

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/best-accident-of-my-career>

Venture capitalist John Lilly shares how he was drawn to the role of leading Mozilla, the organization behind the Firefox browser. Rather than seeking to dominate the market, Lilly explains why he and the organization were driven to create a more competitive market. He also shares the moment when he knew he had to join the effort.



Transcript

And then the best accident of my career is that I joined Mozilla.. So in 2005 I was going through this period where I was trying to figure out what to do.. And I thought I was going to do venture.. And I just couldn't find the right venture firm for me then, and I accidentally, because of Mitch, I accidentally got sort of involved with the Mozilla people.. And Mozilla at the time had just launched Firefox about three or four months earlier, they had just signed a deal with Google that made it economically viable.. It was an open source, non-profit, which is not exactly which you're looking for when you're doing a job search.. But I couldn't escape it.. I felt this incredibly strong gravitational pull to go work on a browser, because the web felt so important and so under pressure at the time.. And again, you won't remember this, but I'll show you why it's important.. So this is what it looked like just before I got there..

And again you're not going to remember this.. So Microsoft was dominant.. Dominant, dominant.. 96% of the computers in the world.. Now all I see out here is Macs, that wasn't the case in 2004.. 96% of the computers in the world that people used were Windows and all of them, all of them used Internet Explorer.. So this was such a finished chapter, that Microsoft took their Internet Explorer team and they said 'you guys are not working with Internet Explorer anymore, mission accomplished' and they put them all in Silverlight, which as you know is going to be huge.. This was a mistake that Microsoft made; it took them years and years and years to come back from it.. I would argue that it really opened a door for a quick downfall for Microsoft.. Four years later in 2008 we were about a quarter market share, 9% is Opera and Safari and some other stuff..

And then, now, this is IE, about 55% depending on how you count.. This is Chrome, and this is Firefox, again depending on how you count, and this is some other stuff, Safari and Opera.. And if you include mobile the world changes quite dramatically and I'll show that in just a second.. But for most of our point of view this is what we wanted.. Like we didn't want the same as this but orange, we wanted robust.. We probably could have been happy with the blue slightly smaller, but this is what we wanted.. We wanted a robust competitive market, where you had people innovating and trying to be good for consumers.. Because we felt like that was our mission of a non-profit.. And I feel like in large part we made that happen...