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Jobs to Be Done

A Roadmap for Customer-Centered Innovation

Stephen Wunker, Jessica Wattman and David Farber • Copyright © 2016
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Management / Disruption
Innovation / Product Development
Marketing / Customer Relations

Take-Aways

- How you develop a new product or service is as important as the offering itself.
- Life is a series of getting jobs done.
- If you discern what those jobs are, you can create products or services that help people accomplish their essential jobs.
- Offer consumers solutions that accomplish their jobs efficiently.
- Use the “Jobs Roadmap” to target the jobs people want to get done.
- The Roadmap helps you learn why your buyers act as they do.
- The “Jobs to be Done” approach focuses on actual consumers.
- Few successful products develop from traditional brainstorming.
- Marketers should develop a “process map” of the steps consumers take when they buy.
- Create a “Jobs Atlas” of relevant consumer insights you can refer to often.

Recommendation

Marketing strategists Stephen Wunker, Jessica Wattman and David Farber explain that the most-in-demand products and services enable consumers to get essential jobs done. As Harvard professor Theodore Levitt said, “People don’t want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole.” The authors devoted 12 years to researching their “Jobs to be Done” strategy and its commercial applications. Its roots lie in revolutionary work by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen. His original “Jobs to be Done” concept concerns the tasks people must get done to lead their lives. These authors extend that concept to apply to products and services. *getAbstract* recommends their insights to product planners, marketers and consumers.

Summary

The “Jobs Roadmap”

Companies can use the Jobs Roadmap to develop new commercial ideas – and later, products or services – that consumers will love. Its roots lie in revolutionary work by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen. His original “Jobs to be Done” concept concerns the tasks people must get done to lead their lives. The Jobs Roadmap and the Jobs to be Done approach enable you to learn why people buy certain items – and not others – to fulfill tasks they must do.

“Successful companies “have figured out how to satisfy the right jobs and alleviate the right pain points.”

Understanding which jobs consumers must accomplish is more important to business than the products or services consumers purchase. The Jobs to be Done approach combines detailed marketing data with understanding how and why consumers act – that is, which tasks they are trying to do. The objective is to develop commercial insights about your customers and prospects that help you create profitable, popular and implementable new offerings. Uncover your prospects’ motivations for buying your products or services. Marketers, product planners, product designers and related professionals should focus on the jobs consumers must do in their lives.

The Peter Drucker Perspective

Management guru Peter Drucker (1909-2005) explained, “The customer rarely buys what the business thinks it sells him. One reason for this is, of course, that nobody pays for a ‘product.’ What is paid for is satisfaction.” The customer seeks to satisfy the need to do a job. Drucker believed that no one can sell or package satisfaction. However, you can provide the method customers use to gain satisfaction. Products may compete with items that are apparently quite different in every way but one. As Drucker said, they “are alternative means for the customer to obtain the same satisfaction.”

“Making a ‘better’ product is the easy part of innovation. The hard part is ensuring that your new product is better for the right people in the right ways.”

Astute companies learn how and why their potential customers act and how they are likely to react to new goods or services. This is why Procter & Gamble, Dell and General Motors hire ethnography experts and why Microsoft is the “second-largest employer of anthropologists in the world” on staff. These companies – and many like them – invest in expert research to understand how customers behave based on the jobs they need done.

Traditional Brainstorming

The Jobs to be Done approach differs from the method most companies use to develop new products. They hold brainstorming sessions in which staff members gather around whiteboards to come up with usually predictable ideas for products or pathways to corporate expansion.

“The Jobs to be Done framework...focuses innovators on the right questions rather than having them jump directly to devising solutions.”

Brainstorming participants almost never focus systematically on insights about their consumers. Their sessions seldom develop “breakthrough innovations.” Ordinarily, these gatherings involve available information, current events within the company, and what the primary stakeholders like and don’t like. Such an approach limits breakthrough innovation and leads to several outcomes:

- More than half of newly launched products don’t meet their company’s expectations.
- Of every 100 new products, only one covers its costs of development.
- Of 300 new products, only one is successful in terms of “customer purchase behavior, the product category or the company’s growth trajectory.”

“Innovation ‘silver bullets’ are a fiction. There is no single right way to make an organization more innovative.”

The approach you use to develop innovative ideas is as critical as the ideas themselves. If you don’t get “the ‘how’ of innovations right,” your chances of getting the “what” right will diminish.

“Jobs Atlas”

Orient your Jobs to be Done strategy around “customer insight.” This relies on developing a Jobs Roadmap to outline a step-by-step process, and it calls for keeping track of relevant customer insights in a Jobs Atlas. This atlas has three parts:

1. **“Know where you’re starting from”** – Identify and prioritize the jobs your customers want to get done.
2. **“Chart the destination and roadblocks”** – Determine how customers define success and what may interfere with it.
3. **“Make the trip worthwhile”** – Outline the business stakes and make a roadmap for how your firm can come out ahead of its competitors.

“Job Drivers”

Job drivers are “the underlying contextual elements that make certain jobs more or less important” to the people who must do them. Around 2009, the consumer electronics giant Best Buy spent \$50 million to renovate its 110 stores to accommodate customers better. It took this step after developing two different prototype consumer personas – a young tech enthusiast named “Buzz” and a suburban soccer mom named “Jill.” Best Buy redesigned everything in its stores to serve these two personas, a move that ultimately incorporated their job drivers.

“Getting the “how” of innovation right will in large part determine the quality of the “what” – the solutions that organizations ultimately produce.”

Jill’s job drivers included getting her children to soccer practice and similar activities, focusing on good nutrition for her family, preparing meals quickly, and so on. When Jill shops Best Buy for a microwave oven, the retailer might also show her a second, new smart appliance that also offers quick cooking but which does a better job of preserving a meal’s nutrients.

“Much like the problem of adding too many features, attempting to satisfy too many jobs leaves you with a complicated, expensive, one-size-fits-none product.”

Job drivers derive from three factors that shape people’s actions and how they make choices: 1) their attitudes (personality traits), 2) their background (long-term context) and 3) their circumstances (“immediate or near-term factors”). Analyzing your customers’ job drivers means segmenting them by recognizing that different consumers have different needs and different jobs to do. Job drivers help you understand how consumers act in trying to complete their tasks, and they help you predict how customers will react to new products.

“Finding a way to repeatedly satisfy current customers and simultaneously attract new ones is arguably the biggest challenge facing companies today.”

Traditional customer research centers on “demographics and attitudes,” and – sometimes – on “functional needs.” Marketers often jumble these elements together and fail to establish “clear causal mechanisms” that move consumers from “job drivers to jobs to specific purchase and usage behaviors.” The result is “messy thinking” about your buyers and their purchase behaviors.

Context to the Rescue

The Plumpy’Nut peanut compound exemplifies how smart marketers can use the Jobs to Be Done approach effectively, in this case, to provide lifesaving nutrition to poor people in developing nations. For years, pediatric nutritionist André Briend had tried to help feed impoverished people. At the time, humanitarian agencies provided poor people globally with F-100, a fortified milk product. However, people must reconstitute F-100 in clean water, which often is unavailable.

“Brainstorming sessions are often doomed from the start. From who’s invited to the structure of the session, most brainstorming meetings are actually set up – albeit unintentionally – to quash creativity.”

Reconstituting F-100 also requires heating it, which isn’t always possible due to lack of charcoal and propane, and F-100 spoils. It goes bad if not eaten right away. Despite the problems with F-100, poor people still had one vital job to do – eat to live – and they tried to use it. To get around F-100’s difficulties, Briend sought a different idea. First, he created a nutritious chocolate bar. But chocolate bars melt in hot climates, so he needed another approach.

“Bad brainstorming sessions occur when only a few people participate, shouting out easy ideas to impress others. Avoid anchoring the discussion around those early, unoriginal ideas. Give everyone a chance to quietly reflect and ideate.”

Inspired by watching his children eat Nutella, a hazelnut and chocolate spread, Briend developed Plumpy’Nut, a nutritious peanut-butter-tasting spread that anyone, in any circumstances, could eat with no complications. Since peanuts are a popular staple in West Africa, where many people are in great need, Briend was confident people there would like Plumpy’Nut. And, he was right. Plumpy’Nut nutritional paste meets all the important dietary requirements of a healthy food staple for poor people: It “tastes familiar, requires no preparation or training, is highly portable, and has a two-year shelf life.” Since 1997, Plumpy’Nut has fed hundreds of thousands of children in places like Niger, South Sudan and Malawi, with a success rate estimated between 90% and 95%. Plumpy’Nut works because it helps desperately poor people get their most important job done: staying alive. It perfectly illustrates how the Jobs to be Done approach works.

Décor Aid

New York start-up Décor Aid makes interior design services available to everyone, not just the well-to-do. The founders of Décor Aid asked what jobs everyday people want to get done “when they move into a new home, apartment or office.” The company saw opportunity to help people decorate their homes or offices at affordable prices. To meet this need, it entered into partnerships with furniture companies. Décor Aid also developed proprietary technology that eliminates many of the costs of traditional interior design. Its proactive steps have won the business of people who previously would have done their decorating themselves. With its Jobs to be Done perspective, Décor Aid has leveraged new markets and generated additional profits.

Using a “Process Map”

When you are serving multiple stakeholders, learning how and why consumers make purchasing decisions is more complex. For example, companies sometimes must appeal to family members or housemates with sometimes-conflicting priorities about how to shop for, prepare and clean up after meals. The same issue also arises with firms that require multiple levels of approval before making a purchase. To serve this kind of client, develop a process map that covers the perspectives of the individual stakeholders involved. Graphically illustrate each step these consumers will take when deciding whether to buy your offering, right up to the point when the customer decides to buy or gives up.

“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.” (Albert Einstein)

Besides noting the various stakeholders involved in any purchase, your process map should also refer to the approaches your customers will take at each point of the purchasing process. It should list all relevant “pain points” – areas “where a customer experiences frustration, boredom or inefficiency.” Your goal is to eliminate pain points with your product or service. Innovation is the best way to get rid of pain points. Implement quantitative research to determine clients’ pain points accurately. The pain points you plan to eliminate must be particularly painful to get buyers to change their behavior – since that is always an uphill fight. Your process map helps you determine if your strategies are working or if you need to replace them.

Value-Based Pricing

Once you apply the Jobs to be Done approach to your initial product planning and design efforts, adopt a “value-based pricing” model to determine what you will charge for your item or service. Base your price on how well your product or service enables your customers to do the jobs they need to get done. This differs from “competitor-based pricing,” in which companies price their offerings based on what their competitors charge. The Jobs to be Done strategy enables companies to estimate the size and profit potential of different markets more accurately. Using this philosophy also helps companies make the most of their markets by identifying the widest possible range of prospects and uncovering “latent demand.” Sellers must prioritize which opportunities they decide to pursue. Otherwise, they will end up “boiling the ocean.” You can’t sell everyone everything.

Design Considerations

As your Jobs to be Done strategy unfolds, you’ll have to address additional design considerations and related issues. For instance, a cellphone firm hired author Stephen Wunker to help it develop a “next-generation offering.” His initial work on defining the jobs to be done was fine, but it didn’t help the firm resolve its “trade-offs between size and durability, battery life and screen resolution,” and other factors it had to cover to satisfy customer drivers. To go further, he would have needed to investigate their customers’ specific “success criteria” and recommend additional design elements to help the cellphone meet clients’ particular needs. Smart companies apply a robust Jobs to be Done approach to their product planning, design and marketing. They train salespeople that their main business isn’t to sell products or services. Their business is to help their clients use those products and services to do the jobs they need done.

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Stephen Wunker is managing director of New Markets Advisors, where **Dr. Jessica Wattman** is director of social innovation and **Dave Farber** is a manager of growth strategy and innovation.



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