

# Growth hacking



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26 Aug 2015

Deep down, anyone who's launching a new product, fantasises that it is the next big thing - and this illusion shapes the expectations for every marketing decision.

Brands, and their agencies want a grand opening, a launch with impact, major media coverage. We default to thinking that we need a huge advertising budget, a red carpet and celebrities. And we dangerously assume that we need to get as many sales as possible in a short space of time, and if it doesn't work instantly, we consider it a failure.

While my marketing brethren chase vague notions such as "branding" and "mind share", by focusing on creativity to deliver results, you can relentlessly pursue growth. And when it's done right, those customers bring more customers, who bring more customers. By being the inventors, operators and mechanics of our own self-sustaining and self-propagating growth machine - a start-up can turn into something HUGE.

Today's brands must grow or die. We're all trying to grow our business, launch our website, sell tickets or fund a project. Being the catalyst for growth is inspiring and creative... When Burbn became Instagram - that was a billion-dollar branding decision. When Dropbox rolled out its referral program, paying users in free storage to bring your friends on board - that was viral marketing genius. When Twitter created its Suggest Users list, it improved customer acquisition. Product development in all these cases, made marketing better.

## A mindset

These billion-dollar companies became what they are by using a new script - one that most of us aren't familiar with. They call it 'growth hacking'.

Growth hacking is a technique developed by technology start-ups, which uses creativity, analytical thinking, and social metrics to sell and gain exposure. It can be considered as part of the online marketing ecosystem, in many cases growth hackers use search engine optimisation, website analytics, content marketing and A/B testing.

Growth hackers focus on low-cost and innovative alternatives to traditional marketing, e.g. using digital communications rather than advertising in traditional media. This lean approach is great for start-ups, and focuses on growth first, and budgets second.

It might be a relatively new term, but growth hacking isn't a process shrouded in secrecy. In fact, it has grown and developed in very public conversations.

Aaron Ginn, the director of growth at StumbleUpon, put it well: "growth hacking is more of a mindset than a toolkit. So that's good news for entrepreneurs and marketing 'gurus': growth hacking is as simple as changing your mindset."

Growth hacking is a fluid process, it means putting aside the notion that marketing is an independent process that begins at the end of a company's creation or a product's development. It is a way of thinking and looking at your business. By being in this mindset it is a constant advantage, and team it with a creative approach, it will be the key to finding likeminded people to keep your momentum and help you achieve your goals.

## Community creation

Glasgow-based Cyclehack, did just this when they asked a group of cyclists, bus drivers, designers and taxi drivers and anyone they could think of, to come along and hack away at the issue of making cycling more accessible. A myriad of ideas and products emerged: indicators for bikes, apps for cycling, repainting buses to warn cyclists they are in the driver's blind spot, and even to put a 'penny in yo pants'. A simple idea where ladies use a coin and an elastic band, to create baggy shorts to stop the embarrassment of flashing when cycling in a skirt.

This idea went viral and was picked up by the international media, reaching 300 million people worldwide. The energy generated from this one concept pushed the Cyclehack agenda across the internet, and there is now a Cyclehack in Cape Town, Vancouver and Glasgow - all pushing the same message.

What sets this tactic apart from conventional marketing is the methodology and co-operative approach of hacking. A movement just like Cyclehack shares solutions to problems - and this generosity of spirit embeds marketing success.

What makes growth hacking so successful is that it requires thought, energy and a real focus on the idea or brand, and what consumers want. It is a chance for business to address grass root problems, and start again, to generate the vitality that can sometimes get lost on the hard road to growth.

## ABOUT TORQUIL MATHEWSON

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