

You Can't Innovate from Your "Compact" Comfort Zone

Take Comfort in the Zone
that Your Users Inhabit Instead

by

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Here's the trap. We have all experienced it.

Things are going well. It's been challenging, but your products are now well received. Your market position is strong and stable. Product-design tweaks have kept your firm well ahead. Your team has settled into a nice pattern. Customer complaints are manageable. You are complacently resident in your comfort zone.



Then all hell breaks loose.

A new player has entered “your” market with a vengeance. A totally new, cost-effective solution has emerged to solve the problems that you currently solve. Customers are intrigued, and many are bolting. The business press is now lining up against your now-inferior solution. Your CEO examines the shocking numbers every week and demands action – anything to restore historical revenue and share stability.



So, what just happened?

Well, you have been disrupted. Outsmarted. Unprepared. Perhaps out-innovated. Could you have avoided that outcome? Not necessarily, but maybe so. It's likely that you had become too comfortable in your comfort zone.



Why did it happen?

Perhaps your team should have been operating beyond your “compact” comfort zone, living in -- or at least fully understanding -- the zone that your customers and users inhabit, fully appreciating the problems they face and the shortcomings of the solutions already available to them.



Prescription:



You must expand your comfort zone!



Specifically, what should my team
have been doing differently?

What follows are some things to consider.



Conduct Market Research

This is obvious, right? And you are probably already doing it. Do more of it, including a rigorous voice-of-the-customer (VOC) program, competitive intelligence (CI) gathering, and user experience (UX) testing. And, conduct your research on a regular basis because markets and user expectations inevitably evolve.



Distinguish Buyers from Users

These two customers are different. Buyers are important because they represent revenue. Users are important because they represent needs and problems to be solved, both today and tomorrow. Don't confuse the two. Address them both, but differently.



Push Developers Into the Field

Amazing things happen when creativity directly interacts with problems and needs, person-to-person. Get your technologists away from the bench and drawing board from time to time. Your users will actually appreciate the unexpected attention.



Hire and Reward Imagination

Creativity is actually quite rare, so exploit it when it emerges. It often generates controversy and pushback from the status quo. Creativity must be given a voice, even if that voice is sometimes appropriately ignored from time to time. Without imagination and creativity there can be no real disruption.



Don't Believe Everything You Read

By definition, most of what is published applies most accurately to the past, not the future. This is especially true of market sizing, segmentation and share. Documentation of the past certainly has value as baseline information, but the future is best predicted from personal experience with users and buyers.



Look Beyond Market Boundaries

Don't limit your view to the market(s) you serve today. The "next big thing" could arise in your market as a result of something that happens in an adjacent segment or a different geography. Find a way to monitor broad market activities routinely.



Time Your Own Disruptions

Just because you have imagined a disruption doesn't mean you should realize it now – now may be too late or too soon. Introduce innovative new products and services at a time when your market is “ready” for them.



Thanks for your attention!

We can help you expand your comfort zone:

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