

Socialize the Idea without Fear or Inhibition

When I think about building the fort, I think about the first thing that kick-started us, “Hey Chrissy, want to build a fort?” Jimmy asked.

This was a very simple and direct question. Jimmy delivered it without agenda, peer pressure, fear or angst. Let’s think about it – what 10 year-old is afraid of an idea. In Jimmy’s mind, any answer of mine was acceptable.

But Jimmy did something very important in that simple little sentence. What Jimmy did was **socialize his idea**. This is one of the strongest pieces of advice I give to budding entrepreneurs every day.

An idea that never makes the light of day will forever remain an idea that never has a chance of becoming something special. Believe me, I don’t socialize every one of my ideas, some stay inside my head rattling around for days or weeks, waiting for an exit. Most fade away and die out. But, the important ones make it out into the sunlight. Bringing your idea out of your head is the first step on your startup journey.

Why is this so important and why should you share your idea with others?

Let me start by saying that this is the most important stage of your startup journey. No exaggeration or hyperbole here. I am not aware of one business that exists solely inside your own head. Even solo inventors have to tell/show someone their invention at some point, right?

Are you ready to take this idea to the outside world?

Please say yes.

Let’s start with all the reasons why you should socialize your idea even at its rawest, most vulnerable stage.

Newsbreak: Your idea is probably not novel. There are at least 10 people somewhere thinking the same exact thing you are. If it is not exactly the same thing, it is close enough that any buyer would not discriminate when making a purchasing decision between their product and yours. And, even if there are other products all competing for the same dollar, you may be up against some incumbent business that everyone is already comfortable with.

Most of us start by conceiving of a product that meets a personal need. It is a great place to start. It is the first match that lights our fire and ignites some dormant passion of ours. Fantastic.

But you are just one customer. You need many others and every one of them will have a different idea of what this product is and how it should work.

For the past days/weeks/months you have been thinking about colors, logos, features and the smiles on many future customers. But what if I told you that over half of the features you are thinking about would never be used yet paid for and that the manner in which customers interact with your product will create too much friction for most if not all of your intended users?

These issues are all game-enders. Most startups run out of time and money before they discover their product and market. Too many times I see talented entrepreneurs who have worked tirelessly perfecting

a product inside their own head or even in their basement before they bring it out to the world. Sometimes months of effort and even hundreds of thousands of dollars later they emerge to show the world their brilliant creation. Then the world votes with their disinterest. What a waste of time and effort.

Steve Blank, noted author and blogger who teaches entrepreneurship at U.C. Berkeley- Haas Business School, Columbia University, NYU, Stanford University Engineering School and UCSF and developed the concept of Customer Development, the precursor to the Lean Startup movement, has a great quote; “no business plan ever survives the first contact with a customer”. You can insert a product for a business plan for the same effect. You can also insert friend, colleague, wife/husband, parent, and neighbor for customers.

Let me share with you my first CEO hint: Your job is to find the most productive and efficient path to success for your product and business. Very few of you, if any have all the answers for your product, sales and operations of your business.

Socialize your idea now. The result will be a better, more well rounded concept that will start to stand up to early scrutiny. Every minute and dollar working on the wrong element of your business is wasted and pulling you away from success.

Thinking back, when Jimmy pitched me the idea of building a fort that day, he obviously had some thoughts about the location, the size and what this might look like when we finished. He had been working on this idea in his head for some time. Remember that he wanted an upgraded fort that held more people and had a real roof that blocked the rain from getting in.

For the first 10-20 minutes of that conversation we just discussed what the fort could be. This is my favorite part of the journey. Why? At this stage, it's all about the dream and nothing can stand in the way of the obviously successful outcome. In order for Jimmy's dream to come true he had to share it with someone. It was the first test of his dream.

This is where channeling your inner 10-year-old is critical. How many of you are afraid to share your idea with someone with the notion that your idea is too raw? This is an adult affect that begins building early in our life. I hate it too. We have to rid this from our early journey. It is an inhibitor, hands down.

As I mentioned earlier, there are probably 10 people already working on a version of what you are thinking about.

Worried? You should be. But don't let that stop you from socializing your idea. Because here is the dirty little secret – it's not the idea, it's the execution of the idea that will mean more to the success of the business in the long run. So, if it's not the idea, then there should be no reason to let the idea out, right?

Don't get me wrong, your spin on something may be very unique and even something special that customers might gravitate to. But you still need to build it out and show it to people and how are you going to do that alone? You need to socialize your idea without fear of anyone stealing it.

The good news is that you have been thinking about this a lot longer than anyone else has. To that end, you have somewhat of an advantage. Now go do it faster and better than everyone else.