



Stanford eCorner

Strategy Versus Execution, Part 1

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Is SlideShare about strategy or execution? "It's about both," answers Rashmi Sinha, cofounder of the presentation-sharing Web site. It surprises her how important execution is to the process. In Silicon Valley, she explains, there are a lot of smart people with good ideas who aren't persistent enough to make their vision come alive. CTO Jonathan Boutelle chimes in that one of the biggest engineering challenges to execute was the raw scaling of the site to handle nearly 25 million monthly visitors. Returning to the original question, he adds that good execution should drive strategy.



Transcript

It surprised me how important execution is. In Silicon Valley, you meet a lot of very smart people with a lot of great ideas. And very few of them have the patience and the kind of persistence, the metric-mindedness, all the things you need in order to actually make it come alive, watch it every step of the way. So, it's both and there are phases. One is more important than the other. You have this grand vision and you start laying it out. And then, for a while it's about your execution. And then, you have another thing that you're doing. And then, it becomes about vision again. And so, what was the hardest execution? Let's take you, Jon, for engineering that you had to do with SlideShare.

I think just the raw scaling of the site was incredible, a true challenge for us. We get 25 million visitors a month. It's just this huge torrent of traffic. And we run on very modern infrastructure that's based on the assumption that you have lots and lots of computer time to waste and the developer time has worked it up. Actually, DHH came here last week or maybe a couple of weeks ago. So, we heard from DHH. DHH is? David Hammerschmidt Hansson, there we go. So, we run the Ruby on Rails. And Ruby on Rails eats up a lot of computer resources. And so, figuring out how to run operations and having to learn that very quickly when it's just three guys who know how to program but don't know how to do that kind of thing was very challenging for us.

And we struggled a lot. I think we're over that hump now but it was for a solid year or something we really had to lean on it. So, for you execution was immense scale in a short period of time, not being a scaled domain expert and figuring out how to bring that expertise around you, in you and into the DNA of the company? Absolutely. But I have one other point about execution versus strategy, which is if you're doing your execution right, hopefully it should generate your strategy. I mean, all you have to do is have, if you have some smart ideas and you're executing right, you should be able to test them with enough efficiency so that the ones that are working will manifest themselves so that you'll get proof that this strategic idea that you had actually has legs and is worth investing in.