



Stanford eCorner

Do Less

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Entrepreneur Tim O'Reilly illustrates how a focus on doing less can be a major strength for entrepreneurs. Using products and software examples from Square, O'Reilly also explains why society is just beginning to come to grips with the possibilities of integrating software and hardware design into improving human interactions.



Transcript

So, the company that I really want to talk about the most right now is Square, and Square is interesting for a number of reasons. But I want to just ask how many of you have actually shopped in a store that has a Square Cash Register? So a fair number of you. How many of you had the Square Wallet app running when you did that? Smaller number of you. I really recommend it. It's pretty weird when you walk into the store and they say are you Tim O'Reilly? Obviously, the clerks need a little retraining because of course they should be asking you what's your name, so that you have to provide it and then you get two-factor authentication instead they just looking at your name on the cash register and your face, but still you look like yourself, you probably are okay. But there are a number of wonderful things, lessons in this app I want to tease them apart. The first one is to do less. We hear a lot in the mobile world about how it's a small screen, we hear about how people use mobile devices differently, but there is something that's incredibly important that's going on in mobile that I think we're just beginning to understand. And that is that your mobile device knows so much that you don't have to tell it as much as you use to. I am an investor in Foursquare, but I still think how stupid is it that I have to check in somewhere.

I mean, my phone already knows I'm there. I'm an investor in RunKeeper, but I say why do I have to tell my phone that I started running? It knows I started running. It knows when I stopped. And one of the things that I love about Square is that Jack has exploited this. When you show up in that store, if you are running the Square Wallet app, your identity is broadcast to any Square Cash Registers. Now if you talk to a merchant, he will say oh, yeah sometimes we get people in the next store over, it's not like a real check-in. But the fact is, Jack figured out I don't actually have to ask the user to tell me that they're there. The phone tells the Cash Register that it's in the vicinity without any human intervention, other than starting the app and running it in the background. Now there may be some battery issues with that and so on, but think about that as a trend and a theme that you've got to come to grips with in designing apps. We now have devices that have so much information, so much implicit context, and it's going to be I think a revolution as we take away more and more of the instructions that we give to the device and realize, oh wait we can just assume that.