



Stanford eCorner

You Must Overcome Resistance

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Author Guy Kawasaki discusses the critical role of social proof in product adoption, using examples of public signage, and stories from Apple, to amplify the point. He also warns companies against adjusting their products based on naysayer feedback, and to instead focus on finding product bright spots to build on. Kawasaki describes this concept using the example of Apple's mid-1980's focus on desktop publishing.



Transcript

To enchant people, you will have to overcome resistance. You will encounter resistance. This is a classic example. In the mid '70s, believe it or not, electronic gaming was in a bad way. It was tarnished, Atari and all the lousy stuff when Atari came out. It just sort of polluted the whole world. People were very pessimistic about gaming. So, Nintendo was coming out with a new product. And they were very hesitant to call it a game because retailers didn't want to stock games anymore. So, what it did is it added a cheap little peripheral as a robot.

And so, it positioned its family computer system not as a game but as a toy because retailers still would stock toys but not games. And furthermore, by having a robot, it positioned it as an educational toy. So, now kids could ask their parents for educational toys as opposed to electronic games. That's how they overcame resistance to electronic games in the '70s. Some ways to overcome resistance. First, social proof. Social proof means that you see other people doing it. It must be OK. Now, this can work both ways. But the way I mean it is as a positive.

Back when Apple introduced an iPod, you saw lots of people carrying this white thing around with earbuds. You figured out that that's an iPod. You saw lots of people with white earbuds, you want an iPod. You became one of those white earbuds. More people saw more white earbuds. More people bought iPods. More people saw white earbuds. More people bought iPods. I don't think that Apple purposely used the white for social proof. But I think it definitely worked for social proof.

Another great example is from Arizona. There's a park in Arizona where they let you see petrified wood. It's petrified wood forest. They were having problems with tourists stealing petrified wood. So, Robert Cialdini, a social psychology professor from Arizona who is probably the father of influence and persuasion, he conducted an experiment with his grad students. They had a certain part of the park. They measured it off. And they controlled how much petrified wood was in the area. Then, they tried this experiment. They put no sign.

And they saw how many people stole petrified wood. Then, they put the petrified wood back. They put a sign that showed one person stealing petrified wood with a warning sign that says, "No, don't steal petrified wood." They put another sign showing lots of people stealing petrified wood, "No, don't steal petrified wood." Guess what the results were? The sign that was the most effective was one person stealing petrified wood, i.e. very few people steal petrified wood. You will be an outlier of society if you steal petrified wood. The second best condition was no sign. The third and worst condition was, "Ha! The sign that says not to steal petrified wood has lots of people on it. It must be OK." Social proof is telling you it's OK. Social proof is a very powerful factor. Second thing.

You need to find a bright spot. When you introduce a product or service and you find out that there is resistance to it, don't make yourself crazy trying to fix it for the naysayers. Instead, find the bright spot, what is working, and use that. This is a picture from Vietnam because this is an example cited that this person went to Vietnam to fight malnutrition. He found just horrible malnutrition in all these villages. But in every village, there was always a few families that had kids who were malnourished. He investigated and found out the difference between the malnourished family and the non-malnourished families was not income level. It was not political standing in the village. It was a very simple thing. Those mothers were taking crabs and shrimps from the rice paddies and putting it into the meals so they had more protein.

Very simple thing. That was the only thing that was working. He focused on that and trained other parents to do the same thing. More high-tech example. In 1984, 5, 6, and 7, we thought we had it all figured out with Macintosh. Macintosh would be a spreadsheet database and word processing machine. If you're familiar with Macintosh from way back then, you would know we're 0 for 3 there. The bright spot was desktop publishing. Desktop publishing was the only bright spot in the Macintosh software world at that time. And you know what? I wish I could tell you that Apple knew and predicted and caused that bright spot.

Not at all. This was an example of planting many seeds. One seed was Aldus PageMaker. Aldus PageMaker created desktop publishing. Desktop publishing saved Apple. If it wasn't for Aldus PageMaker, there would be no Apple today. We would all have cell phones and real keyboards. The batteries would last longer. We wouldn't be stuck with AT&T It would be a different world, It would be a different world.