

Minimum viable product

A **minimum viable product** (**MVP**) is a product with just enough features to satisfy early customers, and to provide feedback for future product development.^{[1][2]}

Gathering insights from an MVP is often less expensive than developing a product with more features, which increases costs and risk if the product fails, for example, due to incorrect assumptions. The term was coined and defined by Frank Robinson about 2001,^[3] and popularized by Steve Blank and Eric Ries.^{[4][5][6][7]} It may also involve carrying out market analysis beforehand.

Contents

Description

- Purposes
- Testing
- Notable quotes
- Marketing
- Business Model Canvas

Contraindications

Emerging applications

- Minimum viable brand (MVB)
- Minimum viable co-founder
- Minimum viable team

Criticism

See also

References

Description

A minimum viable product has just enough core features to effectively deploy the product, and no more. Developers typically deploy the product to a subset of possible customers—such as early adopters thought to be more forgiving, more likely to give feedback, and able to grasp a product vision from an early prototype or marketing information. This strategy targets avoiding building products that customers do not want and seeks to maximize information about the customer per amount of money spent.

"The minimum viable product is that version of a new product a team uses to collect the maximum amount of validated learning about customers with the least effort."^[2] The definition's use of the words maximum and minimum means it is not formulaic. It requires judgement to figure out, for any given context, what MVP makes sense. Due to this vagueness, the term MVP is commonly used, either deliberately or unwittingly, to refer to a much broader notion ranging from a rather prototype-like product to a fully-fledged and marketable product.^[8]

An MVP can be part of a strategy and process directed toward making and selling a product to customers.^[9] It is a core artifact in an iterative process of idea generation, prototyping, presentation, data collection, analysis and learning. One seeks to minimize the total time spent on an iteration. The process is iterated until a desirable product/market fit is obtained, or until the product is deemed non-viable.

Steve Blank typically refers to minimum viable product as minimum feature set.^{[10][11]}

Purposes

- Be able to test a product hypothesis with minimal resources
- Accelerate learning
- Reduce wasted engineering hours

- Get the product to early customers as soon as possible
- Base for other products
- To establish a builder's abilities in crafting the product required
- Brand building very quickly

Testing

- Results from a minimum viable product test aim to indicate if the product should be built to begin with. Testing evaluates if the initial problem or goal is solved in a manner that makes it reasonable to move forward.

Notable quotes

- Steve Blank: "You're selling the vision and delivering the minimum feature set to visionaries, not everyone."^[10]

Marketing

Releasing and assessing the impact of a minimum viable product is a market testing strategy that is used to screen product ideas soon after their generation. In software development, the release is facilitated by rapid application development tools and languages common to web application development.

The MVP differs from the conventional market testing strategy of investing time and money early to implement a product before testing it in the market. The MVP is intended to ensure that the market *wants the product* before large time and monetary investments are made. The MVP differs from the open source software methodology of release early, release often that listens to users, letting them define the features and future of the product. The MVP starts with a product vision, which is maintained throughout the product life cycle, although it is adapted based on the explicit and implicit (indirect measures) feedback from potential future customers of the product.^[2]

The MVP is a strategy that may be used as a part of Blank's customer development methodology that focuses on continual product iteration and refinement based on customer feedback. Additionally, the presentation of non-existing products and features may be refined using web-based statistical hypothesis testing, such as A/B testing.

In software development, the general method of *deploy first, code later* is akin to the agile program code testing methodology called test-driven development where unit tests are written first and fail until the code is written.

Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas is used to map in the major components and activities for a company starting out. The minimum viable product can be designed by using selected components of the Business Model Canvas:^[12]

- Customers
- Value proposition
- Channels
- Relationship

Contraindications

Andrea Contigiani said that his PhD research showed that early release of an MVP may hurt a company more than help when companies risk imitation by a competitor and have not established other barriers to imitation.^[13] He also said that negative feedback on a MVP can negatively affect a company's reputation.^[13]

Emerging applications

Concepts from minimum viable product are applied in other aspects of startups and organizations.

Minimum viable brand (MVB)

Using a minimum viable brand (MVB) concept can ensure brand hypotheses are grounded in strategic intent and market insights.^[14]

Minimum viable co-founder

Finding other people to create a minimum viable product is a common challenge for new companies and startups. The concept of minimum viable co-founder is based on looking for a co-founder with the following attributes:^[15]

- Trust
- Exceptional at building or selling
- Company commitment
- Personally likeable
- Productivity
- Reasonable
- Rational
- Realistic

Minimum viable team

Founders with an early-stage company are faced with the challenge of building a team with minimal people and cost. The process starts by listing out basic functions of a particular company (e.g., engineer, operations, finance) and then stripping down to the abstract job activities and skills that the company must have to operate.^{[16][17]}

Criticism

Many developers of mobile and digital products are now criticizing the MVP because customers can easily switch between competing products through platforms (e.g. app stores)^[18]. Products that do not offer the expected minimum standard of quality are inferior to competitors that enter the market with a higher standard. The criticism of the MVP approach has led to several new approaches, e.g. the Minimum Viable Experiment MVE^[19] or the Minimum Awesome Product MAP^[20].

See also

- Lean startup
- Minimum marketable feature
- Pilot experiment
- Startup company
- *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*

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This page was last edited on 23 January 2019, at 03:46 (UTC).

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