Alex Powell

What Customers Know (or not), and Publishing Innovation

3 September 2015

It's not the customers job to know what they want

- Steve Jobs

- First thoughts?

  - Really? What's market research for?
  - Even if true for mass market consumer electronics (hardware/software bundles), is it true for digital information products and services targeted at domain experts?
  - And anyhow, don't customers at least know what they *don't* want? – so can't we just subtract from they don't want from the space of product possibilities to identify what they do want?
 - Err…

- How about re-casting:

  It's the responsibility of product developers to know what customers [will] want [when they see/experience it] [because it's hard for customers to envision novel technological possibilities]

Important Thought

- Technological innovation is often **combinatorial in character**
  - e.g. iPad depends on circuit miniaturization / density (Moore's Law) + battery tech + display tech + mobile comms standards + s/ware developments + ...

- What we're thinking about here is how to innovate successfully
- Think in terms of the nature of
  - Markets – composition, segmentation; experts and novices
  - Customers – uniformity vs. multiformity; broad goals and values vs. context-specific needs
  - Technology – trends, opportunities
  - Innovation – psychology, sociology, commercialization
  - Publishing industry – skills, traditions and tendencies (and how to harness or overcome them)
  … with a view to understanding better the salience (if any) of Jobs' dictum, and the implications for how [OrgX] innovates
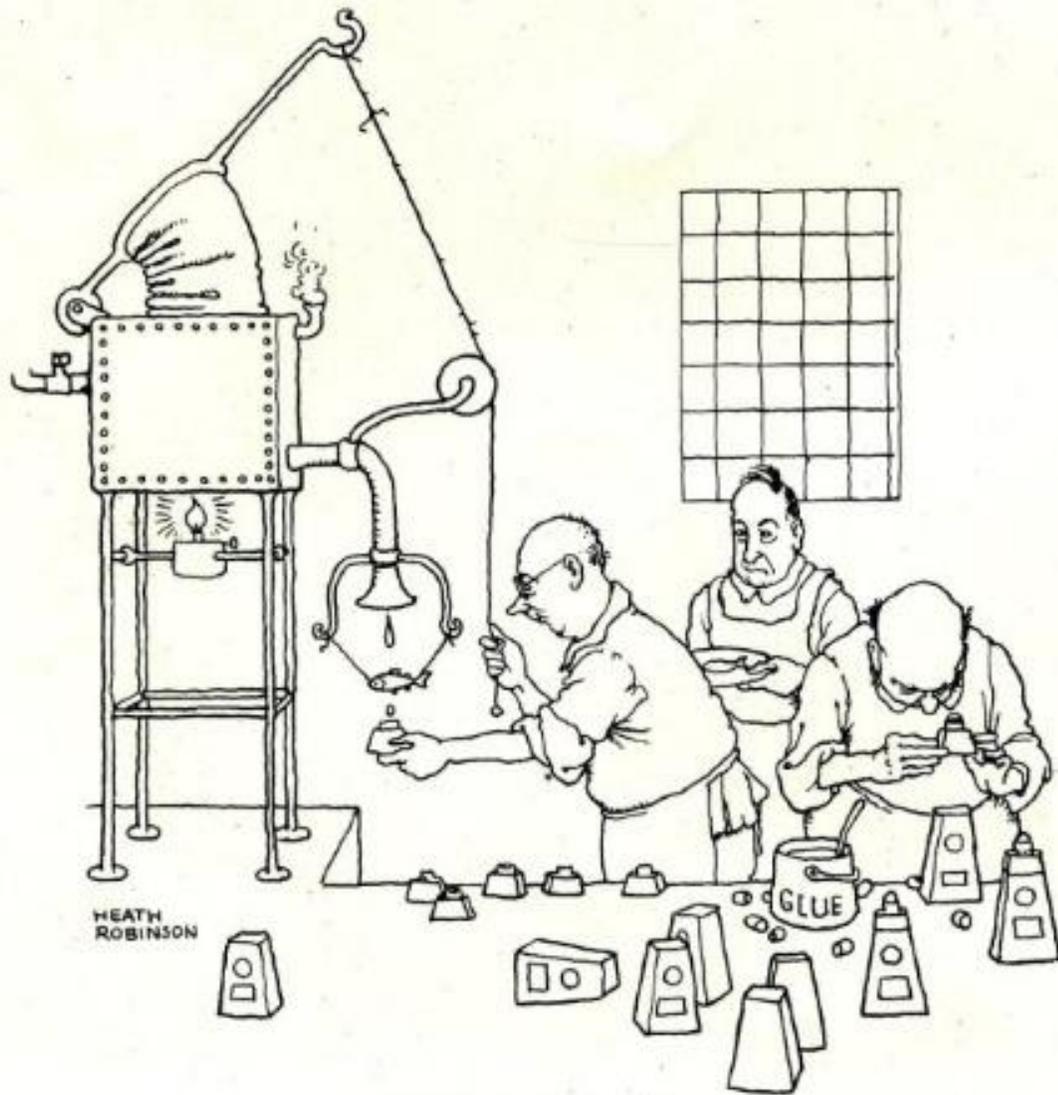
ECONOMY IN THE MAKING OF ANCHOVY SAUCE

Key challenge for innovators: Distinguishing between the possible and the desirable

Apple

- Apple: digital products and services for mass markets
- The genius of Apple: to make appealing products that invite use and re-use (even incorporation into lifestyle & identity)
- Positive and negative dimensions:
  - Tap into appetites, needs, wants (e.g. music anywhere)
  - Avoid technological pain points
  - Easy to learn and use, reliable, high quality, fun, attractive …

Innovation in publishing

- How well does this port into the professional publishing arena?

- Arguably, surprisingly well
  - There are basic market needs, e.g. for information
  - Negatives to avoid – unreliable, out-of-date, partial/incomplete, hard to access/use, irrelevant, poorly presented, …
  - Invert these to feed the appetites and needs of the market
  - Ideally, supplement with 'delighters' / pixie dust / that extra something (novel capabilities, dramatic improvements in efficiency or ease of use, …)

E&T

- E&T: a market that is diverse with respect to
  - Technical sector
  - Industrial area
  - Geography (issues of culture and globalization)
  - Level of education
  - Information requirements (content, style of presentation, delivery mechanisms)

- Potentially a demanding market
  - Rich in customers who are no strangers to technology and innovation

E&T and [OrgX]

- But [OrgX] as a membership body is well placed to understand market composition and concerns
- [OrgX]s multi-disciplinary information resources have the potential to **catalyse innovation** by helping customers
  - keep abreast of developments in multiple E&T disciplines
  - discover new connections between them
- (Recall the **I**mportant **T**hought)

E&T and [OrgX]

- Innovation in publishing exemplifies the I.T. – we need to keep on top of:
    - markup (meta-)standards
    - cross-linking technologies
    - content management technology
    - indexing and search
    - text and data mining, clustering, semantic technologies
    - web standards
    - UI/UX norms and developments
   - software development methodologies & best practice
    - etc!

Innovation for demanding markets

- **Knowledge is power!**
  - Know your markets – who populates them, what your customers value, what is irrelevant to them, how markets are structured / segmented
  - You might not know what your customers want any more than they do, but you can still *try to see the world through their eyes*
  - Know the relevant digital publishing technology space(s), deeply enough to see where they're heading
  - Know what your organization can do now, and how it might need to change in future
  - Leverage publishing pedigree, but don't cling to tradition just for comfort

A reason to be cheerful

- Whilst the I.T. might be right some of the time, much innovation is not revolutionary or combinatorially complex
- Rather it is **evolutionary**
  - Incremental
  - Progressive
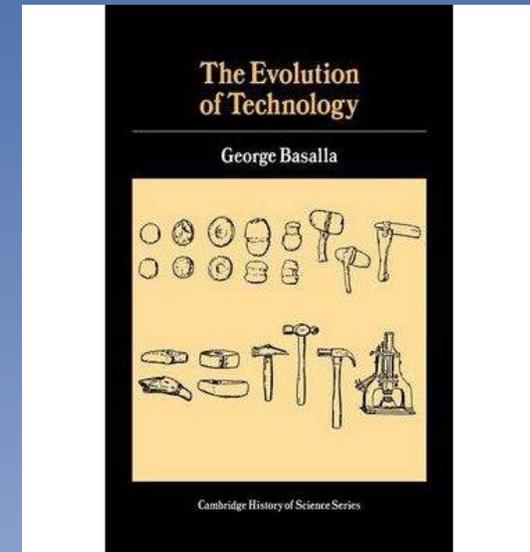
Implications?

- Teamwork is key!
  - No-one knows everything
  - Everyone must be involved
  - That includes customers – if only as a sanity check (but NB need for representativeness)
- Try things out
  - But risks must be calculated / contained
- Aim for flexible platforms capable of delivering to multiple channels in diverse and tailored ways
- Constantly improve
- Agile can help

Thank you!

ap.cybercraft@googlemail.com