

Who Wouldn't Want To Be Disruptive?



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As consumers, we're always on the lookout for anything new. But it's fair to say we don't give a lot of consideration to how new products come into being, evolve and somehow miraculously follow what we want and need.

But there's a reason why companies attract customers and grow. There's some clever thinking going on behind the scenes to research, consult on, analyze and predict what it is that customers will need or buy next — and, equally, to know when it's time to shake things up a little and start over.

What we're talking about is known as disruption — or digital disruption, in the technology industry. So, how does it work?

Going Innovation Crazy

Innovation is key if you're to capture the wants and needs of your customers, incorporate them into your offering and deliver it at just the right time in just the right format. That's certainly true whether you're producing technology solutions (as my business does) or any other product.

As a new company, you'll most likely begin by bringing your idea to life and creating a product that's more or less at the lowest end of the market in terms of performance: one that is simple, affordable and carries out a task that makes life easier for your customers.

Over time, you'll naturally add functionality to that product — and customers will readily welcome the new, exciting features that appear. There are three main drivers for exactly how this additional functionality is determined:

- As a response to customers' needs.
- As a reaction to what your competitors are doing, to ensure your product is not left behind in the general flow of things.
- As part of your own plan for the product's development and the direction you want it to take.

Time To Evaluate

As time passes, your product goes through various iterations, eventually reaching maturity and finding a position at the high end of the market. It's at this point

that you'll encounter "[the innovator's dilemma](#)." In other words, to add more to your product now will take it well beyond what your average customer uses it for — and, if they don't already, they may begin to resent paying a premium for functions that they don't need and instead turn to other solutions. So, what do you do?

At this stage, it's wise to step back and think about whether you're adding value and if the product is continuing to evolve in a positive sense. Plowing on regardless can be short-sighted, especially if competitors are adapting and changing to new and/or different ways of doing things. Take the demise of Blockbuster Video as an example: It failed to see the possibilities of online delivery until it was too late and a young upstart (Netflix) ended up stealing its thunder.

So, this is the time to consider how your product in its current form meets your customers' daily needs. For instance, if you know that particular features are being sidestepped by the majority of your users, then put on your innovation hat, think outside of the box and find a new way to deliver your core service or solution.

The Value Of Disruption

This point of resetting the clock on your product is where “disruption” occurs. So how do vendors go about pulling together and shaping a strategy to create something new? What are the key things to think of? It’s a case of being honest, reflective and analytical.

Common questions leaders can ask themselves to find the way forward are:

- What do we want to try to do?
- How will it benefit the customer?
- Is there a demand for it?
- Is there anybody else doing it?
- How will it benefit the company?
- How will the narrative around it be positioned?
- What are our opportunities and options?

The answers will guide your direction of travel to create a new product or approach that will be true to its fundamental purpose — as well as hitting the mark for customers.

Proactive And Reactive Strategies Combine

Let’s talk a little about strategies for disruption. Your business will have a deliberate (proactive) product strategy that’s modeled around what your customers want, what you want to include and how you’ll deliver it.

However, over time, what also feeds into this is a second strand: an emergent (reactive) strategy. This includes the feedback you receive as you work alongside customers to co-produce and test your product, as well as changes dictated by the wider market and your competitors. So this emergent strategy feeds into the first, ensuring your offering will be more informed, resilient and robust.

The Value Of Co-Production

Companies that believe they know best and neglect to gain their users’ feedback will often find that, at some point along the line, their offering crumbles. But those who choose to co-produce their products with the very people who will use them have a much greater chance of long-term success. This way, when you bring your product to market, you’re sure it will have an immediate appeal — not to mention

a greater chance of uptake and growth as you continue to listen and consult with your customers.

Be Brave

This path of digital disruption is one that we’ve traveled many times at NetSupport over the last 30 years, one that has helped us learn and grow as a company. Co-production is an essential part of our strategy for software development and customer input is critical to the success of our solutions. After all, there’s no point committing hundreds of hours of development time to a feature if it’s going to sit there unloved and unused.

My advice to organizations finding themselves at the point of disruption is to be realistic and above all, brave. Preparation is key, and a carefully thought-out plan is certainly less risky than simply sticking your head in the sand.

