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The Risks of Listening Too Much to Your Users

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"Listen to users too much, you build a bad product," believes Scribd's Trip Adler. While analytics data can provide helpful information, he cautions that if you listen only to feedback from the most vocal users, you risk building a product that will appeal to a small niche market. Accuray founder John Adler agrees — listen to your users, but base your decisions on your own vision for your product.

Transcript

I'd say that just like all advice, you take a lot of advice but in the end, you need to make the decision on where you want to go.. And this is kind of Apple's perspective on things.. You can't really ask users what they want because users are going to say, "I want a button on this page, lets make this." But if you just take all users advice, you get a kind of messy product.. So, you really need to have a vision for where you want to go and just build that and then tell your users this is what you're going to use.. You can learn from your users.. Actually most of the learning comes from analytics, just looking at what actually people are doing and that influences your decision.. But in the end, if you listen to your users too much, you build a bad product.. Do you find that users often tell you things that are quite different than what they show, they're doing in the analytics? I don't think so.. Often the users who give you feedback are the most vocal users and most vocal users are not your typical users.. So, you have to be very careful about who you're listening to..

You can easily get in the trap of just listening to your most vocal users then you build the product for really small niche that isn't really what the world needs.. So John, let me ask that same question.. Here your users are very, very different but I'm going to guess you spend a lot of time listening to them.. How important was their feedback and their guidance on the product as you were building it? I say, I feel the same as Trip.. I think all products are the same in some respect.. I can't have too strong a feeling about how one should deliver surgery but I do know a lot about surgery.. And so at the end, if you love your product enough, you as the innovator, you as the entrepreneur, the love will show through that product.. And in it will be simplicity and in it will be the effectiveness that ultimately what your user base wants.. So, listen carefully what the world has to say, but in the end make decisions.. In that sense, neurosurgery is a good training...