The Power of a Customer Discovery Program

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At Sirris, we're dedicated to guiding our clients in the creation of innovative products and the adoption of advanced technologies. New technology can streamline internal processes, make businesses more efficient, and elevate the quality of products and solutions offered. The overarching goal remains the same: a more attractive offering.

In our interactions with clients, we've frequently encountered a common misconception about software solutions. Some believe that a solution devised to enhance their internal processes can easily be transformed into a market-ready product that they can sell to similar companies. However, the reality is more complex.

While some businesses may engage in similar activities, the intricacies of their processes and the tools they use to run their operations can differ significantly. It's crucial to understand that what works well internally may not seamlessly translate into a market-ready solution for external customers. Due to that misconception, organizations often underestimate the importance of thorough customer discovery and the need to build confidence in the product. After all, clients tend to rely heavily on assumptions. They often invest substantial resources, only to discover - after extensive development - that their offering fails to capture enough interest in the market.

In tackling these product development challenges, the customer discovery program comes into play as a powerful solution. This strategic approach ensures that developed products not only meet customer expectations, but also exceed them.

Let's discuss the important difference between discovery and delivery work. Below, we will unravel how a customer discovery program acts as a guiding light, that steers businesses away from assumptions and resource pitfalls, and towards successful product development in the dynamic marketplace.

Discovery vs. Delivery

In the product development journey, two distinct phases play a crucial role: discovery work and delivery work. The unfortunate reality is that the discovery phase is often neglected.

Discovery work is the initial stage, that focuses on understanding what truly matters. It involves identifying valuable big opportunities and crafting solutions that people not only want but are willing to pay for, choosing them over existing alternatives in the market. This phase is all about learning, exploring, and honing in on the essence of customer needs.

Delivery work kicks in once we're confident about the idea's value, viability, feasibility, and usability. This is the hands-on phase, during which the idea transforms into a tangible product through actual development by the engineering team.

The distinction between discovery and delivery is vital. Understanding that difference ensures a thoughtful and strategic approach, that steers the product development process towards successful and customer-centric outcomes.

The primary responsibility of a product manager should lie in the discovery phase. They should predominantly focus on market exploration and understanding customer needs, while delivery should constitute a smaller part of their role.

The Role of a Customer Discovery Program

In the world of product development, the significance of a comprehensive customer discovery program is undeniable. The primary goals of the program are to assist companies in achieving a product-market fit early in the game, while mitigating big risks along the way. Often described subjectively, product-market fit reveals itself through markers such as happier customers, lower churn rates, shortened sales cycles, and rapid organic growth.

A more efficient route to achieving product-market fit, especially when leveraging a customer discovery program, involves having six reference customers from the same target market use the same solution (so not customized or tailored to their business). These customers should actively run the solution, invest money, and passionately advocate for your product. This approach provides a tangible and measurable benchmark for product-market fit, ensuring that solutions do not only meet customer expectations in the dynamic marketplace, but also surpass them.

At the core of this ongoing initiative are weekly touchpoints with customers, forming the backbone of success. These customer interactions should include a product trio: the product manager, the technology lead, and the design lead. In smaller businesses, these responsibilities could all belong to the same person. This regular and iterative engagement with customers proves instrumental in aligning the product with the ever-evolving needs of the market, the best technical solution, and the most UX-friendly way to interact with it.

Framing The Problem

Framing the problem is a pivotal step in the customer discovery program. It entails reaching a consensus on crucial elements, including the business objective, the specific problem the product intends to solve for customers, and the identification of the target users or customers whose problem is being addressed. Such clear framing lays a strong foundation for subsequent discovery activities.

Moreover, the customer discovery program plays a vital role in identifying the major risks that need to be tackled during the discovery work. These risks can be categorized into four key dimensions:

1. **Value Risk: Will the customer (choose to) buy this?**
   Assessing whether the proposed solution aligns with customer needs and preferences, ensuring it holds value in the eyes of the market.
2. **Usability Risk: Can the user figure out how to use it?**
   Focusing on the user experience, understanding whether the product is intuitive and user-friendly.
3. **Feasibility Risk: Can we build it?**
   Evaluating the technical feasibility of the solution, and addressing concerns related to implementation and development.

4. **Viability Risk: Does this solution work for our business?**
   Examining the broader business viability, ensuring that the proposed solution aligns with the organization’s strategic and sustainability goals.

By systematically addressing these risks, the customer discovery program ensures a proactive and informed approach to product development. It doesn’t just help in creating products that customers want, but also mitigates potential pitfalls, setting the stage for a successful product launch that resonates with the market and that will stand the test of time.

Conclusion

In the world of product development, a customer discovery program isn't just a tool. It's your guide to turning great ideas into something customers truly want. By tackling challenges and smartly engaging with customers, this program becomes your ally in creating products that do not only meet customer expectations, but also exceed them.

We extend you an invitation to tap into the power of a customer discovery program for your business. Whether you're embarking on a new product journey or fine-tuning existing strategies, the Sirris team is here to collaborate with you. Our expertise will assist you in setting up an effective customer discovery program, helping you achieve a product-market fit early on and efficiently.

It's not just about success.It's about mitigating big risks from the get-go, ensuring your product becomes a hit, and avoiding the waste of valuable resources like time, money, and effort.

At Sirris, we believe in the simplicity and effectiveness of customer-centric strategies, and we’re ready to be your partner on the way to market excellence. Reach out today, so we can navigate your challenges together and propel your products towards unparalleled success.

Authors