

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/surfing-or-sculpting/>

Voicex founder and Cisco Contact Center VP and GM Omar Tawakol proposes two models of product-market fit: Surfing and sculpting. Is an innovator creating a unique masterpiece (sculpting), or is an innovator identifying and navigating an opportunity presented by the environment (surfing)? He's found that the "surfer" analogy is more helpful, since it encourages you to identify new opportunities in a shifting external landscape.



Transcript

about building a business is that, I think there's two models of finding product market fit.. Surfing and sculpting.. So, let me describe them and you can tell me what you favor.. So, sculpting is basically, the artist looks at a block of material, and sees in their minds eye, the beauty that they want to create, and then they go in there, and they creatively etch out what that masterpiece looks like.. So that's one way to think about a start-up.. A surfer doesn't create.. They don't create the waves.. They identify the waves and the artistry is in how they ride it, but they're not fooled into thinking that they're wave creators.. So those are two different models.. Any preference? What do you guys think a good start-up is? - [Man] Surfing..

(speaking faintly) - Yeah I guess I led the witness.. That's my opinion.. It doesn't have to be right.. When you think about the way Apple created kind of the iPod, and stuff like that.. It feels a little bit more like the sculpting model, but maybe not, because they saw out there a need, they saw that it was underserved, that there were poor interfaces.. So I don't have to be 100% right, but it's just my way of saying, do more to read the way the environment is moving, the way ecosystem is shifting, and don't drink your own Kool-Aid and thinking you're the generator of that trend, and the rest of the idiots out there just have to get on board...