Featured Essays

8-11 minutes

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eBook, presos, PDFs

2018 essay collection on growth metrics, marketplaces, viral growth in the enterprise, and more (PDF included). Here's a quick compilation of my work over the last year in one PDF.

The red flags and magic numbers that investors look for in your growth metrics (80 slides). I created this deck as part of my interview process at Andreessen Horowitz. I talk through Growth Accounting, why lagging indicators aren't that useful, and how to evaluate Acquisition and Engagement loops.

Why paid marketing sucks, Network effects, Viral Growth, and more (a16z Podcast). My colleague Jeff Jordan (who's on the BOD of Airbnb, Instacart, Pinterest, and others) and I talk about how we approach startup traction and growth. Transcript included!

When organic growth goes enterprise (a16z podcast). Here's a podcast I did with the great folks at a16z, including my partner Martin Casado, on how consumer growth techniques are coming to B2B companies.

Zero to Product/Market Fit – it's really hard. A short and sweet presentation laying out a framework for how to navigate the journey from starting from zero to having product/market fit.

What's Next in Growth. I gave a talk at Startcon (Australia) where I talked about the future of growth – both in strategy, channels, etc. – but made the point by connecting the dots on what marketers were doing 100 years ago for other products/industries.

Recent Essays (2015-current)

According to my analytics, these are the essays with the longest session durations – which hopefully means they are the most engaging! Check them out and hope you enjoy :)

1. Building the initial team for seed stage startups
2. How to actually calculate CAC
3. The Power User Curve
4. A Practitioner's Guide to Net Promoter Score
5. The red flags and magic numbers that investors look for in your startup's metrics – 80 slide deck included!
6. Required reading for marketplace startups: The 20 best essays
7. How to interview for your growth team (from execs at Atlassian, Gusto, Hubspot)
8. Why "Uber for X" failed: The supply side is king
9. Uber's virtuous cycle. Geographic density, hyperlocal marketplaces, and why drivers are key
10. The Next Feature Fallacy: The fallacy that the next new feature will suddenly make people use your product
11. Why consumer product metrics are all terrible
12. New data shows losing 80% of mobile users is normal, and why the best apps do better
13. How startups die from their addiction to paid marketing
14. Benefit-Driven Metrics: Measure the lives you save, not the life preservers you sell
15. DAU/MAU is an important metric to measure engagement, but here's where it fails
16. How do you find insights like Facebook's "7 friends in 10 days" to grow your product faster?
17. The Power User Curve
18. How to build a billion dollar digital marketplace – examples from Uber, eBay, Craigslist, and more
19. New data on push notifications show up to 40% CTRs, the best perform 4X better than the worst (Guest post)
20. Why investors don't fund dating
21. The most common mistake when forecasting growth for new products (and how to fix it)

Essays from 2011-2015

Below, I've organized some of the essays I've written in the last few years. Hope you enjoy them.

Growth

- Growth Hacker is the new VP Marketing
- You don't need a growth hacker
- After the Techcrunch bump: Life in the "Trough of Sorrow"
- How do I balance user satisfaction versus virality?

Product/Market Fit

- 2011 Blogging Roadmap: "Zero to product/market fit"
- Minimize your Time to Product/Market Fit
- When has a consumer startup hit product/market fit?
- When does high growth not imply product/market fit?
- Does anyone care about your new product? (Doing market research with Google's Keyword Tool)
- Has Facebook's DAU/MAU always been ~50%?

Design

- How mobile startups can iterate better, faster, stronger
- Mobile app startups are failing like it's 1999
- Don't just design your product, design your community too
- What factors influence DAU/MAU? Nature versus nuture
- Strive for great products, whether by copying, inventing, or reinventing
- Why you'll always think your product is shit
- Don't compete on features
- Simple is Marketable
- Know the difference between data-informed and versus data-driven
- How to use A/B testing for better product design

Blogging

- How to write good and bad titles for your blog post
- How this blog grows: Evergreen content, Social whales, and "Don't get bored"
- How to use Twitter to predict popular blog posts you should write

Industry and Investing

- Why are we so bad at predicting startup success?
- I'm a Google Glass skeptic and think it'll be the next Apple Newton
- Why it's hard to evaluate new social products
- Confessions of a Startup Seagull
- My friend Noah and his $100M lesson after being fired from Facebook
- Career Suicide versus Startup Suicide
- Stop asking "But how will they make money?"
- What makes Sequoia Capital successful? "Target big markets"
- The Law of Shitty Clickthroughs
- Visual Basic, PHP, Rails. Is Node.js next?
- Why I doubted Facebook could build a billion dollar business, and what I learned from being horribly wrong
- How sheep-like behavior breeds innovation in Silicon Valley
- "Anyone can start a Groupon!" and other startup myths
- When Does Paid Acquisition Work for SaaS Startups?
- Stanford CS major seeks sales/marketing monkey

Older content from 2007-2011

See below for some of my older content, from before 2013. Most of the discussion is about websites, and some of it outdated or wrong :) But I've archived them here to read at your leisure!

Viral marketing and user acquisition (2007-2011)

For web entrepreneurs, growing your userbase is a key challenge, alongside product development and financing. These posts emphasize a quantitative approach to getting traction and growing users.

Engagement and product design (2007-2013)

Using principles from game design and analysis of consumer behavior, these essays cover the process of creating experiences your customers will love.

Freemium and online ad monetization (2007-2013)

Social web product have unique characteristics as it applies to online advertising and direct monetization levels. These posts cover some of the issues around key topics such as ARPUs, conversion funnels, CPM rates, behavioral data, revenue modeling, etc.

- 3 key ideas from a recent Freemium dinner conversation
- ⭐ 5 factors that determine your advertising CPM rates
- ⭐ 5 things that make your social network monetize like crap
- 7 ideas for billion dollar startups in online advertising
- App monetization: Gambit launches, funnel metrics, and ARPU versus "CPM"
- Age (and ARPPU) ain't nothing but a number: How age impacts monetization (Guest post, Susan Su)
- Are social gaming offers scamming users? A detailed analysis
- Data portability: Is the social network data you're hoarding treasure or trash?
- Counting your big pile of Benjamins: 5 startup tips for maximizing ad revenue
- Creating value versus optimizing revenue
- ⭐ Free to Freemium: 5 lessons learned from YouSendIt.com
- Freemium case study: AdultFriendFinder ARPU, churn, and conversion rates
- ⭐ How to create a profitable Freemium startup (spreadsheet model included!)
- Ignore cougars, follow the money: 3 social gaming tips for monetizing younger users (Guest post, Susan Su)
- How NOT to calculate ad revenue
- How social gaming offers create value for everyone
- Online advertising during a recession: 5 key trends for ad-based startups
- ⭐ Virtual goods summit video, The Whirled Case Study: metrics for the virtual goods business
- What's the value of a user on your site? Why it's hard to calculate lifetime value for social network audiences
- ⭐ Your ad-supported consumer site is actually a B2B enterprise in disguise
- "Stealing MySpace" and my personal experience monetizing MySpace ads
- Super Rewards and the leadgen side of Facebook virtual currency – can it last?
- Remnant ads and the advertisers who love them
- ⭐ Ad targeting talk from Community Next: People Not Pages (updated x2)
- Revenue, ARPU, Funnels, and RPM: My talk from Startonomics on Revenue metrics
- Ad-based versus direct monetization: Which one is better for you?
- ⭐ What would Facebook look like if it sold out to ads? Click here to see…
- Will social payment platforms really work long-term? (Guest post by Jay Weintraub)

Metrics (2007-2013)

Without metrics, web entrepreneurs are just flying blind. These essays cover some of the organization and development issues around instituting a metrics system – what to measure, in what order, and how to implement them.

Media and games (2007-2013)

Traditional media, including TV, music, games, and movies are at a crossroads. Here are some thoughts on how the industry is changing and evolving.

Entrepreneurship and startup life in San Francisco (2007-2013)

Just a couple thoughts on things I've encountered while arriving in SF.