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Lean Customer Development: Build Products Your Customers Need

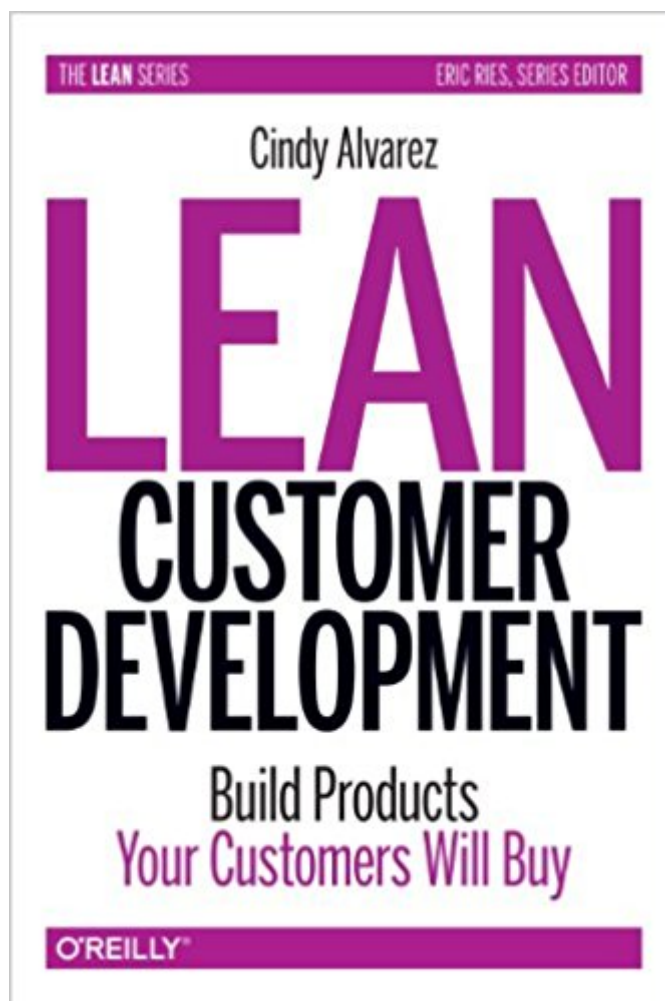THE LEAN SERIES

ERIC RIES, SERIES EDITOR

Cindy Alvarez

LEAN CUSTOMER DEVELOPMENT

Build Products Your Customers Will Buy

O'REILLY

Synopsis

How do you develop products that people will actually use and buy?Customer development research is a method for validating your product and company ideasâ "before you waste months and millions on solving a problem no one needs.Through customer development, you'll learn how your customers behave, what problems they need to solve, and what frustrates and delights them. Through a combination of open-ended interviewing and fast and flexible research techniques, this book provides rich insights that can take you beyond incremental improvements and to the "a-ha!" moments that inspire truly great products and sustainable businesses.This book will serve as an intensely practical guide to customer development that will get you talking and discovering valuable insights within days.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fast, Flexible, and Ongoing Customer Development --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Cindy Alvarez is a product manager who turns understanding the customer into competitive advantage. She's worked with early-stage startups, medium-sized companies, and Fortune 500 companies to make customer development an ingrained part of company culture and product development process. She currently runs User Experience and Product Design for Yammer, where their 5 million customers include hourly staffers and CEOs and techno-luddites to early adopters.

Wow! I normally don't write reviews...but when I do it's because I desperately want to encourage others to give a book a chance. Lean Customer Development is an easy sale for Lean Startup lovers--of course we want to go deeper with the concepts. Lean Customer Development certainly does that. I've read many critical reviews, however, about Lean Startup's relevance to specific products not mentioned in the books. If that's you--you MUST read this book!I'm coming from a service industry and this book clarifies many questions that I had about the feasibility of having a "Minimum Viable Product" or MVP. What does that even mean to a lawyer? I've seen many people misconstrue the concept of the MVP and thus, I had my doubts about applying them to my profession. Although she still uses software development as the main focus for applying the principles, Alvarez addresses the flexibility of the MVP in a clear and enlightening fashion in Chapter 7, "What Kind of Minimum Viable Product Should I Build?" Powerful stuff! I feel I understand the concepts well enough to directly apply them to my law firm. Don't get me wrong: Eric's Reis' original work, Lean Startup, is a classic. Ash Maurya's Running Lean, also a part of this Lean series, is also essential reading. Lean Customer Development, however, easily led me to a pathway of applying Lean Startup principles to my situation. Her overall message about searching out, discerning, and applying customer behavior is truly eye-opening. Alvarez truly embodies why Lean Startup works--you give yourself the freedom to tailor a product/service that customers will actually pay to experience. Novel concept. I highly recommend you read this book before making a final decision about Lean Startup!

If you are launching, running, or attempting to turnaround a business, the first thing you need to do is read this book (and Ash Maurya's, Running Lean).Also, Google: Bob Dorf + "MY TAKE: WAY TOO MANY STARTUPS, NOWHERE NEAR ENOUGH TRACTION"Steve Blank and Bob Dorf's books are excellent and highly recommended. I read them straight through, cover to cover, however I think most people prefer to use the Blank/Dorf works as reference or diving deep into specific concepts.Lean Customer Development (and Running Lean) is excellent at explaining concepts as well as providing actionable and measurable steps towards keeping your business customer-centric and focused on what really matters (providing the greatest opportunity for value creation ($)).In addition to what the other reviewers covered, I would suggest that if your idea/business is not tech-based please do not be discouraged. It will just take a slightly more open mind to be creative and customize some of the templates and suggested activities.In my time as an entrepreneur and mentor, one major challenge I have seen preventing businesses from being REALLY successful - small or large, online or offline, product or service, startup or established - is falling into the trap of

having too much "pride of authorship" or an identity tied too tightly to the company.I have seen startups fail because founders were either too prideful or just plain shy (find a +1 to help!) to connect in meaningful ways with customers - potential or actual. I have seen establish companies flounder and/or fail because their customers change and they don't, relying on the "way its always been done" and caring more about maintaining their lifestyle + routine than creating true value.When you know more about what you want than what your customer wants, you don't really have a business, you have an expensive hobby.If you start with, and circle back to your customers when considering any new offering- product, service, or experience - as detailed in this book, you will have a much greater chance of success as well as personal fulfillment because you are offering something the world actually needs.

I work for one of the largest companies in the world. We have tons of ideas, too many. What we didn't have was a way to prove that people wanted the ideas. My boss challenged me to figure that out and through this book (and a few others in the series like UX for lean) I realized we had all the pieces in the company already, we just needed to tie it all together.As an engineer I also used to take the mindset that only the consumer research folks in the company could talk to customers. Now I try and talk to 3 a week. Ideas are rarely the issue which is the focus of many other books.I came out of too many brainstorming sessions thinking what a waste of time. I replaced those with the alignment meetings mentioned in this book.

It should come as no surprise that the DBB book is very well designed and presented. It's beautiful. But just like Branding itself, there has to be some substantial defendable underlying value first, only then does a great branding performs very well.I doubt that I represent the intended customer since I develop strategy tools myself and purchased the DBB book for research purposes. I started reading the book and was prepared to be overwhelmed with tons of tools that will add noise instead of clarity... a typical magazine reading experience. I was totally wrong!The book was surprisingly well balanced not overwhelming. I am an advocate of visuals especially when they add value by simplifying, explaining, and drawing the eyes attention... but maybe it was a tad more distracting that it should've been, there are instances where I didn't see the value of illustrations, but the flow and substance were commendable.Overall, a great manual and process that points to great tools, just I would recommend using those you need only in order to avoid being overwhelmed. The only thing this book lacks Great job!

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