

What is Running Lean?

We live in an age of unparalleled opportunity for innovation. With the advent of the Internet, Cloud Computing, and Open Source software, the cost of building software is at an all time low. Yet, the odds of building successful products haven't improved much:

9 out of 10 startups still fail.

And of those that succeed, more than two-thirds report changing their plans drastically along the way. What separates successful startups is not necessarily starting with a better initial plan (Plan A), but **finding a plan that works** before running out of resources.

Up until now, finding this better plan was based more on gut, intuition, and luck. There has been no systematic process for rigorously stress testing a Plan A.

That is what Running Lean is about:

Running Lean is a systematic process for iterating from Plan A to a plan that works.
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Why are startups hard?

First, there is a misconception around how successful products get built. The media loves stories of visionaries that see the future and chart a perfect course to intersect it. The reality, however, rarely plays out quite as simply. Even the unveiling of the visionary computer, the iPad, in Steve Jobs words were years in the making, built on several incremental innovations (and failures) of software and hardware.

Second, the classic product-centric approach front-loads some customer involvement during the requirements gathering phase but leaves most of the customer validation until after the software is released. There is a large "middle" when the startup disengages from customers for weeks or months while they build and test out their solution. During this time, it's quite possible for the startup to either build too much or be led astray from building what customers want. This is the fundamental dilemma described by Steve Blank in "The Four Steps to the Epiphany" in which he offers a process for building a continuous customer feedback loop throughout the product development cycle that he terms: "Customer Development".

And finally, even though customers hold all the answers, you simply cannot ask them what they want. Given the right context, customers can clearly articulate their problems but it's your job as the visionary entrepreneur to come up with solutions.

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

– Henry Ford

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Is there a better way?

Running Lean provides a better way to build web applications in the face of extreme uncertainty.

Running Lean is about speed.

Running Lean is about testing a vision by measuring how customers behave.

Running Lean is about engaging customers throughout the product development cycle.

Running Lean tackles both product and market validation in parallel using short iterations.

Running Lean is a disciplined and rigorous process.

But most importantly, Running Lean is about focusing on the right stuff and reducing waste, a philosophy which can be summed up as:

"RIGHT ACTION, RIGHT TIME"

- Bijoy Goswami

Founder, Bootstrap Austin