Jobs to Be Done

Jobs to Be Done is a way of understanding why customers buy: they "hire" a product to make progress in a particular situation. The idea was popularised by Clayton Christensen, a professor at Harvard Business School, in books such as The Innovator's Solution, written with Michael Raynor in 2003, and Competing Against Luck in 2016. Others, such as Anthony Ulwick, developed related methods. We follow Maryam, who runs a small start-up that delivers dinners that are ready to heat.

1. Find the Job

The first step is to look beyond the customer's age, income or job title and ask what progress the customer wants to make. A job is a need in a specific situation, such as getting through a boring commute or feeding the family on a busy evening. The same person can hire different products for different jobs, and different people can hire the same product for the same job. We find jobs by watching and by interviewing customers about real purchases.

Example: In a well-known story, a fast-food chain noticed that many milkshakes were bought early in the morning by drivers. Their job was to make a long, boring commute more interesting and to keep hunger away until lunch.

At work: Maryam interviews customers who bought a meal box. She learns that they are not mainly people who love healthy food, but tired workers who need dinner solved on busy evenings.

2. Write the Job Statement

A job statement describes the job in one sentence. A common form is: when I am in this situation, I want to do this, so that I can reach this result. A good statement has a functional side, which is what must get done, and an emotional or social side, which is how the customer wants to feel or to be seen. It describes the progress and does not name any product or solution.

Example: A student writes: when I have an exam tomorrow and I feel nervous, I want to review quickly, so that I can sleep calmly. Flashcards, a summary sheet or a study group could all be hired for that job.

At work: Maryam writes: when I get home late and tired, I want a healthy dinner without cooking, so that I can rest and still feel that I take care of myself. The statement names the situation, the need and the feeling, but no product.

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3. Map the Competition

Customers can hire many different things for the same job, so the real competition is any alternative that does the job. It can be a rival, a different type of product, a habit or simply doing nothing. For each alternative, we ask what it does well and what makes customers want to drop it, such as high cost, poor quality or wasted time. The gaps show where a new offer can do the job better.

Example: To relax after work, a person could hire a TV series, a walk, a video game or a nap. These are very different products, but they compete for the same job.

At work: Maryam lists the alternatives for a quick dinner: takeaway, instant noodles, a simple home recipe and skipping dinner. Takeaway is fast, but it is costly and often unhealthy. Her meals must therefore be as fast as takeaway and healthier, at a fair price.

4. Design and Test

Once the job is clear, we design the product, the price, the message and the service around it, and we remove features that do not help the job. Then we test our ideas with small experiments, such as a prototype or a pilot, and we check whether customers really use the result for the job. The measures of success are progress on the job, for example repeat purchases, not opinions alone. Jobs change over time, so the cycle should be repeated.

Example: Imagine a hotel that learns that business guests hire a room for a good night's sleep before an important meeting. It could invest in quiet rooms and dark curtains instead of a bigger lobby.

At work: Maryam changes her meals to be ready in three minutes in one tray, and she offers delivery after six in the evening. She tests the new plan with fifty customers for a month. Repeat orders show whether the meals really do the job.

Conclusion

In summary, Jobs to Be Done explains that customers hire products to make progress in a situation. Four steps put it to work: find the job, write the job statement, map the competition, and design and test. Used this way, a company builds what customers truly need instead of what they say they like.

Sources

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