onboarding or trial emails add to paid conversion in SaaS. The nearest one is outside SaaS: a retailer randomly sent automated emails to about half of the people who browsed and left without buying, and the emailed group brought in more

online revenue in the category they had browsed (Goic, Rojas and Saavedra, 2021[10]). To know what your own trial emails add, keep a random group out of them and compare.

06 What we would do with this

1. **Plan for week one and the last day.** The first emails should help people reach the step that makes the product useful; the last should arrive before the trial ends, not after.
2. **Don't lengthen the trial to fix conversion.** In the one large software experiment, 7 days did better than 30.
3. **Judge the card question by paying customers, not by rate.** A card up front raises the share who convert and can cut the number who start. Count paying customers per hundred visitors to the sign-up page.
4. **Follow what each person did, not the calendar.** Someone who reached the key step needs a different email from someone who never came back after the first day.
5. **Help more than you push.** In the one SaaS study of trial messages, persuasive messages the company started went with less conversion.
6. **Keep a holdout.** Leave a random 10% of trials out of your emails for a few weeks. It is the only way to know what they add.

TRY IT IN BEHAVLY

Follow up every trial on what they did

In Behavly, a Trigger Campaign takes a person in the moment your product sends an event, like a trial about to end. Behavly sees who visited pricing, who went quiet and whose trial is ending, and writes each person the email that fits.

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ABOUT

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About Behavly

Agentic analytics and lifecycle email for SaaS. Behavly shows what each person did on your website and in your product, and follows up with each of them by email based on what they did. It has a free plan, no credit card needed.

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