



Stanford eCorner

Designing Successful Products

Jeff Hawkins, *Numenta*

October 23, 2002

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/54/Designing-Successful-Products>

Jeff Hawkins, one of the founders of Handspring, claims to have witnessed teams of entrepreneurs brainstorming a product just for the sake of the sale, and he criticizes this approach. A good product can only be conjured by a genuine need in the marketplace. If there are no holes to fill, says Hawkins, then there is no point to being an entrepreneur.



Transcript

All right. So what's my philosophy in designing a product that is successful in the marketplace? Well it doesn't start there. I don't start by saying, "Gee, how do I be successful?" I start by thinking what would be the right thing to build and can I make a difference? And so, it's really a big difference between those two. There's a lot of people who sit around saying... I've seen a lot of entrepreneurs by the way sitting around saying, five really smart people together and they say, "Okay, let's think of something to do that we can be successful with." Well, sometimes that works but I can't imagine doing that. It's like you got to have something to do before you get together, you know? So the whole idea of entrepreneur in residence, you know, it's like a pitch hitter or something. I don't know whether they pitch bad. I don't quite get it. So anyway, so I will start with you know, what a particular sort of goal. And the goal in our case has always been basically bringing the benefits of personal computing to a much, much broader audience.

If there's six billion people on this planet, how do you get two or three billion of these people have the benefits of the personal computer? Now the traditional goals of the computer, you know, it's too expensive, too big, takes too many resources, takes too much power and if you get more than five of them together, you need an IT professional to keep them going. And this is not scalable so this is you know, in my mind, I don't even, sort of the personal computer model. How do I get the benefits of the personal computer to a broader audience? So smart cards don't fit into that. I want to be able to do, you know... Today I want to be able to do web access, I want to be able to email, I want to be able to have information, I want to be able to compose things and yet I want to do that... And so, it's a fairly broad goal but it definitely leads me to certain directions. It doesn't mean that I have to put everything in the kitchen sink in there like some people do but it does mean I have discovered the basics. I'm moving in a direction and I have a very long-term plan how you actually make something like a Treo really into the future personal computing platform. And so, that sort of directs me. So I know where I want to be sometime in the future and I try to figure out how to build products to get me there.

And along the way if I can't really add value, if I can't do something different and someone else is doing then I shouldn't be in business. and that I wouldn't be in business. If I felt like the best products in the world would be made already and I can't really add to it, then I would not go and do something else. I wouldn't just say, "Oh, I'm going to go and work in some other business where I can make some..." You know, I don't want to do that. It's either I got two passions in my life, personal computing and neuroscience and I'm going to follow those until they went out of...