

The Life-Changing Magic of Launching a Minimum Viable Product

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ICF-Washington State, Spring 2016 Newsletter

Do you have a beta course, or a draft of a draft of a new program or workshop, languishing in your idea file? Are you stuck because it seems overwhelming? Or you haven't figured out how it's all going to work, *if* it's going to work? Is perfectionism threatening to sabotage a fabulous idea?

If so, I have some good news that will help you cut through perfectionism, inertia, and attachment.

Welcome the life-changing magic of Minimal Viable Products.

The term "Minimal Viable Product," or MVP, has been around since 2001, most recently associated with Lean Startup business frameworks. Eric Ries, author of "The Lean Startup," popularized the term. In simple terms, an MVP provides value to your clients, while also requiring minimum effort on your part. The intention is to start a feedback loop that helps you to continue to develop and refine the idea. This is different from beta in that it's more complete and is fully operational. You've just trimmed the fat, and behind the scenes, you know the product will evolve with future iterations.

I found myself wrestling with perfectionism for the past six months or so as I worked to develop an online course offering based on my new book, "The Introvert Entrepreneur." The idea for the course had been brewing for at least three years, then gained energy as the book's publication date came closer. Well, the pub date came and went, and I was stuck. I had an outstanding instructional designer assisting me, but I was still stuck as stuck could be.

So I did what I do these days: I took my stuckness to my mastermind group. These are five of the smartest people I know, and I knew they could help. As I shared my vision for the online course, one of my colleagues invited me to take a step back and re-evaluate what I was envisioning. What was the purpose of the course? What did I want to accomplish?

What could be the minimum viable product that I could put out there just to get it moving?

It was that last question that had the life-changing magic effect. I literally teared up – okay, I cried a bit – and felt very emotional as he was talking. I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders. I'd been so attached for so long to the product looking a particular way, I forgot I had choices.

With the group's help, I re-imagined the online course as a virtual book group. Within 24 hours, I'd posted a promotional page on my website and started sharing the news on social media. And three weeks later, I hosted the first call with one of two virtual book groups that had formed.

After years of being attached to a specific vision, I was able to release it in 24 hours and make something happen.

If you decide to move forward with a minimum viable product, it's not about putting out something that's sub-par and not ready for prime time. It's about having just enough functionality and value that you can test the market and begin data collection.

If you're finding yourself with a bunch of half-finished ideas or paralyzed by one big idea that seems too complicated to tackle, here are some steps to help you move to an MVP approach.

Notice what you're attached to.

Reflect on all aspects of your product. Does it *have to* serve 1,000 people? Does it *need to* have an app, a podcast, its own logo, at launch time? Does it *need to* make \$x in its first week? **It's great to begin with the end in mind, but don't get caught up in thinking that the beginning has to look like the end.** If you find yourself saying, "have to," "need," "should," or "must," that's an indicator there's attachment to something. Question if those "have to" points are really true.

Whatever the attachment is, let it go.

Really. Let it go. Release it in service of making space for other possibilities. It doesn't mean those things won't come up again or ultimately prove important, but in the interest of moving forward, let it go.

Drill down to the essence.

Because I'd always envisioned creating an online course, I forgot there were multiple ways to achieve the essence of my goal: to connect people through the book and provide a space for them to discuss and take action to improve their business. Leading with this goal expands possibilities. What's the core of what you want to create? Not the "how," but the "why," of what you're doing?

Imagine a "lite" version.

Take your project, offering, or product, and ask yourself: What are the core elements that would need to be retained in order for it to be viable? Are there "nice to haves" that can be put on the back burner? Put yourself in the mind and heart of your customer, and focus on what would serve them best, rather than what would serve your ego (*ouch! I know... but we have to acknowledge that it's our ego that trips us up at times!*).

Lead with curiosity.

Now that you've identified the MVP, continue to notice any attachments, let them go, and lead with curiosity. While you launch with the intention that it's a viable product, there's still uncertainty. It might be rougher – or more ready! – than you thought. The only way

you'll find out is if you stay curious and always be asking why different aspects are and aren't working.

Embrace the feedback loop.

This is what makes an MVP so valuable. If you lead with curiosity, you're going to create a strong feedback loop. Most often, the people who purchase an MVP are early adopters. They aren't terribly surprised by bugs and glitches, because they know they're getting a first generation product. That said, they're not shy with feedback. You'll hear the good and the bad. Take it all in, knowing it's part of an evolutionary process and creating something new.

Keep improving.

One of the benefits of an MVP is that you get a chance to fail fast so that you can improve more quickly and efficiently. This is not to say that your MVP is destined to fail. But it does mean that failure is always an option when it comes to launching something new into the market. The failure in this case will be smaller and of less consequence, because you've invested minimal effort to receive maximum feedback. Resilience builds when you're able to recover from small set-backs and learn to trust you can handle them and keep improving.

Trust that what you offer is enough.

What defines an MVP to me will probably not be the same as an MVP to you. You have to use your best judgment. You know how much further you could go and where you're drawing the line. Stick to elements that support your core essence and intention, and let go of the rest, at least for now.

The Bottom Line:

Done is better than perfect!

Here's to moving past perfectionism, inertia, and attachment through the life-changing magic of minimum viable products!

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