

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/how-palmone-evaluates-what-customers-want>

Customers generally are not very good at knowing what they want for the next big product, says Wirt, but they are good at making suggestions for incremental improvements. The next big thing has to come from the product developers, but then has to be refined based on customer feedback.



Transcript

What's interesting, evaluating what customers want, you have to go about it two different ways and I'll give you a little anecdote.. I worked at early in my career before I went to business school here.. I worked at PBS or Public Broadcasting Service.. PBS was always trying to compete with the major networks and everybody was complaining about what's on the commercial television.. It's a bunch of garbage and you know.. Can't PBS, which gets government money, you know, address all these complaints and do what people want.. All we did research study after research study.. We go to people on the street, not literally but figuratively and say, "What do you think about commercial TV? Yeah, we hate it.. There's nothing good to watch on." Well what would you like to see on TV.. And they have like, all they would tell was basically what's on commercial TV..

"Well, we like sitcoms, and we like sports and you know." Regular people aren't product visionaries and they're not really good at, they're good at incremental improvements so if you want to do an incremental improvement on a device like this, you can say to them, "You're using the device, what would you like to see different in this device?" Then they could say, "I want a bigger screen or a smaller screen or a high resolution screen or a brighter screen.. I want the keyboard to be bigger." But they're not going to go from probably this device to this device.. They're not going to come up with something entirely new.. So we do kind of both types research at PalmOne where we definitely ask customers for current products.. What would you like to see in the next generation of this product? Product iterations, customers are really good at telling you what they like and what they don't like and what they'd like to see as an incremental improvement.. They're really not very good at trying to figure out what might the next big thing be.. And that really comes from, you know, you got to have some product people that have experience that come up with some concepts and even then you can't really go out and test the concepts.. Don't test well at people either, regular people because when you try and explain the concept to them unless you have something very concrete, they don't get the concept.. So, you have to kind of do a leap of faith and get something, you know, spend enough money to get something pretty concrete before you can get valid feedback on in.. The kind of regular and incremental product development process is probably 12 months on a product cycle..

A kind of developing something really new is like, that's a couple of years at least two or three years maybe to really get something new and then you're still going to require a couple of iterations on the product probably to learn enough or about how people use it to make it really good.. The first trio, you know, was not a barn burner of a product but I learned enough from that to make the next trio really pretty good...