



Stanford eCorner

Idealism Makes the Best Marketing

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People love to be challenged with idealism, says Tim O'Reilly. Here the founder of O'Reilly Media uses examples from his own business that show how idealism and cause advocacy can actually be some of the most effective marketing efforts.



Transcript

When we started working on the open source movement, it was because we said, hey, this is a really important thing that nobody is paying attention to it. But we sold a lot of books because we told the big story that mattered to all those communities that we made them proud of who they were, we made the world know who they were, and it was great marketing for us, it was great because we were helping others and we helped our own business. Web 2.0, a lot of people don't realize this, 13 00:00:32,070 --> 00:00:35,219 but the reason why we started that marketing campaign was because after the dot-com bust a lot of our customers were out of work and we actually had our strategic goal in 2003 to reignite enthusiasm in the computer business. We basically - we went out there and we told a big story that was designed to help other people and, sure, it helped us build our business as well. Clearly I have been doing that in areas like open government, I'm looking at healthcare, I'm really interested in that. But there is another element of that idealism that I want to share and I want to start with a talk I gave in 2008 called "Why I love hackers" and that was at our EmergingTechnology Conference and in that talk I gave, I read a poem and you can't really see in the background, it's a painting by Delacroix in the background of Jacob wrestling with the Angel. It's a biblical story. And the poem by Rilke is about how the wrestlers of the Old Testament would go wrestle with the Angel and they knew they couldn't win. But they got stronger by wrestling with the Angel and it's a wonderful line from Rilke he says, what we fight with is so small, and when we win it makes us small. What we want is to be defeated decisively by successively greater beings.

And I love that and I said - so I told this and it was funny because the reaction from the audience was people love to be challenged with idealism. They love to be challenged to do stuff that matters and so in the last - ever since I gave that talk I've really just been focusing on that just like I don't care what you do something that matters to you more than money. That's a great way to succeed. But even if you don't succeed, the world will be in a better place and that's what you should think of as an entrepreneur and you should think about working on things that are hard. Remember that what we fight with is so small and when we win it makes us small. Find hard problems.