



Stanford eCorner

Quick and Frequent Product Testing and Assessment

Mark Pincus, Zynga

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Mark Pincus, CEO and Founder of gaming company Zynga, encourages fast and frequent new ideas for video game development. But rather than putting forth tremendous resources to build out each idea, they company first tests its viability with a round of "ghetto testing" - five words that will be used to market the game, posted to the website live for five minutes. If sufficient audience interest is measured, then a one-week rollout of the first version of the game is revealed to just one percent of the Zynga audience for play and feedback, almost always with some modicum of "golden mechanics" - or viral, retentive quality - built in. If these early efforts prove successful, the game grows more robust with each successive build. Pincus reports that the company is always testing several hundred products simultaneously, and that measuring this success has never been easier or more affordable.



Transcript

Mark Pincus: So, her question was, how do we do a market research around new features we want to bring to market, right? We do something at Zynga that I call ghetto testing. So, I would like to take someone who has a gigantic - so, usually it's a game designer - they have some gigantic idea that this would just be great. And I always said, "Build what you want to play." And here's their fantasy. Maybe they really want a hospital simulation game. Our HR group, our people group is in the back. So, they email me today, "We think it would really be fun to play a hospital simulation game." Great. What do we do with that? So, we want to ghetto test it. So, again, we have so many bullets we can fire and we got to just treasure and honor our engineers because if we do our job right, they don't get burned out. They have a great life and we have successful products. That's what we want.

Bing Gordon: They don't want to write code that gets laid on the cutting room floor. Mark Pincus: Yeah. What we do is we ghetto test it. So, I say to the marketing person or the product manager that's what you're doing, describe it in five words. It's built. Great. It's six months from now, we built every dream you had, how are going to market it? Give me the five words, which is something Bing told me. And we'll put that up. We'll put up a link for five minutes saying, "Hey, you ever fantasize about running your own hospital?" Mark Pincus: And well, maybe you have. In this economy, it's an only growth area.

So, we'll put that up for five minutes and the link will maybe take you to a survey. You know, give us your email and when this comes out, we'll contact you. If you're really doing ghetto, it says 404 not found. That's bad. But so first you try to get the heat around it. You say, how much will people like it? Bing Gordon: How many page views will happen in five minutes? Mark

Pincus: I don't know. We have something like, I think we have over 500 million hours a month of game play. I think we have more hours watch than CBS. So, I don't know what happens in five minutes. So, we ghetto test it.

Then, once we get to the point of actually building a game or building a new feature which we love Bing's idea of golden mechanics. Take that away, steal that from us. The idea of not a game but a feature that you can deconstruct and see that this interactive feature, a way to do a gift, will drive virality or retention or revenues. So, we put it in a feature that we can build in a week. It's a ghetto build. We AB test it. We flow test it. We put it out to 1%, 10% of our users. We build a data warehouse with the testing platform. So, we're running several hundred tests at any given time for every one of our games.

And no single user ever is involved in more than one test. So, we love testing. When we see that it moves our metrics in a considerable way, that's when we take it to be a full feature roll out and then we do the full 2.0. So, one example, we just turned on flowers in FarmVille. So, now you can build, plant, grow beautiful flowers. There's so many places you could take flowers. With the holiday season coming up, what if we let you level up your flowers and create your own custom bouquets. Bing Gordon: Tulips, daffodils, lavender. Bing Gordon: Red roses. Mark Pincus: But we don't want to go down those paths until we've test them with our users.

And what's amazing and this is a feature that you will all have available to you as you enter this third Internet business is that you're going to run a service and you are going to every week be able to test things with your users and something that I never have available to me in previous companies. it won't be build it for three months and hope and pray. It's test it now. And you can test it with - you don't need to be a big company - you can test it by buying Google AdWords or Facebook Self Service ads. You can put these links out. You could spend 50 bucks a day and know most of what we know. So, it's an awesome way... Bing Gordon: We also use Amazon Mechanical Turk.