

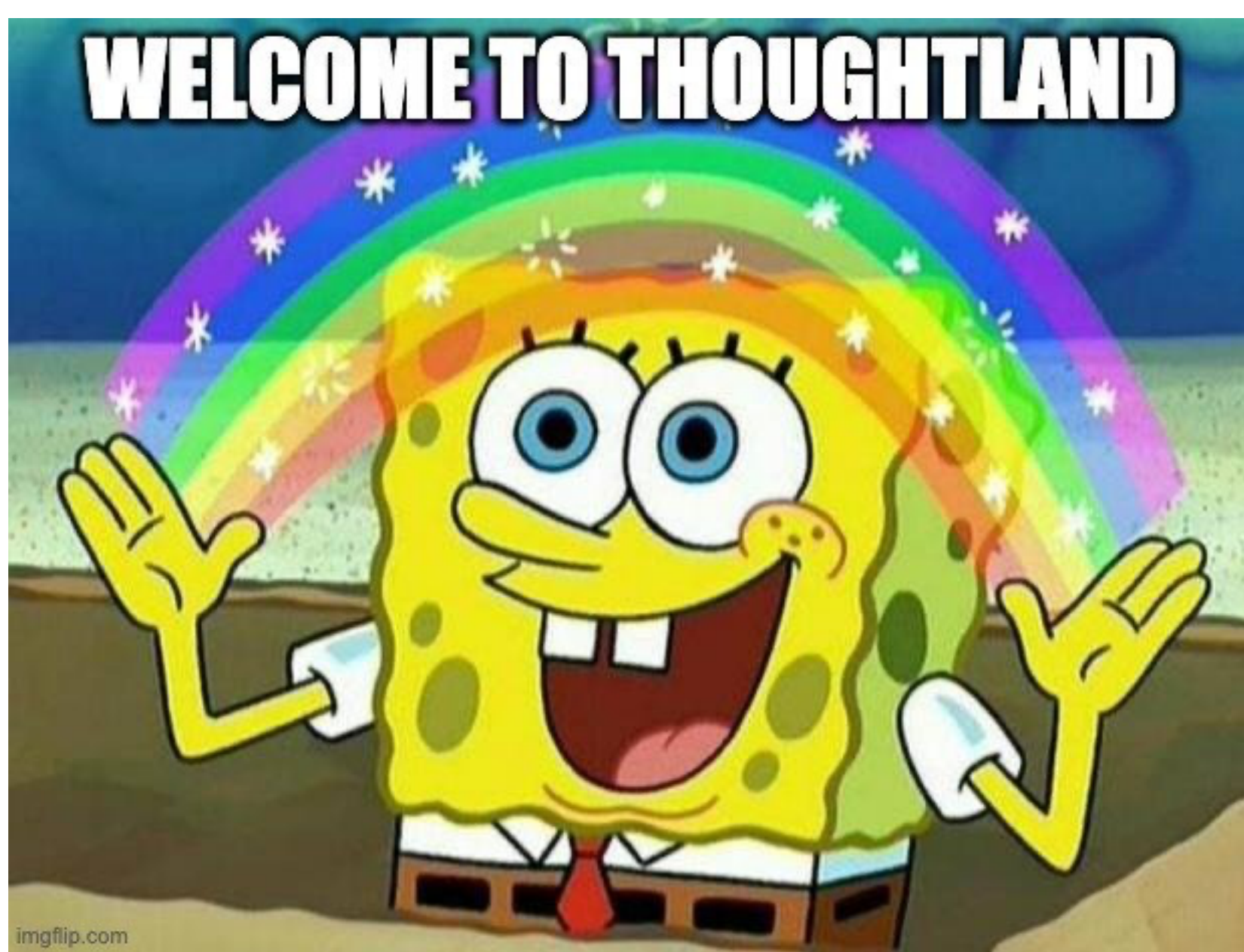
Your customers lie to you. Here's how to get the truth.

Surveys suck. Everyone knows it deep down – they're a pain to create, annoying to receive and complete, and they don't even give you the information you need. Even worse, many of us will make business decisions based on what we *guess* customers want using data that *isn't even accurate*.

Customer surveys are inaccurate for one simple reason: customers lie to you, and they don't even know they're doing it. They're not deliberately trying to deceive you, of course, but *context matters*. Most people don't want to offend, be rude or hurt your feelings so most answers are tempered with this lens. Alternatively, it can be an opportunity to unload and vent after having an unrelated bad experience with another product or service (yours included) but not the specific solution you're trying to get feedback on. You also get the imagination problem. Tell any 10 people about a coffee app and you get 10 different imaginings of what the solution does and looks like. Show them a mockup and they still imagine the missing bits.

The key to getting reliable customer data is figuring out what your customers *do* rather than what they *say*. The only thing a customer survey measures is their opinion about things. And that might be helpful if you need to know how to improve your customer service, but it's useless in product validation and development. To create products and services that actually work, you need to get them in front of customers so that you (and they) can see whether or not they actually want them.

Data gathered from surveys – customer's opinions – is dangerous. It takes you into a perilous place called Thoughtland.



Thoughtland might look wonderful, and feel comfortable – but it's a trap. It feels good to be in Thoughtland, because we are able to pick and choose the opinions that we like the sound of, and make decisions based on those opinions, rather than on reliable data.

The key to getting out of Thoughtland is to use *data* to make decisions about product development, not opinions.

This is where pretotyping and rapid experimentation comes in.

Pretotypes are experiments designed to get your ideas in front of the customer as quickly as possible, for as little money as possible, in order to measure what they *do* with the product, rather than what they *think* they'll do. Then, you can use the reliable and valuable data gathered from your experiment to iterate and design another one... and another one... and another one.

With a good pretotype, your customers can't lie to you, because there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer – you are just seeing what they do with your idea. If they do what you want them to do (sign up for a service, interact with a product, or otherwise put 'skin in the game' to prove that they're genuinely interested in the idea) then great – you have some data that validates your idea. Now, you can iterate.

And if they don't do what you want them to? No sweat. You've tested your idea, and it's failed. Now, you can either try again in a different way to get more data, or kill the idea and move on.

The benefit of pretotyping is that it keeps you out of Thoughtland, by scaffolding your ideas with real data that proves your customers actually want your product or service. If it works for Google, it can work for you.

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