

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/stealth-mode-strategy>

Austin Russell, founder and CEO of Luminar, explains why his company spent five years in "deep stealth mode," with no public website or press. He recommends founders to quietly iterate behind closed doors until they're ready to showcase an impressive product



Transcript

- The first moment when we came outta stealth mode, 00:00:05,880 we were actually, we had no press, no interviews, no public website, no anything, for the first five years of the business, that was that.. - Would you recommend that, by the way, 00:00:13,620 because it sort of goes against, it's another contrarian move.. Most people would say, let's fumble towards victory, iterate, you release and mention and talk and interact with the market frequently so that you get feedback.. You went into deep stealth for five years.. - Yep.. 00:00:37,353 I think the distinction is that, if you, we kind of have jokingly had to say that we had to find 2,000 ways to not build a lidar before finding the way that would actually solve the problem for all these different dimensions and everything of what it takes to be able to make this happen.. And you want to do that behind closed doors.. You want to be able to make sure in a world where everyone is always over-promising and under-delivering, like in the startup B aura of hype sphere, there is value in under-promising and over-delivering, or frankly just not promising literally anything at all.. Hence being deep in stealth mode.. But then when you do have that and when you're ready to be able to show it off, I mean, I think it was like literally the first time that we launched out of stealth mode, next thing you know, you have just breakneck interest from the customer side to, I mean, I think we were getting these huge features from Bloomberg and the New York Times and other stuff..

- And how do you overcome the criticism, 00:01:56,190 which is like the classic customer development trend over the last decade that you want to get outside of the business, interact directly with your end customers and iterate quickly.. - And you can do that too..