

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/buy-in-from-the-right-people/>

Austin Russell, founder and CEO of Luminar, advises founders to identify people in companies who understand what you're doing and can become a champion of your product. He shares Luminar's experience of working with Volvo as an example, and encourages founders to start small and work their way up.



Transcript

- I think in terms of the go-to-market side, 00:00:05,100 you have to take it in.. In this case, you have to take it in different phases.. First is just make sure that you can get the buy-in of the right people at the right organizations that this can make a meaningful difference.. It's all about reaching the right people.. 99.999% of people at automakers would have absolutely no freaking clue what they're looking at when they're looking at a point cloud off of some LIDAR prototype.. But if you reach the right person, like as was the case, for example, back in like 2015, 2016 with Volvo, which is one of our lead partners and customers who actually had a LIDAR expert that was on board their team.. He went up to Portola Valley, took a look at the point cloud in the car, and he literally fell out of his chair the second that he saw that.. When you have the context, it's like, wow, this really can make a huge difference.. And then you get those champions and sponsors that have that vision for you with companies that you'd like to work with and partner with.. And that's really, really important along the way..

Otherwise you will just get lost in the noise, you won't be able to grow.. So I think that's the most important part, at least in the B2B context.. B2C is a little bit different, but that's sort of the world that we've been operating in.. - And for founders that wrestle with whether to go after 00:01:17,550 smaller enterprises where they can iterate more quickly and get some type of deal quickly versus the bigger OEMs that are gonna take forever and could kill the company, do you have any guidance on which you should choose? - Yeah, start smaller and then work your way up.. 00:01:28,260 I mean, that's honestly the best.. I mean, don't get me wrong.. If someone at the table said "hey, let's go sign a billion dollar deal tomorrow" and they're a big company or small company, they're like doesn't matter, just focus on being customer-obsessed as what the Amazon philosophy always is, but listen, if you have a choice of stuff there too, I mean, naturally I think it's gonna work out that you're gonna work with smaller enterprises because they're more nimble.. - But you guys actually started pretty big 00:01:54,030 with Volvo early on, or did you have smaller companies in advance of Volvo? - We did, 00:02:03,840 I think we had even technology companies that were there earlier on.. I mean, I guess they weren't that much like, I don't know, the Ubers of this world or whatever.. There's a bunch more they probably can talk about..

But I think Volvo though, but it's all relative, right? So for example, in the world of automakers, Volvo is, sure, they're an automaker, but they're actually a smaller.... No no, they're actually a smaller automaker.. So for example, like in the Mercedes case there too, they actually produce three times the volume of what Volvo does, for example.. But I think it's all

relative, but they're also like a massive, massive company too.. So you have to be able to work through it, but it's a risk reward thing, and if you can make it happen, then it makes a huge difference...