Stanford eCorner

Shaping Customer Experience on a Massive Scale

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Serial entrepreneur Reid Hoffman understands the challenges of maintaining a solid customer experience as a company grows its user base. Although you may have a defined set of ideas you are building toward for customers, says Hoffman, users are individuals with different needs and interests. Hoffman uses an example from LinkedIn to stress the importance of testing new ideas and preserving user trust through your actions.

Transcript

The question is how to think about how to engage your customers the right way. The short answer is you have a set of ideas by which you think things can be very valuable to them and so you building to those, those are the value propositions. But then people are diverse, you have a wide range of possible reactions to things so you have to test them. For example on that specific email, we thought that people would like getting both a "thank you" and also essentially "what number they were when they signed up," and we thought that people would like getting that. But we weren't sure so we said, "OK, let's send it for the first 100,000 and see how the response to that goes," and we were looking at Twitter and a bunch of other things as a way of finding out where people going. "Uh, damn it, this guy Reid is putting an email on my box that I don't like," or they'd go "Oh, that was kind of cool," and getting real-time sentiment analysis. It was clear within a couple of hours that the vast majority of people that were getting it, "Oh, it was kind of cool. I both liked being appreciated for being an early adopter." And part of our theory is the members make the network so it's all about the individual members and everything else is secondary, and then also what my number was, so we then we set the second batch which was up to the first million because the thought is to confirm it to early adopters. So, that was an instance of thinking this through. The last piece that I'd say on this is when you're a company, you're building all kinds of things where you want to open up the curtains and say, "Tadah!" You want to make sure that everything that you do because your members only see a small portion on what you do.

The rule that we follow in the company is "if everything that we we're doing were printed on the front page of the New York Times, everyone would be happy with us," or at least neutral, but preferably happy. And no one would go, "What, what are you doing?" That's part of the trust that you have when you say it's a network of over a hundred million people and growing. How do you preserve that trust and how do you have them go, "Yes, I think that you've never acted badly. You've acted frequently well and the times when I don't agree with you, I at least kind of get it and I think it's neutral," as kind of a compass for how you drive it forward.