



Stanford eCorner

Tell a Story and Plant Many Seeds

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Bestselling author Guy Kawasaki encourages entrepreneurs to tell a great story. In this clip, he uses Silicon Valley examples to explain the importance of the skill. He also urges entrepreneurs and startups to "plant many seeds" when it comes to getting the word out about new products. According to Kawasaki, this advice may eschew traditional marketing philosophy, but with the media world now inverted, entrepreneurs never know which outlets will make the difference in building critical mass for a product.



Transcript

You need to tell a story, most people, particularly at technology, are horrible at telling stories. You need to tell a story. Why did you start eBay? Why did you start Google? Why did you start Apple? You can even make up the story after the fact. One of the great legends of Silicon Valley is that eBay was because Pierre Omidyar's girlfriend wanted to sell Pez dispensers. The truth is that he really wanted to create a perfect market where demand and supply cross each other, a perfect market. And to have a perfect market, you need to eliminate geography. The story of the Pez dispenser is after the fact. Now, I'm not encouraging you to lie. But I am telling you a story is much more powerful when you launch. Garage knew there was a better way to search or you wanted to bring personal computers to more people or you wanted a place where people could upload a video of people dropping Mentos into Diet Cokes.

Whatever it is, tell a story. The next thing is you need to plant many seeds. This is completely contrary to classic marketing. Classic marketing is you plant a few seeds because you know exactly who's going to embrace your product. And you water and fertilize just those seeds. You focus. I think that is completely wrong. In the old days, you would focus on the A-listers and the top-tier journalists, i.e. Wall Street Journal, New York Times, BusinessWeek, Fortune, Forbes. What you did is you sucked up to them because you hoped that these great oracles of wisdom and knowledge would embrace your product and tell the hoi polloi and the great unwashed masses to embrace your product.

So, you suck up to them. If you didn't have time to suck up to them, you hired a PR firm and paid them \$10,000 to suck up for you. Then, the PR firm would hire an Oriental art history from Wellesley to do the sucking up for you. This doesn't work anymore because the world has been inverted. And now, for you to reach critical mass with the product, it's not because the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times blessed your product. It's because lonelyboy15 embraced your product. And lonelyboy15 told his 20 friends who told their 20 friends, who eventually told tiffany517 and lonelygirl to also embrace your product. This is how Twitter and this is how Facebook happened. It's not because the New York Times saw Twitter or Facebook on the first day they launched and said, "Aha! We have seen the future. We know with total certainty that someday Facebook will have more members than every other country except China and India." Show me a New York Times, BusinessWeek, Fortune or Forbes article that predicted the success of Twitter or Facebook or Apple or Yahoo! Pick any of the success stories, none of them.

So, what you need to do is plant many seeds.