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Building your growth model and Ladder of Engagement

Josh Elman

5-6 minutes



Back in December, I did an [AMA on GrowthHackers.com](#) around growth and career advice. One of my favorite questions asked [how to create a framework for a "Growth Model"](#). I wanted to repurpose and add more to my answer here:

As you are building a growth model for your product, here are the key questions to answer:

1. **Purpose:** what is the core purpose of the product (or "what problem do users have that your product addresses")
2. **Users:** who will care about that core purpose
3. **Inception:** how can I get people to hear about this product for this purpose
4. **Adoption:** what does someone need to do to get the product to fulfill this purpose for them (sometimes find friends, download an app, sometimes add bank account, etc)
5. **Habit:** what cycle should the person start using the product and how can we get them to adopt the habit (Not every cycle needs to be daily. For example: movie sites should be used approximately weekly as people check new movies and think about going out, communication apps should be close to daily, shopping apps might be 2–3x/month).

Once you have a hypothesis for the what/who/how/frequency of your product, the next step is to build your actual funnel. Your funnel starts with "never heard of the product" and ends with "locked into frequent habit" where frequency depends on your specific product expectation of use. You should break down every single step along the way.

The first step tends to be the "**Hook**" which is the reason people hear about and get intrigued by your product. Sometimes this hook is exactly the same as the core purpose — on Uber, the hook is press a button, get a car to pick you up which is basically the purpose. Sometimes the hook might be a little bit different than the core purpose. For Twitter, the hook is often hearing about news, celebrities, or media breaking information — whether or not you are personally interested. The key transition then is to help someone come to Twitter and learn the purpose of having Twitter show them "what's happening in their world" every time they check it. This is a bit of a transition and requires the user to set up Twitter tuned to their interests to get value out of it.

The key to this is a hook that will pull people in, and give someone enough motivation to adopt the product and get to its core purpose. This transition is the onboarding or adoption process. During adoption, sometimes these steps require other users to be involved such as friends, downloading an app, verifying a credit card, or following your first people or content. The adoption process continues until someone has the product set up and ready to use. It is critical to understand adoption and what you need a user to complete before they can get value from your product. The steps of onboarding (first session or ongoing) can provide a great opportunity to both guide a user through this process and educate them on the values of the product as well. We often call this a "Learn Flow".

Once a user has completed the "Adoption" process, they are still far from experts. Over time, you want to continue to help users along this journey. As you think about your product and what it takes to become an expert, you can describe the ongoing learning journey with something I call the "**Ladder of Engagement**". You should be able to break down your product into specific skills or tasks someone needs to understand to get the most out of your product. Not all users will (or need to!) make it to the top of the ladder to get value out of it. But you should understand what tasks in your product require more understanding of your product. This might be easier with an example I created for Twitter when we were just starting the growth team:

Twitter Ladder of Engagement:

1. Understand what a Tweet is
2. Start following people you are interested in / friends with to make a basic timeline
3. Start checking and reading your timeline to see what's new
4. Make sure you have mobile apps installed so you can go back and forth with the web app. *(this may have been more relevant in 2010 when mobile app wasn't default, but we saw most addicted users were checking from both web and mobile)*
5. Begin to engage and participate — @ reply, retweets, favorites *(now likes)* and even Tweet yourself
6. Run your first searches and see what other people are saying on Twitter. And learn how to search *(this was a hard task for many people since it is so different than traditional search, and a lot of information to parse through)*
7. Learn to build your following *(we didn't expect most users to get here, but we expected power users would care and want to)*

This ladder was valuable for us as we built the growth and onboarding flow. In the adoption phase of the product, we focused primarily on 1–4 to get people going. Over time, we started to build features to encourage users to approach step 5 as they got more comfortable. Overall, this ladder helped us decide which areas of the product to focus on, and helped us explain the product to users in a more stepwise fashion.

I would love to hear about your experience with growth frameworks and ladders of engagement so please respond below and share yours!