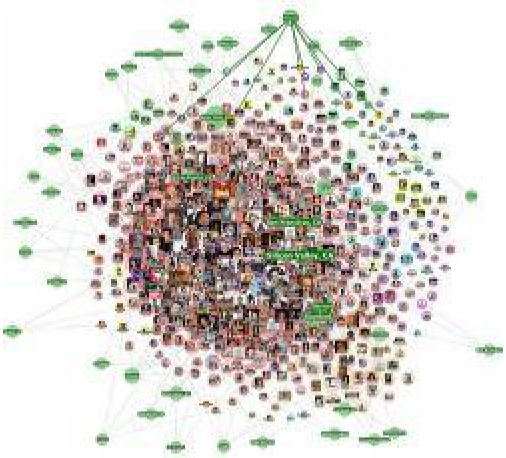
IN SEARCH OF EARLY DEMAND

Posted on 11/02/2011 by Naider



It is known that not only in Spain but also throughout In Europe it is particularly difficult for us to bring technology to market, to do what is called innovation. To me, who on several occasions have been involved in the genesis of some idea and technology, more or less innovative, one aspect in particular seems critical: **the existence of an early demand**.

Why didn't Facebook emerge in Spain? Of course, for many reasons, but I bet that surely there was a *pseudo-Facebook* in Spain before Facebook itself: a social network more or less incipient, interesting, which incorporated approximately the same functionalities. Surely it never gained critical mass, it never reached a minimum number of users that would drive national and international growth. And in the end, Facebook emerged, of course, in the US.

Remembering my university days in Valladolid, back in 97 or 98 (what times), in a Web programming internship, we were able to develop an e-Business portal to book hotels and restaurants over the Internet. Some colleagues developed a Web portal to sell books. Clearly **none of us created Amazon or Expedia**. It is true that we were missing many things: the ability to undertake, advice for it, capital and a thousand other things... but it is also true that when we were programming that, the company and Spanish society did not even know what e-mail was. Approaching businessmen to support those projects was simply unreal. Something similar happened to us with our final degree project: a GPS navigation system for vehicle fleets. We managed to develop a relatively interesting prototype back in 2000 but we did not find any company interested in supporting the project, which sounded complicated and far from the market, nor did we find funding to create a marketable product. **It goes without saying that we don't create Tomtom or Garmin...**

Bringing up these memories, I do not wish, in any way, to vindicate my talent (or my failures) as a developer, which I certainly did not have much of, but rather to underline the constant development of technologies that takes place in our universities, technology centers and surely also in the companies; technologies that **in many cases do not find that *early demand* necessary**. Surely today there are many developments in micro and nanotechnologies, biotechnology, within ICT or in many other technological fields that are simply never transformed into products and manage to find that early demand.

It is true that today there are more transfer mechanisms, but unfortunately this continues to happen to many entrepreneurs in our country. **With insufficient early demand for innovative products, they do not progress, are not perfected and do not make the global leap**. Technologies are not transferred to the market, and when they do, they do not cross the known chasm). Meanwhile, in the US, with a population eager to devour new products, start-ups can more easily access a first market of pioneers (early-adopters) with whom to test your products. Afterwards, the products can grow, and make the leap to the global market. This is what happened with Facebook, which managed to dazzle thousands of users at American universities, a perfect breeding ground for early adopters. Was Facebook really better than other existing networks? Or was Facebook in the right place at the right time? **What would have happened if Mark Zuckeberg had studied at a Spanish university?**

How to solve this market vacuum? In Spain, we should learn a lot from the Scandinavian countries where they are capable of creating **companies that are born with global ambition from the start**. In Sweden, I am especially familiar with the incubator Chalmers Innovation. Many of the companies they host were born from the outset oriented to the American, global or emerging markets. The Swedes know that the local market does not have enough critical mass to successfully launch innovative products. In Spain, with very limited, delayed and excessively conservative early demand, it will continue to be very difficult to innovate without seeking more advanced global markets.

Header image Creative Commons thanks to Jurvetson

There are no comments yet.