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Want To Build An Incredible Product? Strive For The Delta Of “Wow”

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7-9 minutes

When companies or first-time entrepreneurs create products, they tend to work toward an MVP: Minimum Viable Product.

I have been building products for a long time. My last company, Crashlytics, was acquired by Twitter and then Google acquired it from Twitter. The product is in over 1 million apps and lives in almost 3 billion monthly active devices.

You only get one chance to make a great impression.

Why would you test your product externally so early on and waste that opportunity?

Whenever I'm working on a product, I tell my team to build what I like to call an MLP: **Minimum Loveable Product**.

An MLP is a product that is so intuitive, so satisfying to use, that your customer base can't help but tell someone else about their experience. (This quality is what I look for in each of the companies I invest in as well — and I have invested in 50+ startups.)

In order to create an MLP, however, as founders it's crucial to understand your competition's current baseline experience.

When we were building Crashlytics back in 2012, we looked around at our competitors and studied everything about their process: their onboarding flow, their follow-up sequences, everything. And what we found gave us baseline experiences for our target users. In one case, Facebook had an SDK (software development kit) developers could use to embed Facebook's login functionality. But the instructions existed in text on a web page so long that it took thirty seconds of scrolling to reach the bottom. Other companies had longwinded instructional videos communicated in a boring, monotone voice, or a 74-step Wiki article on how to install their code.

Looking at all these things gave us an idea of the experiences in the development industry — and showed us how much potential there was to create something better. We didn't want to have that sort of relationship with our customers.

What we wanted was to bring consumer-grade experience to developers.

Just the installer — not even the core product.

Why?

Because I am a firm believer in building a customer's experience from their perspective.

When we finally launched, it was clear we had made the right decision. The moment a developer came to our site, they would start typing in the name of their app and immediately the field would auto populate, pulling their logo in from the data we had crawled from the app store. Out the gate, this made users wonder, “If this is already so easy and my foot isn't even in the door yet, I bet the product is incredible.” (Keep in mind, this was back in 2012. Having a feature like this just for the on-boarding process was practically unheard of.)

Tweets flew out, “This is the best onboarding experience in the history of the planet. Everyone else can take their ball and go home now.”

We went from 0 to 300,000,000 mobile devices in under a year, received multiple acquisition offers, and then ultimately Twitter acquired us.

Well, the baseline experience on Facebook or with other companies was tedious, boring, frustrating. The experience that we delivered was far outside the expected norm. And that's what I call the delta of “wow.”

The greater the delta, the greater the “wow.”

There are really only 2 ways I can get you, the user, to talk about something.

I do something so embarrassing that you have to tell someone else.

I do something so great, something you didn't expect, that you have to tell someone else.

If you can do the latter, people will take action.

Most startups and even big companies that invest in innovation tend to cut these corners, just wanting to get a product to market so they can test it. But it's this delta of “wow” that, when prioritized from the beginning, ends up saving you so many resources down the road.

It cuts down on sales cycles — since people start talking about the product for you.

It reduces the need for marketing and “user acquisition.”

It makes customers feel like they're part of something special, a community, instead of just purchasing a service from a vendor.

I say this to every one of my team members, and even the startups I invest in:

This requires you to go above and beyond what is sometimes “necessary.”

Using Crashlytics as an example, there was one step in particular where we took the time to trigger an emotional response for our users instead of just creating a simple solution.

When a developer was experiencing a crash, they would receive a crash report from us telling them how many people experienced the crash and exactly what line of code to fix in order to resolve the problem. No one was doing that at the time, in a seamless, scalable way that pinpointed the exact line of code that caused the crash.

But we took it a step further.

When a developer fixed the issue, they would go back to our site and mark it “Done.”

It was a simple checkbox.

But when we built that step in the process, we were cognizant of the idea that in order for a developer to mark it done, they had to put in a solid amount of work to ensure it didn't happen again.

We thought, in that moment, they would want to feel some sense of reward — and wanted to be part of that celebratory journey with them.

So, instead of building a simple checkbox (and thinking like a “solution provider”) we made it so when the checkbox was marked, a massive stamp came down on the screen and marked it done.

This was surprising. This was emotionally gratifying.

Did we need to spend all that time creating this fun feature? No.

But we did because it aligned with the emotional journey we wanted to create for users.

And we actually have data showing that users would actually unmark and then mark the checkbox just to experience the stamp feature again.

Building a meaningful product experience is like constructing a movie.

The whole journey has to be timed down to the second, and the story has to be told linearly.

4 seconds after this interaction, the user should feel this.

And keep in mind, it doesn't always have to be delight. You can engineer anticipation, anxiety, or a heightened need for gratification.

A very simple example of this is when a website asks for your information.

If you go to, say, an insurance site, and it immediately asks for all your information up front, as a user you're probably going to find that tedious and unnecessary. It's a poor experience to be asked for your full name, address, billing info, social security number, etc., all before you've even taken a single step inside the platform.

But when a website only asks you for the information as you need it, immediately you enjoy the experience more. They only ask for your address when they need to ship you something. They only ask for your billing information when you make a purchase.

Consumers naturally gravitate to experiences like this.

Which is why I am such an advocate for engineering emotions, not solutions.

If a user expects their experience to be painful, and it's the opposite of that — it's intuitive, surprising, gratifying — you've won them over.

You've successfully achieved the delta of “wow.”