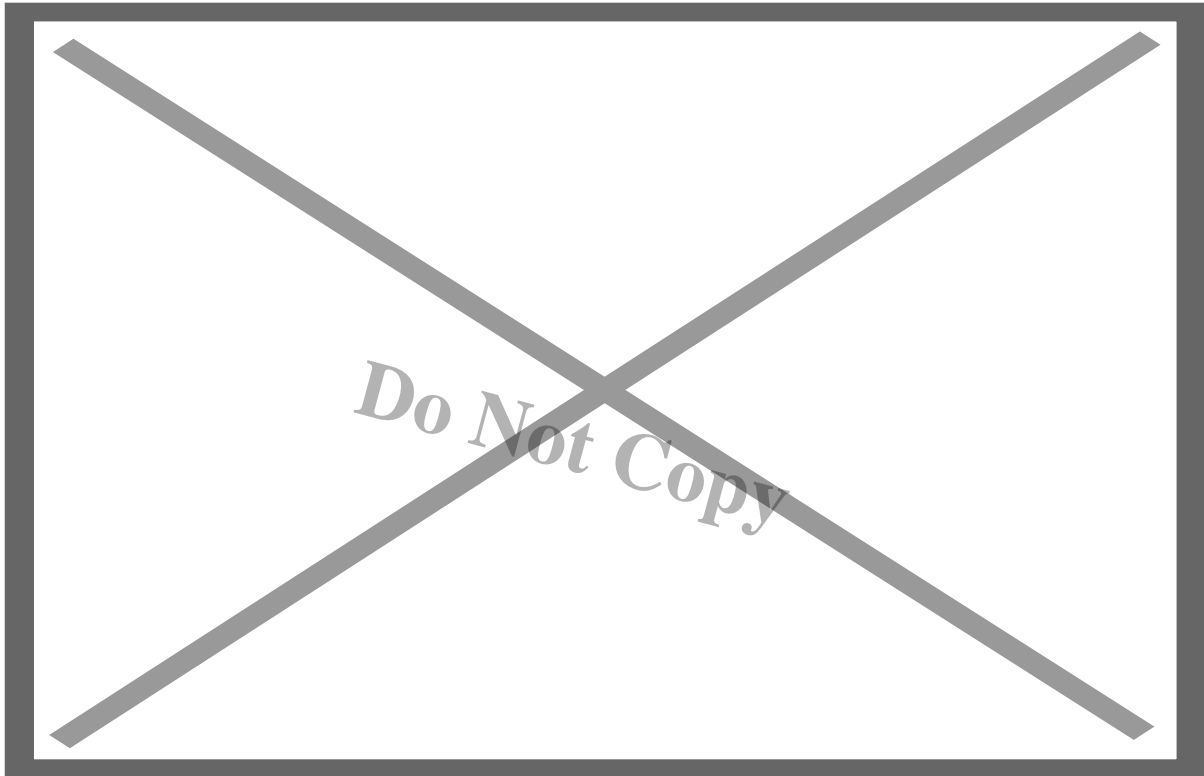


How this crisis can spark your next great wave of growth

Description



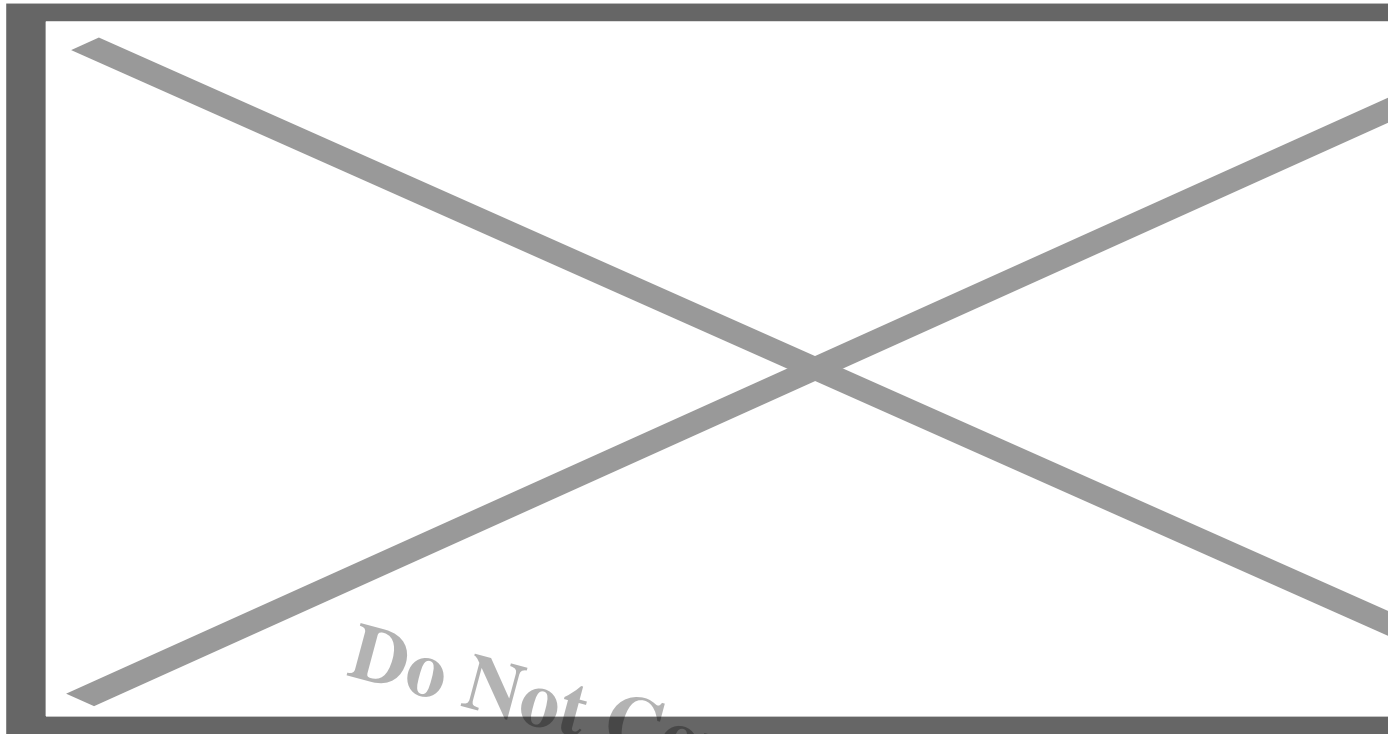
If you build it, will they come?

I can get so hooked on product design. I love debating features, user experience, functionality, styling, and costs. I love trying to understand what makes a good design and what doesn't. But in all that dynamic, in-house creativity it's really easy to lose sight of the most important thing: Does anyone even want it?

And as we continue to drag on with this worldwide pandemic, thinking about what's next is sure to be on the mind of every leader in every segment and market imaginable. The opportunity in all this is to take this "slower" moment in the economy (except for Amazon I guess) and do some strategic planning for your next round of growth.

The key is to know what to invest in next, that will bring you the biggest bang for your buck. And nothing ever does a better job than having as much data possible on your market and customers. Really getting to know where your market is and seeing the gaps and opportunities in the fog that lies ahead.

How I fell in love with the Mekko chart



Because Star Warsâ€¦!

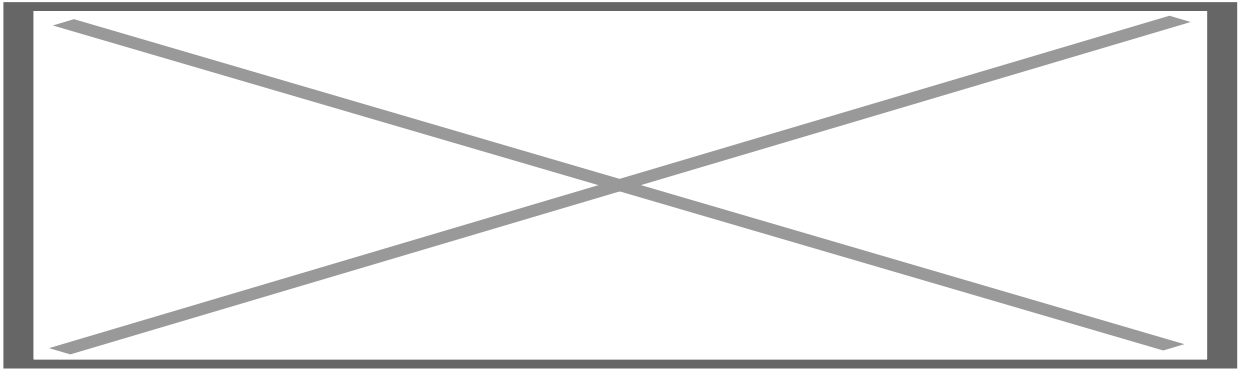
I first saw this years ago from a consultant firm that tried to sell me their services; I didnâ€™t wind up selecting them but they introduced me to this really useful picture of a market and where we stood.

It shows the various market segments along the horizontal axis, and the relative market share is on the vertical. It gives a one-stop picture of all the areas you play in and your strengths and weaknesses in each one.

Spend as much time as you can learning about every corner of your market, from the obvious big competitors to the mom and pop shops with 2%. Look where your strengths are and understand why youâ€™re strong. Gaining these insights may open your eyes to the opportunities lying in wait for you.

While I love the Mekko, it doesnâ€™t have to be in this format; just spending the time learning the numbers of your market and how big you can grow within those spaces gives you direction on where to explore next.

I hate surveysâ€¦! but focus groups



I think surveys have a place. It's called the trash can. Surveys can't really get to the heart of the customer and explore the true gaps in your product. We've all been subjected to surveys of some form or another, and for me, they are painful experiences. Not only is it incredibly impersonal, you never find out if anyone actually does anything with your comments. They tend to ask the wrong questions so they can lull themselves into believing their customers love them.

I am a big fan of real and engaging conversations with customers. If you invest in some time with them the amount of insight you can gain far outweighs a statistical report generated from a mindless survey.

I ran a series of customer focus groups over a period of a year or so once. The goal was to determine how we could get more of our customers to come to our service centers.

We had customer survey data and regular NPS (net promoter scores) information. The survey data didn't show any reasonable pattern of why they would choose a competing service center over us. Was it price? Was it cycle time? Personalized service? Location? It could be any or all of it depending on who responded to the survey.

We found a handful of committed but unhappy customers and invited them to a series of workshops with us. We paid them for their travel and expenses, so they felt more taken care of. They felt like an insider into what we were doing. They became invested in helping us succeed. We didn't go in and simply ask "What do you want?"

We showed them our thought process, what we wanted to become, and asked them to explain how they go about choosing a service center. What were they looking for, and what would ultimately tip the scales. It wasn't all one size fits all, but I guarantee you we discovered some incredible things that we never thought of before engaging with them like that.

The key to any of this is deep and honest listening to what they are saying, without bias or predetermined outcomes. Have a real conversation with their customers, and understand their motivations without judgment of them or your business's successes or failures.

Beware of the anecdote

We all love a good story. And let's face it more and more leadership theory presents the idea that great leaders are great storytellers. If you can turn your vision into a compelling story, you can generate tons of followers. But a single anecdote can kill your growth plans because you can fall victim to the story being true for your entire business.

I had a VP come to me once and literally say, "This customer and I just spoke and said he didn't like the height inside the lavatory, redesign it right away". I tried to show him the physical, geometric limitations of a barrel-shaped fuselage, and what we would be giving up from a design point of view by shifting around the space (we had done months of customer focus-group testing, mockups, and functional industrial design to get the lavatory just right). But he made us change it. He got so convinced by one customer's offhand comment than all of the wealth of data that we had collected from other customers and science. It's human nature to believe what you personally hear and see more than what others present to you, so beware of the trap that can lead to one anecdote over what your team has gathered as facts. I'll say it again (like I do often in this blog) check your ego at the door, and listen to everything not just what you hear above everyone else.

Analytics is more than just navel-gazing

The next big thing in strategy is big data. It has been here for a while in all segments. Apple, Google, and so many other companies not only gather information to help grow their business and products, they sell the data to other companies to help them understand their market better. It's so easy to not trust this data (big brother is watching) or be overwhelmed by the amount of data you may have, but it can be a very powerful tool in discovering your next big move for your company.

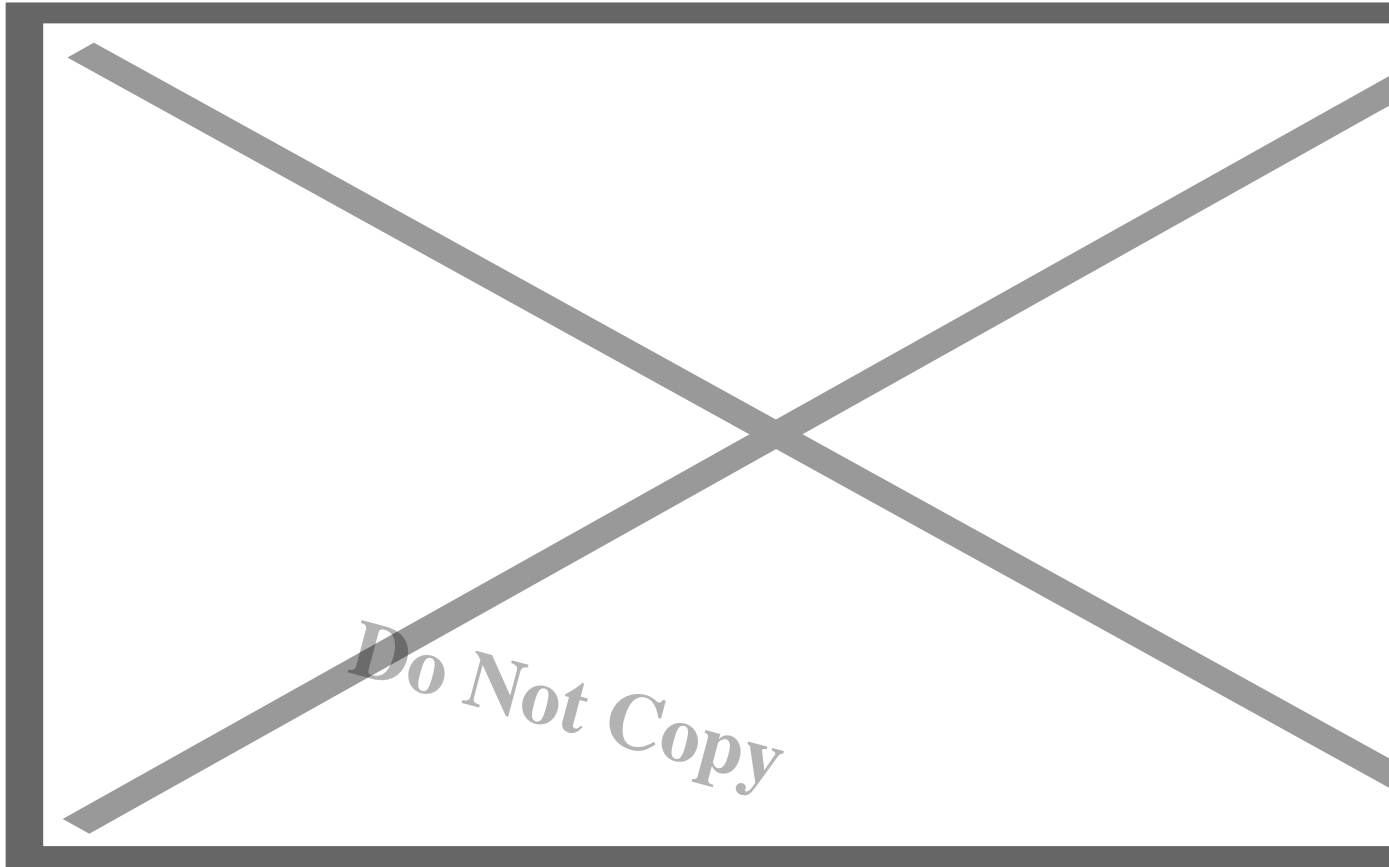
Maybe you don't have any major data collection in your business yet. A solid move would be to create data gathering hardware, software, or points in your customer process to gather information.

Maybe you have loads of data on 5-1/4" floppy disks gathering dust in your basement. Your next move could be to load that into an analytics engine like Power BI and start to mine it for insights.

Maybe you have that data in, and you need some heavy thinkers to sort out the meaningful bits from the noise.

It can be overwhelming to go down this road, and you may feel at times you will never get out of it, but find someone who has done it before to help navigate you through to the other side.

Where we're going we don't need roads



We are in an unprecedented period of uncertainty with this pandemic, not only causing fears and a health crisis but an economic one also. All the analysis above can bring some clear insights into what products, markets, or strategies to take next for your business. But in reality, the biggest wins come from going where no one has gone before (to steal from Star Trek).

This period can be a great launching point for your business into uncharted territories. Take this time, if you have the time and capital to stay afloat, to explore new products and markets. Take your expertise and knock on some new doors. Open your eyes to what else may be out there, and take some risks. This crisis can be the spark your company needs to go beyond what you thought was possible.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created

October 20, 2020

Author

platypussolutionsadmin