Twitter Thread by ■■■■■ ■■■■ ■■



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1/ Amazon is famous for its writing culture:

• "Mock press releases / FAQs" for new product pitches
• "6-page memos" instead of Powerpoint

Two former Amazon execs wrote a book called "Working Backwards" detailing the philosophy.

Here are some insights ■



2/ The "Working Backwards" playbook

Instead of creating a product then finding customers, Amazon asks "What does the customer need?" and works toward the product.

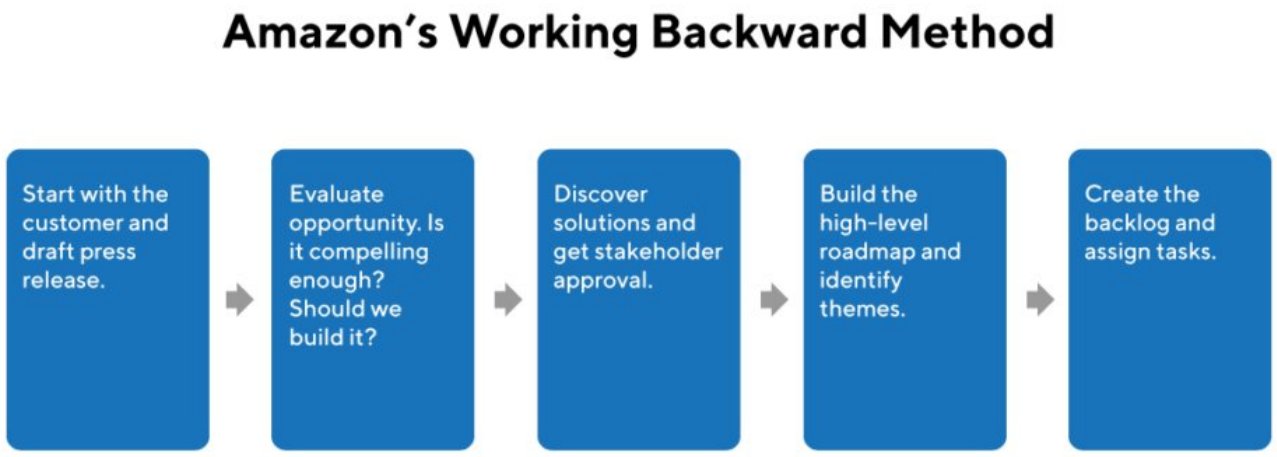
■Customer need --> Create product
■Create product --> Find customer

3/ Write a mock press release

To determine if the customer need makes biz sense, employees write a press release:

• What problem is the new product solving
• Why it's better than existing options

To persuade a customer, the document has to be jargon-free and tell a story.



4/ Press release forces big thinking

You don't write a press release for an incremental improvements.

Creating a product worthy of a press release means really solving a customer problem and going after markets with large TAMs.

5/ Include an FAQ in press release

Addressing every potential customer question can help identify hurdles to getting something to market...and also uncover opportunities.

6/ Why memos over Powerpoint?

Amazon famously has execs write 6-page narrative-driven memos instead of Powerpoint decks.

The practice began in 2004 when Jeff Bezos noticed nothing was being decided after 60-minute long meetings with his inner circle (AKA S-Team).

7/ Memos > Powerpoint #1: More info density

People read faster than people can talk meaning that -- for a 60 minute meeting -- reading a memo before discussing an issue conveys much more information (10x more per one of the book's authors).

Narratives are also more memorable.

8/ Memos > Powerpoint #2: Ideas > Charisma

In Powerpoint presentations, a great presenter can sell a bad idea. Conversely, a poor presenter may be unable to sell a great idea.

In a memo, the idea wins.

9/ Memos > Powerpoint #3: Better analysis

Powerpoint's hierarchical (and sequential) structure is not ideal to address complex issues.

Narrative-driven memos can be multi-causal and provide a 360-degree view on a topic.

10/ Memos > Powerpoint #4: Focusses a meeting

If every meeting participant spends the first 1/3rd of a 60-minute meeting reading, there is a huge transfer of information.

It's a forcing function to get everyone on the same page and makes the remaining 40-minutes high quality.

11/ Memos > Powerpoint #5: Shared understanding

Whether or not one agrees with everything in a memo, focussed reading of a document provides a shared knowledge base with which to begin discussions.

Further, someone can quickly "get up to speed" by reading past memos.

12/ Memos > Powerpoint #6: Decisions need narrative

Powerpoint and Excel are great at communicating data.

However, at the executive level, you are making complex decisions and leading. This requires a mastery of narrative (AKA memo writing) to persuade stakeholders.

13/ Writing is crucial to help a company scale

At 20 employees, Bezos could be in every meeting. At 1k+ employees, he needed a way to “inject his lens of thinking” into the organization.

An archive of writing helps encode the thinking across the company (e.g. Annual letters)

14/ If you enjoy business breakdowns (and dumb memes), def HIT THAT FOLLOW.

For more on the book, check this a16z podcast:
https://t.co/Gz876YZs1b

Here's the book:
https://t.co/qTzLMrCCYw

15/ FYI, if you liked this Amazon thread, you might like this thread about Netflix's culture: https://t.co/TnEdX81mCo

> (1/10) Lots of coverage on Netflix's culture.
>
> The company has a cutthroat reputation and willingness to pay top dollar for superstar talent (AKA "100x engineers").
>
> The reason why is explained in these 6 slides.
>
> And it has to do with creativity and complexity. \U0001f447\U0001f447 pic.twitter.com/Htt5PtsLhW
>
> — \U0001d683\U0001d69b\U0001d69e\U0001d697\U0001d690 \U0001d67f\U0001d691\U0001d68a\U0001d697 \U0001f1e8\U0001f1e6 (@TrungTPhan) September 8, 2020