



Stanford eCorner

Motivated to Solve a Problem

Drew Houston, *Dropbox*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2985/Motivated-to-Solve-a-Problem>

Co-Founder Drew Houston tells the origin story of Dropbox, his cloud-based online file storage company. Houston admits going after an idea in what was a crowded space, but explains the personal pain points that drove him to create the first version of his product.



Transcript

In late 2006, early 2007 cloud storage, or online storage startups were kind of the thing that is like the startup cliché basically and so on TechCrunch you would have these roundups, so like okay here are the next 100 online storage companies that have launched and it was just kind of a joke and, but at the same time I had all these problems with this because I had this company and all of our crown jewels I had on this little thumb drive and I was always like one stupid mistake away from disaster, right. I would carry it like in my shorts and I would pull it out, and the connector would be bent and I would like pray that I could like bend it back softly, but firmly enough so it would keep working. And I would - I mean, these are all things that people would do, I would still be emailing myself stuff, I would still be carrying this thing around, on my little leash and it just drove me nuts and I went through Michael Arrington's articles and I tried all 100 other things and I found something interesting where none of them really solved the problem for me, even though there were a lot of them. And in particular you had to get like one thing to - one service that was like a website, you could upload your stuff too and then you had get another app that was like that would sync things across your computers and you get another app to back up your computer and I'm like as we would later tell investors like, I mean, I can't really imagine Tom Cruise in *Minority Report* like logging into his Gmail to like pick up the attachment he sent himself that morning or like forgetting his thumb drive, it was just over here and your stuff follows you round and that's the whole point like someone else takes care of it. And we had a glimpse of that at school and I'm sure you guys have something similar, we had this system called Athena, where you sit down at any of tens of thousands of computers across campus, all your stuff's in front of you, you don't think about it and it's kind of - it's not a very - it's not a consumer kind of typical environment so it's kind of Unix focused and things like that. But still you're not like sprinting back across campus to take up your paper, you're not worried about backing it up because again someone else was just taking care of it. And nobody here really built that for the rest of the world and like this was pre, you know, iPhone and iPad and all the amazing things that have happened in the last five years and it wasn't actually a very mainstream use case, I mean, people were not syncing things across like six Linux PCs, even then most people just had one computer. But anyways it drove me nuts enough where the kind of last straw was - I was in Boston South Station at the Chinatown bus terminal and if any of you had the pleasure of riding the Chinatown bus, it costs like 10 or 15 bucks and it takes you from Boston to New York and is famous for such things like tipping over or things like that. So, fortunately that wasn't part of the story. And I got to New York okay, but there was a problem which is I had been making this mental checklist of like all these great things that I was going to get done because I had four hours in front of me where nobody was going to bother me and here all the great things I was kind of accomplish and I excitedly sit down, I open up my, I guess, ThinkPad at the time and I'm like I get that feeling in the pit of my stomach which many of you have experienced at one time or another where I was like start feeling around in my pocket and I just get this vivid picture in my head of my thumb drive sitting on my desk at home and, you know, and then I'm like okay, instead of getting all these wonderful things done, I'm just going to think about what an idiot I'm for the next four hours, but thought for about 10 or 15 minutes, but then actually open up the editor and started writing some code having actually no idea what this would turn into, but I'm getting so frustrated that nobody had really solved this problem.