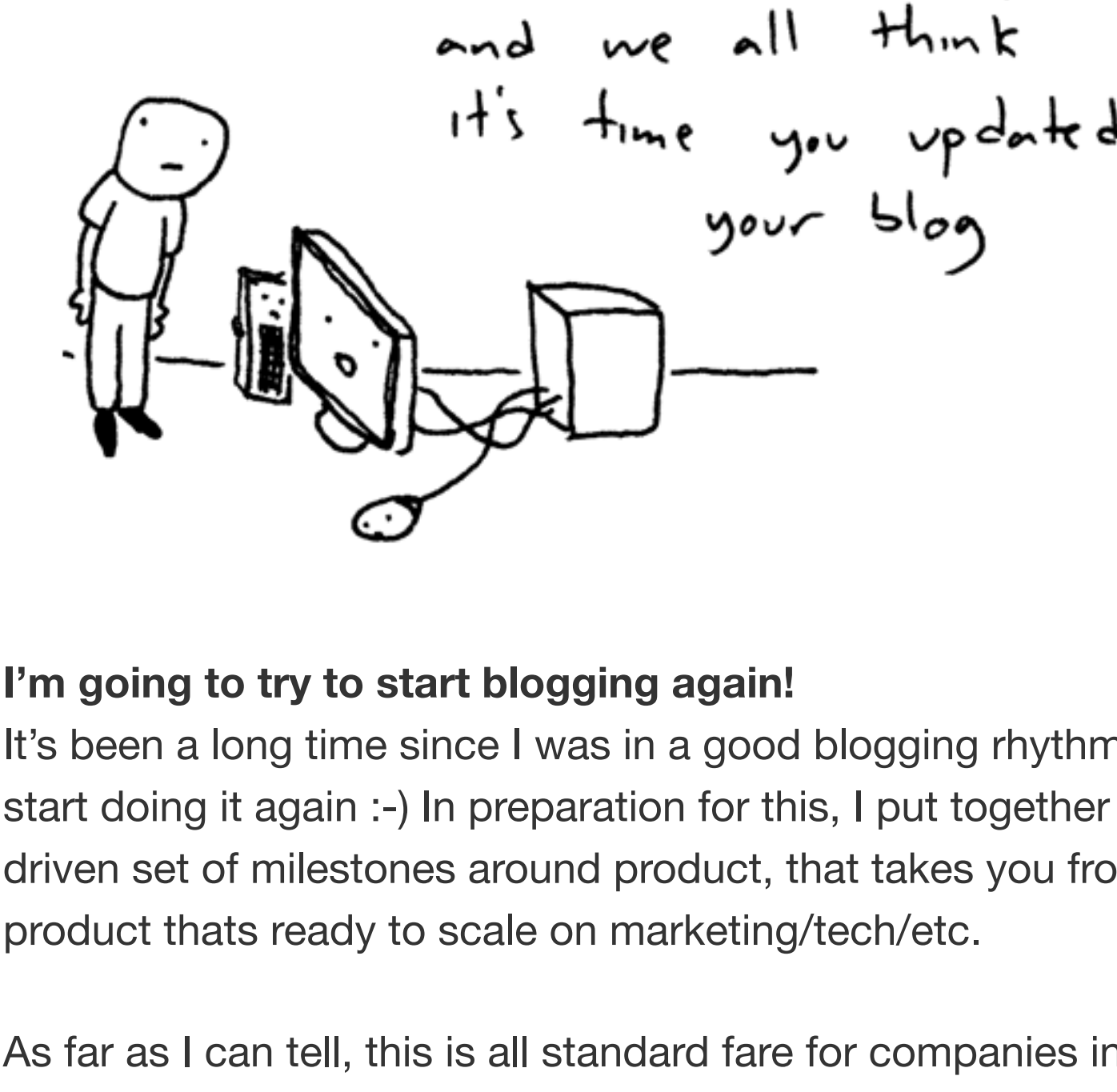


“Zero to product/market fit”



I'm going to try to start blogging again!

It's been a long time since I was in a good blogging rhythm, and I'm going to try to start doing it again :-). In preparation for this, I put together an outline of an output-driven set of milestones around product, that takes you from zero to a P/M fit product that's ready to scale on marketing/tech/etc.

As far as I can tell, this is all standard fare for companies in Silicon Valley. My desire to write these posts is ultimately about documenting what's working for people and spreading the knowledge beyond Palo Alto, CA :-). All of these topics are ultimately derived by both my own projects as well as my advisory roles at venture-backed startups. (Some of these are listed [here](#))

If you like the outline and want to stay up to date, just [subscribe](#) and [follow me on Twitter](#).

Without further ado, here's the outline- I hope to write at least a post or two per week:

Blogging roadmap goals

- “output-driven” roadmap for going from zero to product/market fit
- for small hackerish teams building consumer internet products
- the intention is to create a [scalable startup](#) that is going after a huge market, and generate huge returns for venture capital investors
- goal is to get to P/M fit in shortest time possible, defer everything else
 - defers monetization
 - defers marketing
 - defers scaling
 - (this is all by design)
- P/M fit takes a non-deterministic amount of time to get there, insanely hard, you'll probably fail anyway
- the problem is 90% contextual, make up your own rules as you go

Concept prototype

Picking a product and market

- build for yourself (start with intuition)
- have a long-term vision
- [base it off something that's already big and already working](#)
 - [big makes it easy to test and collect feedback](#)
 - [already working means you have a good sense for minimum product](#)
 - [also, there's pre-existing distribution channels as well](#)
- figure out the options for competitive differentiation – this is the core design intention
 - talk to a lot of users, do a lot of research, compare a lot of products in the space
- [dimensions for competitive differentiation](#)
 - [competitive dimensions](#)
 - [vertical audience](#)
 - [design intention](#)
 - [cheaper/niche](#)
 - [targeting rejectors](#)
- validating that there's LOTS of pre-existing “pull” for the market
 - search keywords
 - app leaderboards
- [ideal goal: simple product with fundamentally different core design intention for large pre-existing market](#)
 - bonus points for baked-in distribution, monetization, etc. but don't let this lead the ideal!!!
 - usually one killer feature (not a bunch of features)
- prototype: Landing page
 - what's a good landing page experiment?
 - headlines, copywriting, hero shot, etc.
 - unique URLs
- anti-patterns:
 - “someone's already done this” (desire for originality)
 - monetization/strategy-driven product ideas
 - technology in search of a market
 - “Wall Street” markets
 - lumping yourself into an aspirational market
 - comprehensive featureset done poorly

Paper/Wireframe prototype

Designing the initial product

- go for the minimum desirable product
 - might work :-)
 - the central design intention drives the product design
 - supports only the core use case, as minimum as possible
 - core UX should be 2-3 pages
 - limited functionality, done well. “Less but better”
 - Should build bare bone prototype in less than 2 weeks (really!)
 - flow-based product design
 - user quotes, then fill in with UI
 - low-fidelity prototyping tools
 - easier and cheaper to make changes
 - fix defects earlier (Toyota lean manufacturing model)
 - engineers always want to prototype in code, but then sunk-cost fallacy
 - get feedback from people and iterate
 - prototype: Core user flows, mocked up and ready to build
 - anti-patterns:
 - “database-up” design
 - feature creep and low product self-esteem (v1 should look like a feature!)
 - comprehensive featureset all of it done poorly
 - lots of pet features that don't fit into the core design intention
- #### Code prototype
- Coding the initial product
- build the prototype as fast as possible
 - fill in any blanks left out of the prototype
 - use the product yourself, iterate on it while keeping with the core design intention
 - focus on key flows and prioritize over ancillary ones
 - don't worry about corner cases
 - get it ready to be used by other people
 - prototype: Live product, usable by other people
 - anti-patterns:
 - taking too long
 - losing focus of the central design intention
 - not adjusting based on intuition and usage
 - overarchitecting, trying to make it scalable or modular or future-proofing in general

Friends and family alpha testing

- [private beta goals](#)
 - [clean up core experience](#)
 - [make product usable over multiple visits](#)
 - [validate the core design intention](#)
 - [not scalable](#)
- recruiting friends and family
 - focus on retention
 - [are users coming back?](#)
- recruiting random people
 - Find people from the existing market, rejectors, and outside the market
 - [Learn from extreme users](#)
 - Craigslist
 - Usertesting
- user testing
 - do they get it?
 - [how would you describe this to a friend?](#)
 - usability – remove the friction
 - would they switch? (for existing market users)
 - Net promotor score
- interpreting user feedback and learning to say “no”
 - [which users fall into the target market? Hear them out](#)
 - which users don't? It's OK (and maybe even good!) to have them reject
 - [try not to add new features unless absolutely necessary](#)
 - [what features can you remove that aren't part of the core?](#)
- prototype: Simple product, polished by real use
- anti-patterns
 - Delusion- it's not working but you think it is
 - Melancholy from user testing
 - Adding features without interpreting
 - Adding features that violate core design intention
 - Listening to out-of-market users
- is it working?
 - people understand the product
 - some subset of your users like it and use it
 - you like it :-)

Random people beta testing

- traffic testing goals
 - start polishing your onboarding flow
 - develop options for distribution
 - build some basic stats infrastructure
 - not meant to be scalable
 - User acquisition tactics
 - ads
 - PR + launch page + slow stream
 - partnerships
 - power through it
 - Collecting feedback
 - surveys
 - help and problems
 - recruit users to talk to
 - prototype: Spreadsheet for signup flow, more polished signup flow
 - is it working?
 - signups are happening
 - people are going through the core flow
 - retention/recurring usage from target users
 - product still works for you, and your friends/family
- #### User flow optimization
- model your usage and figure out your core drivers
 - this is completely product specific
 - two examples- daily deal versus a chat site
 - what's your “metric of love?”
 - prototype your funnel – explore!
 - flow chart
 - excel
 - SQL
 - formalize/finalize with dashboards
 - identify major bottlenecks for why the product's not working
 - start at the beginning of the flow
 - fix bottlenecks with A/B tests
 - [is it working?](#)
 - [how do the metrics compare to the usage model?](#)
 - [10% signup](#)
 - [+1 day retention and +1 week retention](#)
 - DAU/MAU
 - anti-patterns:
 - trying to fix problems in core UX when signup is the problem
 - over-architecting stats infrastructure
 - trying to use a generic analytics product to answer situational questions

Ready to scale?

- Hopefully the major checkboxes are checked – at this point you'd have:
 - [Huge market](#)
 - [Differentiated product](#)
 - [Product makes sense to normal people](#)
 - [Product is working for IRL people](#)
 - [Product is working for non-IRL people](#)
 - [Well-understood and optimized user flows](#)
 - [Ready to scale up](#)
- Non-scaleable marketing, tech, and otherwise- that's fine
- Now scale everything else :-)

Crisis, terror, and melancholy

- Is it good enough?
- Nobody likes my product!
- My product is a mess!
- It's taking too long!
- Investors hate my product!
- I'm iterating in circles!
- When to work on a completely new idea?
- Iterations are getting diminishing returns and people still don't love the product

Final note: Thanks to my friends who helped review and add to this: Vinnie at Yipit, Alex at Penzu, Rob Fitzpatrick, Kevin at Hyperink, Jamie/Justin at Mocospace, Ada/Sachin at Connected, Noah at Appsumo, Jason at Kima, and the other folks who helped

PS. Get new updates/analysis on tech and startups

I write a high-quality, weekly newsletter covering what's happening in Silicon Valley, focused on startups, marketing, and mobile.

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