cdixon   Blog   Twitter   About

Come for the tool, stay for the network

2015-01-31

A popular strategy for bootstrapping networks is what I like to call "come for the tool, stay for the network."

The idea is to initially attract users with a single-player tool and then, over time, get them to participate in a network. The tool helps get to initial critical mass. The network creates the long term value for users, and defensibility for the company.

Here are two historical examples: 1) *Delicious.* The single-player tool was a cloud service for your bookmarks. The multiplayer network was a tagging system for discovering and sharing links. 2) *Instagram.* Instagram's initial hook was the innovative photo filters. At the time some other apps like Hipstamatic had filters but you had to pay for them. Instagram also made it easy to share your photos on other networks like Facebook and Twitter. But you could also share on Instagram's network, which of course became the preferred way to use Instagram over time.

The "come for the tool, stay for the network" strategy isn't the only way to build a network. Some networks never had single-player tools, including gigantic successes like Facebook and Twitter. But starting a network from scratch is very hard. Think of single-player tools as kindling.

Next post: The idea maze for AI startups

Previous post: Virtual reality: a new creative medium where the default state is belief