

Let's take a trip to Silicon Valley! You know that the geographic center of the digital transformation we enjoy today has essentially been Silicon Valley, California, and the tech companies there, and venture capitalists were crucial in the funding of many of those companies. A number of elite venture capitalists in Silicon Valley use a particular phrase as an anchor approach to determine the viability of a technology start-up, and it's relevant to all of us in our organizations. That short phrase is *product-market fit*. That phrase is attributed to the astute Andy Rachleff after his studying the career of the man who has been called the "grandfather of Silicon Valley venture capital," Don Valentine.

So, just what is *product-market fit*? Well, pretty much what it says. Have you created a product that matches with consumers' wishes in a market well? That's product-market fit. And that's always been what free markets are about, even in a medieval marketplace centuries ago. To nurture an enduring enterprise, we must establish a replicable product or service that a number of volume-providing customers want.

This is interesting for several reasons. Some very successful venture capitalists...or "VCs", as they are called...believe that product-market fit is the first and primary key to success, because all the other possible factors of success for an enterprise are pretty much irrelevant if the company doesn't achieve product-market fit. Quality of the leadership team can look stellar and lots of capital can be sitting in bank accounts, but as long as the enterprise doesn't have product-market fit, then it will eventually fail.

Of course, other VCs would say that a top entrepreneurial leadership team is what's essential—the leaders will simply find their way to success. The problem with that, say its critics, is that entrepreneurs who have been successful once often fail in later efforts because they can't easily achieve product-market fit.

Now, let's move on to the next dimension: the size of the marketplace is a really big deal. After all, you can get product-market fit if you serve one customized customer, or perhaps a few customers clustered in a small geographical area. But venture capitalists handle huge amounts of capital looking for very large whales, not small minnows. So, VCs in Silicon Valley are looking for what are called scalable opportunities. "Scalable" success means enterprises that aspire to and are capable of serving markets of millions...tens of millions...even hundreds of millions of customers. But product-market fit across such huge numbers of people with significantly different backgrounds, tastes, and preferences is truly very hard to achieve. Still, some of the more recent biggies have done it: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Apple, and Reese's peanut butter cups. Well, maybe Reese's isn't as big a company as the others, but it *is* sought out by millions!

But no matter the size, scope, or aspirations of our organizations, a *product-market fit* standard still holds great importance for us all. If we don't have product-market fit for our products or services, we will ultimately fail—we simply must pay attention to this practical principle. So, can we journey beyond Silicon Valley for illumination, to prove that product-market fit holds importance across other key areas of life?

Of course we can—we can confidently go to Jesus, who is actually the master of navigating product-market fit, and that navigation ranges from very large worldwide markets to each one-on-one relationship. Jesus accepted the challenge of offering a service to each person in the world, while knowing full well that the task would entail focus on the winningest big-market results being alongside heartbreaking individual misjudgments. Now, we may *subconsciously* know that Jesus is that Master of what we're calling product-market fit...but you and I might be very surprised just how true that is when we *consciously* unpack a lot of the actions, directives, and words of Jesus. Let's do that now with four very specific observations that have held up for thousands of years—and that will hold up for eternity.

First, God always has the largest target market in mind—the whole world! Don't take my word for this—take His Word! Matthew 28:19 ESV - "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." 2 Peter 3:9 - "The Lord is...not wishing that any should perish." John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only

Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God has never limited whoever believes and enters His Kingdom! That’s constantly the largest target market possible—everyone!

Second, for the born-again Christian—that is, the person who believes in Christ and Him crucified—well, *all* of that person’s sins are covered. Romans 8:1 - “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Now, in businesses, services and products are often called “offerings” to potential customers. Likewise, the gospel is the opportunity for sinners to accept the offering of Jesus at the Cross to cover *all* of our sins. Whoa! For sinners turned believers, Jesus fulfilled the perfect product-market fit!

Third, as for His offering’s deployment to all peoples, God “went international” from the very beginning—while staying precisely local! After His death but before His ascension, Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Now *that* is comprehensive, cutting across all lines that have been and always will be divisive for people not in Christ. The Apostle Paul practiced this very well—he was sure to raise up and maintain relationships with local elders and pastors like Timothy, so that local product-market fit could be fulfilled on a consistent basis—but he then also always focused afresh on more and more international growth, saying that “...I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.” (Romans 15:20)

Fourth, like every marketplace where important choices are being made, not everyone will avail themselves of even the most fitting solution. Yes, some do refuse and will continue to refuse to accept a great product or service offering altogether. Joshua knew this, imploring the faltering Israelites to choose between their faithful God and “the gods of the Amorites in whose land they were dwelling,” saying, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15) Likewise, *today* every person must choose to believe in the Lord, to respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. So, this reality is always key: when an organization reaches out to many, it will not strike a chord with every individual person, even if it seems clear that person needs the product or service. When that happens, just move on to others! When Jesus sent His disciples out, He was that kind of realist, saying, “...if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.” (Matthew 10:14)

What’s the anchor to this? God does not change His offering to match mistaken notions of what misguided critics say His product or service ought to be—He has fully provided what’s best-suited to serve his target market! Even to this day, people assume or propose that God does or should accept people based upon their relative goodness or works or behavior. But for us to receive God’s gift of salvation, we must accept it all on God’s terms—via grace by faith, based solely on Christ and Him crucified! It is only through our humbling acceptance—not by our dictating terms to God—that we can gain access to the unshakeable Kingdom of God. Yes, indeed, astute leaders in every vocation know that they cannot satisfy every person, so *they don’t morph their product or service offering to suit the misguided notions of detractors.*

Let’s recap! *God always has the largest target market in mind—the whole world! And with His offering on the Cross covering all sins, Jesus fulfilled the perfect product-market fit! God “went international” from the very beginning—while staying precisely local! Not everyone will avail themselves of even the most fitting solution, but God doesn’t morph His offering to suit misguided notions. Yes! The ideal product-market fit!*

Let’s tie it all together. Some digital era companies like Facebook and Google have mimicked some of the key supernatural dimensions of the Kingdom. And, yes, they achieved great product-market fit. But—better than any other person or organization—Jesus understood *then* and understands *now* how to forge and present the greatest product-market fit ever. Our privilege is to communicate that product-market fit to others—an offer better than anything Silicon Valley can ever offer! Pretty ironic, isn’t it? ... Very savvy businesspeople are smartly reasoning right into the timeless approaches of Jesus! How fun is that!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. In recent years, many retailers have discovered that their product-market fit has been severely challenged by astute digital players like Amazon. Does your workplace organization, whether business or nonprofit, fully understand, leverage, and protect its product-market fit in place today? If so, what are its processes to do so? If not, what thinking and processes need to be installed? Be specific.
  
2. As a believer, are you full of zeal for communicating the utterly unique, timeless fit for the sinner: “Christ and Him crucified?” If so, give examples of your demonstrating that zeal. If not, why not?
  
3. Is your church full of zeal for communicating the utterly unique, timeless fit for the sinner: “Christ and Him crucified?” If so, give examples of that zeal being demonstrated, both locally and internationally, as Jesus directed. If not, why not?