

## Notes from ROLI Team Time, November 2017

Roland speaks in very, very long sentences. All good news is reported in the first person. All bad news is in the second person.

Terri [Marketing Director] gets the only team namecheck, for saying something the whole team's been saying since 2014, but on a higher salary. This often prefigures a demotion.

### A Week In Roland's Head

In Lisbon, I partied with other rich folks in their national mausoleum. We tucked into an exclusive dinner right between the tombs. A proper dinner like you've never been invited to. What better way to honor Portugal than by assembling the greatest of our generation, giving them some canapés, and using the gravestones of their heroes as a stage prop? Nobody could have foreseen that this might lead to widespread offence and a [public outcry](#). What did we learn? That some folks wilfully refuse to get what we're trying to do. This makes me realise that you probably all have the same problem. You have to understand that people who are better than you can have different priorities. But, in the end, I got to eat in the Pantheon in Lisbon, and that's not going to happen again for a while, so you'll never get to and I totally won that round.

The small studio-in-a-box prop we made – the Bauhaus lunchbox that contains more than \$1000 of equipment, most of it made by Apple – well, Apple really likes it. It's definitely the way to reach a mass market.

You all have to focus more on empathising with the customer. Our support team is small, and dealing with a lot of issues. We come nowhere near the expectations set by our own marketing. Creators feel disappointed when they complete a transaction and then have to wait for weeks for it to be fulfilled. And why do they get angry? Because the support team has no empathy. Guys! All I ever hear from you is, like, 'There are hundreds of customers venting at us every

day, I can't speak to them all and it's making things worse. I'm so burnt out I'm, like, throwing up at work and shaking all day and having panic attacks on the train, blah blah blah'. If you stopped obsessing about yourselves all the time, you might begin to understand the motivation of the folks posting comments on our YouTube videos, who you're not responding to quickly enough, by the way.

A really creative way to win at empathy is to send automated emails to creators when they engage with us, to tell them how highly we value their feedback while they wait in line for a couple of weeks to provide it. We're also nailing empathy by sending out monthly emails asking how likely, on a scale of 1 to 10, they are to recommend ROLI products to their friends and families.

Lightpad XL [four Lightpads, tiled in an even bigger square, in one product] is going to be expensive, and we want to get it out soon. We want to ship at the right time, which is all of the following:

- several months before closing Series C;
- just before we close Series C;
- right after we get Series C.

This makes a fresh story for our investors, time to recover an NPI spend of a couple of million dollars, and saves us having to spend that money in the first place. We can do all three if we don't pay our suppliers on time, and also bank our customers' pre-order cash weeks before we ship.

We still don't have a clue what AURA is, but it's got a keyboard and is not for professional musicians. Remember Pharrell? That dude who Roland chatted to last month in the Hackney Empire, who we said would be helping us design it? It's not a product aimed at anybody like him and you probably won't see him again.

It turns out that we're going to attract professional musicians with Lightpad XL: a giant, pricey, niche version of a product with no clear purpose.

## **Roland's guide to product management**

We start a conversation with a product, and the customer directs it. Last year we aimed to hit two targets in different postcodes with a single bullet. Incredibly we missed both, so two groups of disappointed customers are giving us conflicting feedback. Thanks largely to me, we are smashing this empathy thing *again* by finding out what the loudest ones are complaining about, and ignoring everyone else.

We're focusing our development effort on certain sectors, which is a polite way of saying that we're reluctantly removing 10% of our feature requests. (And cutting 50% from our R&D schedule.) The great thing about slimming down our feature set to its bare essentials is that I get to test a really focused, clean product on the plane, and call you mid-flight every day with new demands for features.

If something sucks, be it a product or a feature or a bug, let's say it sucks, and then have hard conversations. In case you've just joined us, this is how I renew my permission to be openly rude about your team and their work, demand demos mid-sprint at short notice, take ownership of every meeting I attend, and insult your intelligence implicitly, and your interpersonal skills explicitly, in public. You can't be trusted to understand what's best for your team or the customer. Only I can, because I own your team and I am your customer.

I've built a great relationship with Apple. Right now I'm talking and you may thank me when my lips stop moving. We're depending on Apple to make our products and company viable, because their best and only interest is to boost ROLI and that will totally work. I've told the Garageband team that they have to place ROLI's priorities before their own, and to reposition the app as a prosumer product. Nothing can go wrong.

Dimitri, your mouth is moving. I've told you before.

## Henrik's turn

We're well behind our sales plan, and we're well behind the plan we revised last quarter when we were already well behind the plan. So it's the Best. Month. Ever.

Apple increased load-in, so we've 'B-to-B' sold stuff. Nobody asks whether we think the channel might actually clear, how likely our Christmas load-in is to happen on time given that we're three weeks away from December, or what the returns are likely to be on Lightpad M.

Realistic prediction from Henrik: we'll make £10m of revenue this year by spending £16m. We are balancing the books like a sub-prime derivative. We are awesome.

The ROLI PLAY app launches next month. It's like the NOISE app would have looked, had we realised that most of our customers are human. Look up the plural of 'fiasco' right now: this is your last chance to sit down with a book before Christmas.

We've just launched a premium downloadable Wu Tang Clan sound pack, because they're still a thing. You can look forward to Q1 2018's sound pack with 2 Unlimited, and retail partnerships with Our Price and Tandy.

Lauren [programme manager] asks about our plans to improve quality assurance. That's not an in-house thing. We'll hire a great team of consultants to fix it. They'll tell us to mend our working practices; we'll remind them that it's culturally and commercially expedient to disregard their contribution. Then, when nothing improves and we fail to execute, we can blame and sack them along with the QA people, chuck the fallout at Gareth and the support team, and find somebody else to work with.

In the Q&A, Damian says 'learnings' twice, like it's an actual word.