

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/user-driven-pivoting>

Jorge Rios, founder and CEO of Bridgefy, explains how his team pivoted as they observed spikes in usage related to political conflicts, and shares how his team responded to users by building out enhanced security and privacy features.



Transcript

- Can you share any insights that you've learned 00:00:06,720 about how to unlock these pivots or these moments as a founder to find where, I don't like to use the word the universe, but you know, the spirit of entrepreneurship and disappointing you and saying you're not gonna build a concert messaging app, you're actually gonna be a critical in messaging tool for war torn and protest driven movements? Can you give us a little bit more color in terms how that happened and any advice for future founders on that? - Yeah, definitely.. 00:00:32,943 So, it wasn't a decision that we made.. We didn't plan for it to be used the way that it's being used today.. And so, like I said, our users were telling us through downloads, through messages on social media, through a lot of email, that they needed this for a different use case.. They needed this for a different situation than we had originally envisioned.. People still use it for events, there are a few thousand people used it at Coachella, people still use it at schools.. Nevertheless, the main, main usage right now is situations in which there is censorship, in which there is a political problem going on.. And so, yeah, we kinda had to pivot.. We didn't choose a pivot and so we built the app and then we realized that it was being used for these other things.. And then at the same time, we were building out the bridge SDK, which is basically software that other companies can integrate into their own mobile apps and make their apps work without the internet..

So, imagine one day being able to use Twitter or Facebook messenger or a Red Cross app when you don't have access to data.. And so we started building that in a different way.. We started building that with security, with privacy, with anonymity in mind, because we had been led to this pivot.. It wasn't a decision.. It wasn't like one day a light bulb turned on in my head and said, and we said, okay, you know what? We should pursue protest and we should market to countries where there's gonna be a political conflict.. It was basically what happened.. It was basically what our users told us that they wanted.. - And was there a moment when you realized 00:02:08,560 that this was the new direction of Bridgefy? And when did you know that it would become this phenomenon? Was there a moment when you realized this was actually gonna become fairly significant? - I don't wanna say that this is the direction 00:02:22,620 that we're gonna keep going on.. We basically are focusing right now on licensing the technology to any app that wants it.. However, our own app is taking this direction..

So, it's very interesting because we have this responsibility and we have to keep preparing for that.. And I guess the moment when we realized, wow, this is actually happening, this is actually getting big and interesting, was back in 2000.. Well, 2017, I was very, very emotional for us because all my team is Mexican.. And so a lot of people lost their lives in the

Mexico city earthquake.. And so just the messages that we got from people saying, "Thank you for building this, I literally found my mom, thanks to this app, we have downloaded it like one or two days before." By coincidence, there was this person that had downloaded it literally that same day before the earthquake.. And so that's when it really hit us like, okay, this is important.. Not necessarily to the point where we were like, okay, millions of people are using it.. That was a little bit later.. But definitely that was one of the first ones.. And then when it started getting even more serious, it was in 2019 when it started just going viral..

In Hong Kong, we had 350,000 downloads, which to us was a huge amount.. It was double what we already had had.. And so we got 350,000 downloads in like two days.. And we started getting in the news, we were on Forbes, also journals and whatnot.. So, that's when we started getting a lot of good opinions, but also bad ones because they said, you're supporting the protestors, which we were not, we just had the app on the app stores.. We don't support, not supported anybody, we are a tool.. And so, we also got a lot of flack because our security was not great back then.. So, it had a lot of vulnerabilities and we let our users know, but they were still there.. And so throughout the years, we started focusing on fixing those holes and improving our security and to the point where we are about to hire a security team to work in health...