

Traction Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Traction* is a roadmap for startups to achieve the exponential growth necessary to survive the first few months and years by looking at 19 ways to get traction and a framework to help you pick the best one for your startup.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Traction is what makes sure that your car's horsepower actually translates to the asphalt and pushes your car forward. Without it, all you create is smoke, admittedly cool drifts and rubber marks on the road.

For a startup, the situation isn't much different. You can spend a lot of time on product development, getting investors and hiring great people, but in the end, how much traction your work gets in the marketplace is what determines your survival.

To help you out, Justin Mares and Gabriel Weinberg have written this book, based on what they've learned growing DuckDuckGo (the search engine that doesn't track you) and Exceptional, a software company, plus a bunch of other startups they founded or worked with.

Here are 3 lessons to help get your startup off the ground:

1. Start thinking about your marketing as soon as you begin working on your idea.
2. Attend trade shows to find potential future partners.
3. Use the bullseye framework to find which traction channel works best for you.

Want to catapult your business from 0-60 in the blink of an eye? Let's go get some traction!

Lesson 1: Think about your marketing as soon as you begin working on your startup.

The #1 mistake I keep seeing people make when trying to start a business is to not start marketing instantly. Every time a friend tells me “I’m building this thing...” I ask: “Have you started marketing yet?”

99% of the time, the answer is “Nah, I want to get something out first...”

As a result, most of my friends end up emerging from their startup lab with a fully cooked product, but no one who wants to buy it. Imagine a guy trying to sell newspapers on the street going “Who wants this?” That’s frustrating. So every time I get that answer, I tell them: “You have to start marketing now, or otherwise you’ll fall flat on your face.”

People rarely listen, but if they do, they usually end up thanking me. I’m sure Justin and Gabriel have had plenty of the same conversations.

They suggest you should split your time 50/50 between product development and getting traction. Of course, when you start out you’re happy if you can get a few dozen people to follow your work and you can always reach those, but the traction metric changes over time and eventually, you’ll have to get people by the thousands to buy your stuff to succeed.

Devoting lots of time to your marketing early on will allow you to test strategies until you find the right one. For example, when Dropbox tried search engine ads, they quickly realized that paying \$200 to get someone to get a \$99/year membership wasn’t going to work and could switch to trying something else.

Oh and don’t be afraid to share updates before you’re ready to launch. Marketo started blogging long before they had something to launch – so when they did, 14,000 people were already waiting to buy.

Lesson 2: Go to trade shows to find people and companies to partner with.

This is one of 19 traction channels Justin and Gabriel describe, but I picked it because it combines offline and online.

No matter what industry you’re in, there are always trade shows and events not too far away, and **there’s always someone there who could change your life and business.**

Even if you meet one of the giants in your industry before you have a finalized product to showcase, you could still get to know them, start building a relationship and who knows, maybe they’ll tell you exactly what they want from you for the two of you to partner up.

You can also use these to come up with creative marketing campaigns. For example, Twitter put TVs in the lobbies and hallways of the SXSW (South by Southwest) conference in 2007, showing live feeds of tweets from the event. Of course everyone wanted to see their own tweet on screen, and as a result, their traffic ballooned from 20,000 to 60,000 tweets per day during the event.

Lesson 3: Use the bullseye framework to find which traction channel works best for you.

However, trade shows are just one of 19 ways to get traction, but that doesn't mean you should pick that one. Nor does it mean you should do all of them at once. Here's what Justin and Gabriel call the bullseye framework to **find which traction channel works best for you:**

1. Brainstorm which channels work in your industry and how you could use them for your particular product.
2. Categorize them into promising, possible and long shots.
3. Make a list with the top three.
4. Do cheap testing with clear goals for those top three.
5. Focus on the one that works best, or start over if none work.

In truth, getting one traction channel to work is more than you need to successfully grow your startup. Finding that one channel is what you should spend your time on – not trying to be everywhere and getting nowhere in the process.

As Steve Jobs said: "Focus is about saying no."

Traction Review

If I ran a "Startup Marketing 101" class, I'd probably make every student buy Traction. It gives a great overview of all your options, without allowing you to get completely lost in them, thanks to the bullseye framework. The two authors combine having a broad set of general knowledge with taking only a very narrow, focused path, and that's what makes their marketing strategies for startups so efficient.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What remnant advertising is and why you shouldn't neglect traditional media
- How to pull off social media marketing without being a pain in the ass
- The difference between SEO and SEM (and what both of those mean)

- What the best sales channel for high priced products is
- Why your traction channels change over time
- The critical path of actions to stay focused on the right stuff

Who would I recommend the Traction summary to?

The 22 year old with an idea for a roommate matching service for college dorms, the 39 year old, who just remembered his past 2 failed startups and how too little marketing was the problem, and anyone who wants to get into online marketing.