



Stanford eCorner

The Role of Market Research

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Founder of the Palm Jeff Hawkins shares his story of graffiti, a handwriting recognition software, and the intuitive leap of using a keyboard to show that users can and will adopt to new technology. He elaborates on the role of market research, as well as how to listen to customers and follow your intuition and vision for the future.



Transcript

How do you bounce off your intuition about what products you should do and what the data meaning like market research and things like that, right? It is a business selling research. It's always research firm. Do you know how they got the research? They call people like me. It is all they do. I get calls all the time. "Sir, what do you think about this? What do you think about this?" And they packaged it up and then they sell it. And then they start to sell it back to you. It's not just me. I mean I'm just me. I mean like they call the industry people.

They ask them what they think and then they packaged it up and it's like sell. I don't pay much attention to that stuff. No, but it's a good question. There are times when you, you know market research is really valuable and it tells you things. And then there are times when you just have to totally ignore it and do what do you think is right. I'll give you some examples about it, if you want in the Palm Pilot example. After the failure of the Newton and the Zoomer which is our first PDA. After that those products failed, Little Palm was the only one out and I actually did some market research. We called up the people who bought Newtons and bought Zoomers. And we said, "Why did you buy it? What were you hoping that was going to do? Now that you don't like it, what did you think it was going to do?" I'm serious.

We were just asking these questions. And they say, "Oh, I hate everything." OK, but you did shell out some money for it. So did you have any expectations about what it was going to do for you? And we actually got similar interesting information that this is the case where market research really worked. They said, "You know what, I was just hoping to organize my life. I got this paper calendar and I got my address book. I worked with my assistant. My assistant's always printing these things out where any coordinates on paper. I just can't stand it I got little yellow stickers all over the place. I was hoping to replace my paper daily calendar and have something automated." And we know that over and over again. No one said, "Wow! I was hoping to have some intelligent agents to control my life." No one said that.

It was like paper calendar. And so we listened to this. They said that's what they wanted. So we said, "Ah, our competition's is not a computer right now." Our competition is paper. So we started looking at paper products. We went and bought all the papers products and we saw how they worked. And what was the quickest way to look at the calendar. So this market research is really important. And I don't think Apple did that. I don't think anybody else did that.

So that was a good example. Another case where we really didn't make any work at all, let's take for example in Graffiti, which is the text entry thing I designed for iPalM. And I said we need to have text entry. You can't have a computer without text

entry. And I said there's again we have to solve this problem, there must be a solution. And people trying the regular handwriting recognition and didn't work and I think was never going to work. And so I said, that's not the solution. So then I made this sort of intuitive leap. I said look, people don't mind learning how to use a keyboard. It's really hard to use a keyboard, think about the 101 keys for 26 letters.

And then you have to sit there for months learning how to type and so people do this. It's crazy. So why can't I give something they have to learn and it only takes 15 minutes. Why won't they learn that? Everyone said, "Oh, you're nuts, whose going to learn how to do this, it was crazy and all." We did research, we talked, we had interviews, we did scoops. So this is the stupidest idea I ever heard. I said we're going to do it anyway. Because my intuition said it didn't matter what people thought. It's what they do and obviously they do this. They learn things. They like to learn things and as long as it works they're happy with it.

And forget that there's a sort of foreseen power on that Computers are supposed to adapt to the user and not the other way around. That's a bunch of baloney. People love tools. They love to learn how to use tools as long as the tools are going to be persistent and not too difficult to learn. They love it. So you got to know, I don't an answer how to know when to pick market research and when to pick your intuition. But you got to do a bit of both - it's not one or the other.