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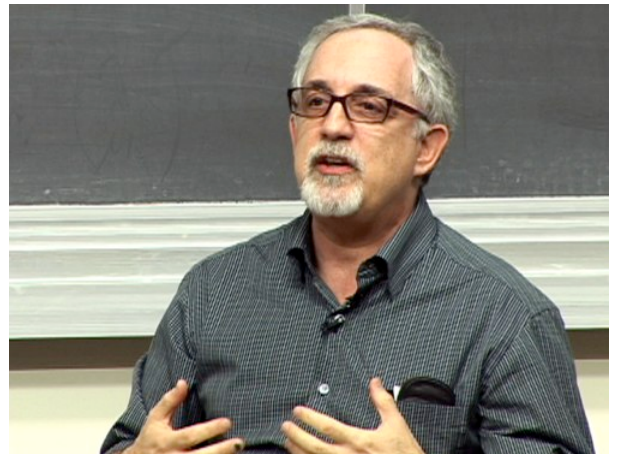
Competing with Giants

Mitch Kapor, *Foxmarks*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1909/Competing-with-Giants>

Serial entrepreneur Mitch Kapor encourages start-ups not to compete with giants. Instead, the young upstart should consider how it could benefit by working in concert with their giant's footsteps. He cites as an example his own young enterprise, Foxmarks, which tracks search trends through the amalgamation of Firefox bookmarks.



Transcript

And so the search part of that, what is it like starting a company that's kind of trying to compete with big giants such as Google. Competing with big giants is a bad idea and should be avoided. I mean the problem for a little start-up whether you're doing this in the 80's or 90's in which case, every single start-up has to worry about what's Microsoft's going to do. Today, it's a different question. You do a start-up and the question is "Is Google doing this? Might they do this? Can you take advantage of what Google is doing?" So one of the things we learned in doing Foxmarks, case in point, is our first thought about what we could do with all these bookmarks is to build a specialized search engine. Not to do all searches but to do what we call topic search. So if you're interested in a subject that could be kite boarding or arthritis or you name it. But a subject that has some real aboutness to it as opposed to a factoid which is an answer to a particular question. Foxmarks lets you find not the public product that's out there but this prototype that we built and tested privately. The best websites on that subject and it actually finds a different and in many cases, better set than Google which is not optimized for that problem.

The issues was when we tested it is if you package it up to look anything like a search engine, the behavior and expectations are such these days that if you don't do everything that search engines do, people aren't interested. So we learned a real lesson which is that the productization has to take a different path so it won't be confused. And there are plenty of things to be done about that but I want to maintain a little element of surprise until we actually put something out.