5 ways to increase your sales and make your products easier to use

Business

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Product design is nearly everything in proposition-simplifying. The objective is to make the product a joy to use, first and foremost, easier to use, then, if possible, more useful and more aesthetically appealing.

If a new product or service is more useful and artistic than rival products but doesn't make life easier for the user, then there's been no proposition-simplifying. For example, the Porsche 911, introduced in 1963, gave a different driving experience from that of any comparable sports car. It was also a work of art. But the 911 did *not* make driving easier; probably the reverse, because, with its rear-mounted engine and unusual weight distribution, it required considerable skill to drive. Aficionados may see that as part of its appeal, but it disqualifies it from being a form of proposition-simplifying. In general, simplifying is neither necessary nor natural for luxury products. Luxury markets aren't price sensitive, and complexity is often part of its appeal.

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By our definition, *all* examples of successful proposition-simplifying involve increasing ease of use. This attribute is the most important in leading to greater customer adoption -- if a product or service is easier to use, more people will use it.

Step one: easier to use

The essential first step -- make the user experience easy and simple -- is more than the sum of its parts. It requires empathy with the user and a genuine simplifying mission. Who do you think would make the better designer of electronic devices? Someone with a natural affinity for computers, even back in the day when operating them required real skill? Or someone who found that experience extremely tough? Listen to one of the latter:

" I went right through college having a real problem with computers. I was convinced I was technically inept ... Right at the end of my time as a student, I discovered the Mac. I remember being astounded at how much better it was ... I was struck by the care taken with the whole user experience. I had a sense of connection via the object with the designers."

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The speaker was Jony Ive, the son of a London silversmith. He went on to become a product designer and was the man behind the iMac, MacBook Air, iPod, iPhone, iPad and Apple Watch. If we look at how these devices were made easier to use, we see five major themes:

1. Eliminate. In designing the Mac, Steve Jobs eliminated all the function keys and cursor arrows, features that all other computer manufacturers thought were essential. Users were forced to use the mouse instead, which they soon learned was a much more elegant way to move the cursor around the screen, once they got used to it. Ive, whom Jobs called his " spiritual partner," also started hiscareerat Apple by eliminating. " We wanted to get

rid of anything other than what was absolutely essential," he says. " We kept going back to the beginning again and again, ' Do we need that part? Can we get it to perform the function of the other four parts?' It became an exercise to reduce and reduce, but it makes it easier to build and easier for people to work."

2. Intuitive and easier. Simplicity for the user is complexity concealed. Ive says he aims " to solve incredibly complex problems and make their resolution appear inevitable and incredibly simple [to the user], so that you have no sense of how difficult this thing was." The iPad is a superb illustration. Have you sat in adoctor's waiting room or on a plane and seen a toddler playing games or watching cartoons on an iPad? It is literally child's play. No stumbling blocks -- no causes of possible frustration -- are allowed on the device, which is the reason why you can't print from it.

3. Faster. Almost every device is getting even faster to use, but some are faster than others -- faster to boot up, faster to operate, faster to service. Products and services can create a new market or niche they then dominate for decades merely by performing an operation much faster than their rivals.

lets Europeans sell their cars quickly and easily by making a cash-up-front offer to buy them and, at the same time, gives car dealers access to inventory delivered within hours. Bringing rapid network efficiency to the used-car trade has helped create one of Europe's fastest growing businesses.

Nespresso is another prime example. Its machines make high-quality coffee far faster than any rival system of comparable quality. They're also simple to use, stylish and cleaning them is a doddle.

4. Smaller/lighter/more portable. The Walkman, introduced by Sony Corp. in 1979, was easier to use than other cassette players, but the big advance was its portability. Previously, people would walk down the street with huge boom-boxes perched on their shoulders. The Walkman subtracted the integral loudspeakers, replacing them with small headphones, as well as the ability to record. As a result, and by using its in-house technicians' genius for miniaturization, it was possible to make a thin and light machine that could be carried anywhere. The Walkman also played magnetic tapes, meaning it had superior sound quality than rival formats, even though the machine was much lighter and more compact. The Sony device remained dominant in its segment until the late 1990s. It declined only when the iPod and iTunes took over by reinventing and transcending all the advantages of ease of use, miniaturization, and portability.

5. Easier to obtain. iTunes also mademusicmuch easier to buy. It was no longer necessary to make a trip to the record store, album tracks could be purchased individually for the first time, and users could choose from a much wider selection than any record store could possibly stock. Spotify has since taken this process a step further by giving its users instant access to millions of songs through streaming.

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Of course, making products easier to obtain isn't a new idea. But there are always new means to make a product more accessible. Unlike traditional car rental firms, Zipcar -- founded in 2000 -- allows its customers to rent vehicles by the hour, and it prides itself on making the whole hiring process quick and hassle-free. It operates on a membership model: Once you become a member, you can unlock the car using your membership card or a mobile phone and drive away within seconds. The cars are also parked in street-side bays, closer to most customers than the majority of car rental offices.