MobileHelp®

Achieving the Role of a Relentless Innovator

By Jean Robichaud, CTO of MobileHelp

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Executive Summary

The longevity of a business in the marketplace is often measured by its ability to provide some variation on the very basic equation that combines quality and consistency over time. While industry analysts may argue the semantics of that equation, the basic principle is if you want your business to endure, you have to provide a good product, all the time, over the long haul.

Undoubtedly that's what sustains a business.

But it isn't what launches a business, or grows a business, or redefines an industry. Those come from something else altogether – and that something else is innovation.

And everyone knows what that looks like: It is Steve Jobs walking onto a stage and unveiling the iPhone. Or Samsung unveiling the curved TV at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES). It is the thing that causes your breath to catch just a bit as you recognize an industry has changed – or perhaps even been redefined – for the better. In a single moment.

According to Jacob Beckley, Vice President of Innovation at **Fusion92**, "in the vast sea of innovation, companies that take the largest risk, close the biggest gaps and identify the newest opportunities are rewarded with the title of true innovators and leaders by their consumers and peers. These true innovators are setting themselves apart from any and all competition."

And as it turns out, true innovation does not necessarily have to be a rare and fleeting Eureka moment, but can also be the result of

commitment to principles that create a business environment which supports continual innovation.

Innovation in Tech – Main Character or Supporting Cast?

As players in the tech space, what I can tell you definitively is the tech industry is booming – largely due to massive innovation and the ability to quickly leverage it within the space.

According to research I've seen, at last count there were **114 privately held companies with valuations of $1 billion** or more. Some are worth much more. But what does that mean for the long-term? Do new companies have the ability to stay innovative?

Staying on the cutting edge of innovation sounds easy enough, yet defining a company as innovative while delivering incremental improvements, seemingly useless features and continually following the competition, is not innovation. It could be called maintenance – but it's not innovation.

Companies who have the chops to do the work to remain innovative in the long term do so through utilization of an operating model some business leaders call "innovation business as usual." This encapsulates the idea that innovation is an integral part of business in these firms, rather than an occasional distraction.

At MobileHelp, we continually reach back into our roots to ensure we retain the basis for innovation. Because at the heart of it, every company was once an innovator – starting from scratch and challenging larger competitors. Which means no matter how old the company is, or how large, or how complacent, within the genetic makeup there is an innovation capability which can be renewed or recovered.

Preserving those roots has ensured we have never crossed the threshold in which innovation becomes far less important than defending and sustaining existing products and services.

OCKHAM'S RAZOR

THE *SIMPLEST* ANSWER IS OFTEN THE *BEST*

That said, it is not without work, the basis of which is more simplistic than people probably realize. At MobileHelp, it comes from five core ideals:

1. Keep the overall product solution simple

2. Design by necessity

3. A lean approach

4. Partner with other companies who are either innovators themselves, or can support innovation

5. The knowledge that innovation ultimately rests with employees empowered to be innovators.

A Simple Solution Executive

Ockham's Razor is a philosophy named after William of Ockham (who popularized the strategy centuries ago), and states that "all things being equal, the simplest and most direct solution with the fewest number of steps is usually the correct answer to any problem."

And while at first blush it may seem the "simplest" solution or the "too obvious" choice is the antithesis to originality, the reminder to keep things simple has often been a catalyst for innovation within MobileHelp.

Our earliest solution, for example, was based on a simple, truly obvious idea: make medical alert systems mobile. So people can leave the house. Eureka! And yet, in an industry that was more than 30 years old, that idea had never come to market.

In tandem, we wanted to create a simplified tool to allow family members and caregivers to check in on the person using our mobile system – i.e. "mom's not answering the phone; is she at church or the grocery store?" And thus, MobileHelp Connect – a simple online portal – came to be part of our initial offering.

What we've observed is that quite often the simplest product idea is also one that fosters the most continuous innovation. For example, MobileHelp Connect has allowed our company to innovate in ways we truly didn't imagine when we first implemented it – its simplicity has allowed us to easily augment it.

In other words, by the very nature of something being simple, it leaves the door wide open to future growth.

In all aspects of our business, we have sought to partner with companies who are willing to roll up their sleeves and brainstorm with us about what lies on the horizon – this is critical to being able to maintain a competitive innovative edge.

Design by Necessity

Frequently we hear the term "necessity is the mother of invention." In the case of MobileHelp, it was a slightly different variation on that, and we often say that "(grand)mother was the necessity for invention."

The founder of MobileHelp was caring for his elderly grandmother, and he wanted to provide

her with a resource that allowed her to maintain her very active lifestyle, but also get emergency help if she needed it. He found that there wasn't a solution on the market that allowed people to access emergency help outside their homes. This became the catalyst for bringing a mobile solution to the marketplace.

We also determined early on that we wouldn't grow by taking our technology solution broader (i.e. the technology could have been used for such applications as pet or child tracking), and instead we chose to focus on taking our solution deeper.

And that has continued to be a driver behind the way we have incorporated innovation into our company: after mobility, we realized people needed a solution that would automatically detect if they fell. And after that, we wanted to incorporate tools to address the two primary reasons people fall: medication errors and a lack of activity.

Now we are looking at the ways we can use our technology to help people proactively manage their health. We will continue to look at what is needed by our customers – and let that help drive our innovation.

A Lean Approach

When we approach innovation, we do so in a very lean manner. And what I mean by that is we follow the 80/20 principle.

This principle is not new, and most business people have heard of and/or utilize some variation of it. Historically, it was first suggested by management thinker Joseph M. Juran, and named after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who observed that 80 percent of income in Italy was received by 20 percent of the Italian population.

The assumption is, of course, that most of the results in any situation are determined by a small number of causes. By the numbers that means 80

percent of your outcomes come from 20 percent of your inputs – and this is how we approach innovation.

Which means that for any idea we want to move forward, we utilize that principle to adjust our development process and methodology to ensure the results of implementation are going to fall within that 80/20 paradigm.

There are, however, exceptions where a lean approach would work, but would provide us with the level of confidence needed for developing life safety products, not to mention regulatory requirements as well.

The bottom line of this principle for us is that not all our business functions are the same, and using it allows us to adjust as needed.

Partner with Fellow Innovators

This seems an obvious notion, and Fortune 500 companies have been doing it for years. Strategic partnerships can give entrepreneurs a competitive edge and help them increase the ability to deliver innovative product solutions.

For example, when we began looking for a central station to create our back end support network, we knew we didn't want to be limited by landline technology alone. So we partnered with a company that could also create the infrastructure we needed to implement a cellular solution. This has been truly instrumental in our company's growth, as it meant we weren't tied to a languishing technology infrastructure and could take advantage of features and benefits available to us through a cellular network.

For example, utilization of cellular technology as a basis for communications allowed us to offer a base station solution to the market place that can be used anywhere in the home, where there is sufficient cell coverage (where there's an electrical outlet). Cellular technology is also easy for us to

integrate with as we continue to enhance our product solutions.

Adoption of cellular technology (in this case for our PERS devices) also allows us to tap into the broader Internet of Things (IoT), and with the convergence of PERS and aggregation of vital signs we have incorporated into our solution set, the rapidly evolving Internet of Healthcare Things (IoHT).

Empower Employees to Be Innovators

If we look at companies well-known in the business world as "Relentless Innovators" (or those who consistently generate innovative ideas and have done so over time), such as Apple, Google, 3M and Intel, it is clear they accomplish this sustained innovation through utilization of the model discussed earlier called "innovation business as usual."

And a large piece of that involves leveraging employees who balance the needs of efficiency with the demands for innovation.

Throughout the last two decades, new management practices and tools have slowly eroded the innovation DNA, replacing it with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Tools like outsourcing and Six Sigma have dramatically accelerated the focus on efficiency and effectiveness, while little attention remained to developing tools and capabilities that drove innovation.

This can be addressed by simply encouraging and empowering employees to embrace innovation along with efficiency. At MobileHelp, that means our people often come up with our most ingenious ideas, and they come from all over the company: customer service, sales, tech support, or accounting.

Innovation cannot and should not be relegated to a corner of the company or a group of people within it – we recognize the potential in all our people to foster new growth and bring ideas to the forefront that will allow us to take the next step toward redefining the industry in which we operate.

Conclusion

Through an ongoing commitment to principles that create a working environment which can foster innovation, companies can earn and retain the label of relentless innovators, and reap the benefits of moving their companies and industries forward.

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