URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/simplicity-for-the-win

Designer Steve Vassallo recalls when he realized that elegant minimalism makes a product more valuable. He describes how he pulled out of a project to design an online platform because stakeholders had endless ambitions and requests for more features. "Trying to be everything to everyone ends in being nothing to anyone," says Vassallo, a general partner at Foundation Capital.

Transcript

   - Now our service was gonna have, this is actually it, guys (laughs).. It was gonna have every feature from every web 2000s startup.. I kinda joked at the time, we were going to build a mobile social network video podcasting with a tag-navigatable wiki.. Like, put it all together.. Whereas, Chevy Chase once said, it's a dessert topping and a floor wax.. (woman laughs) And this is when I decided tag out.. So unlike, that's Groundhog Day, for those of you who don't know it.. So unlike in the case of the Cisco phone, I was simply unable to manage that Cambrian explosion of ideas and features.. What I ultimately realized, was that platforms and viral expansion loops, as they were called at the time, are a great place to end up, but you're never going to get there if you don't focus on a single, unforgettable, minimally awesome product.. How many of you have heard of Ning? Five, six, seven of you..

   But you've all heard of YouTube, and Tumblr, and Facebook.. Ning, the one ring meant to rule them all, was sold to Glam for parts.. Now, I'm still proud of the amazing team that we built, and some of those distributed architecture concepts that we pioneered still live on, actually in the data centers of companies like Facebook and LinkedIn and others.. But this story should serve as a very important reminder that infinite ambition is actually not a goal.. I was actually chastened by this experience, which in so many ways was like a photonegative of everything that I had learned about bringing great products into the world.. Trying to be everything to everyone ends in being nothing to anyone.. And it's only ruthless focus and delivering real value to real customers, to real people, is the only way to win...