

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/software-is-important>

Long before she co-founded LaunchDarkly, Edith Harbaugh pivoted away from software development and took a product management job at Vignette Corporation. She travelled the world meeting with deeply dissatisfied customers, and those experiences impressed on her the importance of building software as if people's jobs depended on it - because they did.



Transcript

- Vignette was also really fun because I got to talk to a lot more end users.. So Vignette had customers all over the world.. They had big newspapers in England.. They had banks in Italy.. They had a lot of media properties in New York.. They had media properties in Chicago.. So and we also had really marquee customers that I was proud of like NASA.. So my job at Vignette was I would fly all over the world.. I'd go to these really cool locations and get absolutely screamed at by unhappy customers.. Vignette had a lot of really bad bugs at the time, and they were bad bugs like, not like a really trivial bug like this should be green and it's actually teal, but a bad bug like we're a newspaper, and you just deleted all of our content..

Or a hotel chain, and hotels actually have a lotta content.. They have the pictures for the property, or they have the blurbs.. We're a hotel property, and none of the blurbs go live, so we haven't been able to book hotels for a couple days.. Really unhappy people yelling at me.. My joke is that I learned how to get yelled at in several languages.. (audience chuckles) But the reason why they were yelling at us is 'cause they bet theirselves on it.. Like, I vividly remember going to Chicago, and somebody said, "I picked you as a vendor.. "You're not doing well.. "I'm gonna get fired because I picked a bad vendor." So I was like, whoa, this is real.. This isn't like some toy, this is something people actually believe in..

So from this, I really learned the importance of if you build software, you need to take it seriously.. People are, if you build software, people are actually gonna use it, and it's not just you sitting in your nice, shiny skyscraper in SF, like, oh, maybe it should work this way.. Like, people really depend on it...