This 6-step method leapfrogs the competition for designing successful growth concepts

Tony Ulwick (Strategyn.com) has staked a claim to Customer Jobs knowledge for concept development. Ulwick came to the Jobs game late – after we introduced the concept to his Harvard professor, Clayton Christensen around the year 2000.

These two quotes from Strategyn’s website, reflect Ulwick’s interpretation of Customer Jobs.

- Defining the job-to-be-done as a purely functional job … and at the right level of abstraction is critical to the successful discovery of breakthrough product and service solutions. …
- Defining customer needs as the metrics that customers use to measure the successful execution of the job-to-be-done … resulted in a set of 70 customer “need” statements …

Ulwick is wrong to think that product function and job function are the same thing: Customer Jobs were never intended to explain what the product must do … to execute the job … i.e., Ulwick’s product innovations are intended to better product outcomes.

The Customer Jobs paradigm stands for something the customer must do. Her job is to improve the realities of particular market use situations … and what those lived situations should be, could be, and are desired to be.

The Customer Job is the customer’s imperative voice for making better use of the market.

Ulwick treats the Customer Job as something the product does. For Ulwick, innovation research is meant to explain the outcomes the product should be producing … if it is to perform its function. The difference in outlook is huge.
Let me illustrate. Take the number 0.99. Let it stand for Ulwick’s idea of a Customer Job. Adding more digits to the righthand side of 0.99 will never get you to 1.0. And neither will adding more facts, insights, and need statements about products (70 is already a lot).

Ulwick is using the wrong language to research what a Customer Job is.

The Jobs paradigm was always meant to describe what customers themselves must do … to complete the idea of the particular innovation: If the customer does not choose to hire the product for a job-to-be-done, all the 70 outcome possibilities will count for nothing. It’s like loading an Apple Watch with features that few will use.

Customer Jobs are all about describing innovation possibilities that lie within the lived experience of the customer’s hiring process. Not about ‘functional outcomes’ that attach to the new product and its benefits.

Customer needs research cannot explain the hiring process customers use to make sense of what they desire to buy next.

Customer Jobs research must work in the language of ‘information use experiences’, sense-making, the lived experience of understanding something new, translating the unfamiliar … ‘hiring’ a new shopping experience that can be more aesthetic than rational.

Customer Jobs research is all about helping designers see the relations and connections embedded in the process the customer will use to shop for and hire something new.

Understanding the hiring process also separates Customer Jobs from other kinds of innovation initiatives, like Communispace’s … ‘investing in customers as active business partners’ … ‘making customers feel rewarded and proud to be your customer’.

Customer Jobs are all about innovation, adaptation, and starting up something new: Creating new market footholds … that let go of the past and disrupt past relationships.

These companies have all played a part in shaping up what Customer Job concepts are all about.
Modeling Customer Information Seeking

Four types of shopping; one path to successful innovation … Making a find

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Organizing thoughts: The basis for new growth footholds

- Growth happens at the edge of market categories, not by stealing share from incumbents. Innovation pushes the historical frontier forward … disrupts the historical pattern, and the demand landscape map
- Q: Why do consumers change? A: They find something new … that promises to improve some part of the lived experience of their life-world (new situation)
- The decision process for ‘making a find’ …
  - Deals with a reality that is, at first, new, unfamiliar, not orderly
  - Begins as an aesthetic experience – the shopper is feeling her way – more tactile and intuitive than rational
  - Involves information seeking
  - The shopper is ‘making up her mind’, changing her mindset, making the case for new behavior, which requires a kind of ‘information design’ --- information is used as a tool to make the case for buying something new (Brenda Dervin – sense-making)
  - The shopper completes the innovator’s design process … by finding a situation for putting the innovation to use (see, Situated Design Methods – form precedes function – new lived experience possibilities follow from the innovation – like the UBER app)
  - The problem the innovation ‘solves’ is only apparent after the shopper has decided to buy – like UBER

Modeling the shopper’s innovation process --- Making a find

The following processes are set against the backdrop of a shopping context (retail journey)

1. Attention and interrupt – conflict arousal with ‘business as usual’ … results from scanning information environment; shopping moment is highly dependent on shopping trip
2. Trusting what you see – Q: Is it new? Q: Is it worth a second look? Q: Do I trust myself enough to try to make sense of it?
   - How does shopper process the aesthetic experience of the shopping moment?
   - Understanding is communicated directly, without words … the shopper is feeling her way – a more tactile experience than rational (NOTE: better done in a physical store than in e-commerce)
3. Making sense – questioning, probing, attacking
   - Creating an explicit understanding of what the new thing is and does
   - Filling in ‘gaps in understanding’
   - By, in a sense, asking questions … translating into a language of understanding. (There is a standard list of question types that shoppers us.)
   - Information uses – how information helps or hurts constructing a proper sense of ‘what the new thing means for me’
4. Choosing – recombining explicit knowledge to make the economic case for purchase
   - Q: Is it worth the money? … Q: How do I ‘comparison shop’?
5. Playing time forward – expressing the new item’s practical value
   - How would I use it? What situation context?
   - Imagine the value of the new situation
   - Put yourself in the picture – vignettes
   - Other situations
   - Social currency
   - Size of the prize – Delphi Method

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