

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/letting-it-fail/>

Facebook Creative Labs released numerous standalone apps. Often, the best parts of those apps were infused into the main Facebook app. In many cases, though, the apps themselves disappeared. Inspirit co-founder Julie Zhou, who scaled the Facebook app from 8 million to over 2 billion users as the company's VP of design and research, explains the logic behind this failure rate. Rather than letting underperforming apps linger, Facebook set clear goals for the apps and generally retired them after a year if they didn't meet the rigorous benchmarks.



Transcript

- If you look at the history of apps that Facebook 00:00:05,590 has released there's been tons and tons of things.. We used to have a program called Facebook Creative Labs and we would do a lot of standalone apps and we would put them out in the world and we would see was there something, does this gonna take off and our expectation with a lot of these creative apps were two-fold.. The first is wanted a testbed where we could put stuff out very quickly, test ideas and if the ideas were successful sometimes all we needed was enough validation that this was a good idea and we would then take that idea and figure out how to invest more of that into the actual Facebook app.. So that would be one success criteria.. But the second success criteria that we wanted was well if this is a really great idea could the app on its own take off and become something big like another Instagram or another WhatsApp? And we actually went and did over a dozen of these different ideas and most people haven't heard of them and the reason why is they didn't end up passing our bar.. You know we put it out there and we had an expectation that for this to be meaningful it had to reach a million users within a certain time frame because that's what we felt that it needed to be so that in three years or five years it was worth the investment that we had of people working on this as a standalone feature.. I would say the vast majority of the apps that we tried didn't end up meeting that bar so what happened is within a year we would take a hard look, we would figure out what worked, what didn't, what are some lessons that we would take back to the Facebook app but other than that let's wind it down.. And I think we were pretty rigorous with how we wanted to do things or what kind of success we wanted to see and we constantly actually still do that.. I think Facebook still has a program called New Product Experimentation where again this is the goal, to have a testbed and if something works out great but in many cases it won't and that's okay too...