KILLGATE | EVIDENCE-FIRST PUBLIC RESEARCH

Restaurant Employee Scheduling Product

$99/month validation report | August 28, 2026

VERDICT: Change the idea before more testing Confidence

0.91

Executive conclusion. The restaurant scheduling problem is real and commercially funded. The locked $99/month offer is not sufficiently differentiated from existing products to justify direct validation in its current form. This is not a kill of the market; it is a rejection of this specific product hypothesis.

The idea you tested - KG-RS-20260828-01

Provisional target customer: U.S. independent and small-chain restaurants, 1-5 locations, approximately 20-75 hourly employees, where a GM/operator owns weekly scheduling.

Problem: Building the weekly schedule requires reconciling employee availability/preferences with expected traffic, labor budgets, overtime, and staffing requirements.

Locked offer: Software automatically creates that weekly schedule.

Locked price: $99/month/location.

Current alternatives: Spreadsheets/paper/texting, fixed schedules, Sling, Homebase, 7shifts, HotSchedules, Push, POS-native scheduling.

Contract rule: Materially changing the target customer, workflow, differentiating mechanism, or price requires a new contract.

What was checked

Research gate Result Evidence

Rules fixed before scoring PASS KG-RS-20260828-01

>=3 useful DIRECT public sources PASS Operator discussions, verified reviews, current competitor material

>=2 independent source groups PASS Reddit/operator communities, G2, vendor/product documentation

Customer pain demonstrated PASS Current owner describes scheduling for 35 employees as a weekly headache and nightmare [S1]

Current workarounds/alternatives demonstrated PASS Paper/texts, Excel, fixed schedules, Homebase, Sling, 7shifts all observed [S2]

Existing spend / budget proxy PASS Operators are considering/paying roughly $40-$150 monthly; commercial plans exist in this band [S3][S4]

Negative evidence actively searched PASS Free/basic tools, fixed schedules, incumbent satisfaction, feature parity

>=2 source-backed supporting claims PASS Pain + demonstrated spend

>=2 material constraints PASS Incumbent feature parity + low/free alternatives

Fatal legal/technical constraint PASS None found; compliance complexity exists but is tractable

Final buyer/payment gate NOT YET TESTED 0/8 qualified buyers; 0 price-positive; 0 payments

Interpretation: The packet clears the evidence-sufficiency minimums, but the offer itself triggers PIVOT.

Mechanism scoreboard

Mechanism Role Status Finding

Capture availability/time off/preferences Required part of the offer Already included elsewhere Standard incumbent functionality

Predict traffic/sales demand Required part of the offer Already included elsewhere Homebase and 7shifts already forecast demand from historical sales/POS data [S5][S8]

Calculate labor costs/budget Required part of the offer Already included elsewhere Available in Homebase, 7shifts and Sling [S5][S6] [S8]

Avoid employee overtime Required part of the offer Already included elsewhere Homebase explicitly incorporates overtime rules into auto-scheduling [S7]

Optimize all constraints into a weekly schedule Central to why someone would pay Already included elsewhere / Already common Homebase already auto-drafts schedules using availability, preferences, PTO, role requirements, labor rules, overtime, and sales forecasts [S7]

Review/edit/publish schedule Later operational piece Already included elsewhere Commodity workforce-scheduling workflow

POS/payroll integration Later operational piece / A limit on the offer Needs a real-world test Operators explicitly care about POS/payroll integration; some integrations carry additional fees or setup requirements [S3]

Feasibility conclusion: No Test a critical capability in parallel flag. Constraint optimization and sales forecasting are already demonstrated commercially. Technical feasibility is not the principal risk. Differentiation and switching economics are.

Strongest evidence FOR 1. The scheduling pain is unquestionably real.

A June 2026 restaurant owner with 35 employees described the weekly process as a recurring headache involving availability restrictions, time-off requests, employee complaints, and schedule changes. Other operators recommended moving to dedicated software rather than continuing with Excel/WhatsApp. [S1]

An older operator discussion quantified roughly two hours per site per week spent building schedules while considering availability and operational metrics. [S9]

2. Buyers demonstrably spend money on this job.

A February 2026 owner with 45 employees was considering 7shifts at roughly $150/month specifically for scheduling, labor forecasting, availability, swaps, and payroll integration. Multiple operators responded that paid scheduling software was worth using. [S3]

Current commercial pricing confirms a real budget category: 7shifts lists plans around $39.99, $79.99, and $134.99 per location/month, while Homebase shows $70 and $120/location/month tiers. [S4]

So $99 is not an absurd category price.

3. Existing customers report meaningful value from scheduling software.

A small-business restaurant owner/GM reviewing 7shifts said it made scheduling faster, improved labor visibility, and saved operational time; G2's review population also shows substantial use specifically for restaurant/employee scheduling. [S10]

Strongest evidence AGAINST

1. The proposed core product already exists almost verbatim.

This is the decisive contradiction.

Homebase currently describes an auto-scheduler that uses employee availability, preferred shifts, time off, role assignments, past scheduling patterns, labor rules, overtime rules, and sales forecasts, and then automatically drafts the weekly schedule. [S7]

That is essentially the idea you tested.

7shifts likewise combines restaurant-specific availability, labor budgets, overtime/compliance, POS-connected sales forecasting, staffing recommendations, and scheduling. [S8]

The proposed causal mechanism therefore does not currently establish a reason to switch.

2. $99/month does not create an obvious pricing wedge.

7shifts Pro is advertised around $79.99/location/month, while Homebase Plus is $70 and All-in-One is $120. [S11]

Your $99 standalone scheduling product lands directly between established suites that include additional workforce-management functionality.

Lower-end competition is also strong: Sling charges by user and offers free/basic scheduling; operators in a May 2026 thread reported using free Homebase or Sling even with teams around 20 employees. [S6][S2]

That makes the 20-30 employee portion of the locked target customer especially questionable at $99.

3. Incumbents are not universally hated.

The disconfirming evidence is stronger than "competitors exist." Operators repeatedly describe 7shifts/Homebase as good enough or excellent.

In one current discussion, users described 7shifts as worth the price, called the transition from paper/text a major improvement, and said Homebase also worked well. [S3]

G2 currently shows 7shifts at approximately 4.5/5 across 124 reviews, with scheduling ease among its recurring positives. [S10]

A new entrant therefore has to beat satisfactory incumbent behavior, not merely replace spreadsheets.

4. Some scheduling pain is organizational rather than algorithmic.

The June owner thread also contains a competing solution: fixed schedules, cross-training, earlier request-off deadlines, and clearer employee responsibility for coverage. [S1]

That matters. An optimizer cannot solve every source of scheduling chaos. Bad availability discipline, chronic understaffing, call-outs, employee preference conflicts, and policy problems may persist after schedule generation.

Evidence audit

Known facts

The problem occurs in real restaurants. Paid scheduling software has an established budget. Forecasting, availability, preferences, labor-cost management and automated scheduling all already exist commercially. [S1][S3] [S7][S8]

Inferences

$99/month is economically plausible for the category but weak as a standalone value proposition without a material performance advantage. Buyers appear to purchase the broader workflow, not merely an optimization algorithm.

The likely competitive requirement is therefore something stronger than "automatically generates a schedule."

Unknowns

Public evidence does not establish whether restaurant managers think incumbent auto-generated schedules are poor; how frequently managers substantially rewrite those schedules; whether a superior optimizer could measurably cut labor dollars or manager time; whether restaurants would replace an incumbent purely for better schedule generation; willingness to pay exactly $99/month for this narrower product; acquisition cost; retention; or integration requirements by POS/payroll stack.

Contradictions

Restaurants already praise current tools; free alternatives work for some smaller operators; process changes can reduce scheduling complexity without new software; and the locked core mechanism is explicitly present in Homebase.

Excluded / downgraded evidence

Vendor claims such as "95% accurate forecasting," "3% labor savings," or "12 hours saved" were not treated as independent demand validation. They establish product claims, not customer demand.

The February 2026 7shifts question was cross-posted into several restaurant subreddits; those posts represent one underlying observation, not several independent buyers.

Why this verdict follows

There is enough evidence for the problem, the category, and the existence of spend.

But the locked commercial hypothesis depends on this mechanism carrying willingness-to-pay: Combine availability + predicted demand + labor cost + overtime + preferences -> automatically create the schedule.

Current evidence shows that mechanism is already bundled into established restaurant/workforce products.

That attacks the Central to why someone would pay mechanism itself, rather than a peripheral feature. Under the locked Killgate rules, removing or materially changing that mechanism changes the reason the buyer would purchase.

Public evidence supports buyer testing would improperly rescue the current offer. More public evidence is needed would incorrectly imply insufficient market evidence. Change the idea before more testing is the correct result.

Build-risk memo

The primary risk is not engineering. It is building a technically competent optimizer that restaurant managers perceive as one more scheduling app.

There is also compliance surface area. Scheduling software operating broadly in the U.S. eventually encounters jurisdiction-specific requirements such as advance notice, rest periods and schedule-change rules. Oregon, for example, imposes predictive-scheduling requirements on qualifying large hospitality/food-service employers; NYC applies additional Fair Workweek requirements to covered fast-food employers. [S12]

Incumbents already incorporate compliance features, increasing the scope required to compete as a complete system.

Minimum next action

Do not build the scheduler and do not yet test "$99 for automated restaurant scheduling."

Run 5 problem interviews with restaurant GMs/operators who already use 7shifts, Homebase, HotSchedules, Push, or another paid scheduling system, specifically to falsify one question: What important scheduling decision still requires substantial manual work after their existing software generates or assists with the schedule?

Require a recent concrete example from the last four schedules. Do not pitch features during those interviews.

If fewer than 2 of 5 independently identify the same costly unresolved scheduling job, there is weak evidence for a software wedge and the category should be stopped under the present thesis.

If >=2 independently expose the same unsolved job, that job can become the basis of a new hypothesis and a new Set of test rules.

What would change the verdict

An upgrade requires evidence of a specific incumbent failure, not merely confirmation that scheduling is annoying - for example, several qualified operators independently demonstrating that their existing software repeatedly produces unusable schedules and that correcting them costs meaningful time or labor dollars.

A downgrade toward More public evidence is needed/KILL would follow if incumbent users consistently say their present systems already solve this job adequately and that they would not replace them for materially better automatic scheduling at $99/month.

Source references

S1. Restaurant Owners - Scheduling thread (June 2026):
https://www.reddit.com/r/restaurantowners/comments/1ud4jzn/scheduling/

S2. Restaurant Owners - Scheduling app thread (May 2026): https://www.reddit.com/r/restaurantowners/comments/1tt6r2m/scheduling_app/

S3. Restaurant Owners - 7shifts scheduling opinion thread (Feb. 2026): https://www.reddit.com/r/restaurantowners/comments/1qsm9my/need_your_expertise_opinion_7shiftsscheduling/

S4. 7shifts - franchise / Toast article cited for plan pricing: https://www.7shifts.com/blog/why-7shifts-is-the-best-scheduling-and-payroll-software-for-franchises-using-toast/

S5. Homebase - Labor forecasting: https://www.joinhomebase.com/employee-scheduling/labor-forecasting

S6. Sling - Pricing: https://getsling.com/pricing/

S7. Homebase - Auto scheduling: https://www.joinhomebase.com/employee-scheduling/auto-scheduling

S8. 7shifts - Restaurant employee scheduling software: https://www.7shifts.com/restaurant-employee-scheduling-software/

S9. Restaurant Owners - Scheduling time discussion (2023): https://www.reddit.com/r/restaurantowners/comments/10i2jhw/

S10. G2 - 7shifts reviews: https://www.g2.com/products/7shifts/reviews

S11. 7shifts - comparison / pricing page cited in report: https://www.7shifts.com/compare/7shifts-vs-hotschedules/

S12. Oregon BOLI - Predictive scheduling: https://www.oregon.gov/boli/workers/Pages/predictive-scheduling.aspx

Research status: Public research can support public evidence supports buyer testing, more public evidence is needed, or change the idea before more testing only. It does not constitute a final GO, buyer validation, or payment evidence.