Iterating towards Bethlehem
(or, making the shift from a “packaged software” guy to a “hosted services” guy)

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About me.

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(Lifelong geek, English major, writer, product manager, consultant, business guy, blogger, amateur designer, spreadsheet geek, father of two.)
About the title of this deck.

W.B. Yeats, “Slouching Towards Bethlehem”

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
About Six Apart, Ltd.
Bust 1.0  
(circa 2002)

Web 2.0  
(January 2005)
Act 1
(Let’s rewind the clock a bit.)
Name that product!
“Packaged” software was truly packaged software

Anyone feeling nostalgic?
Software life cycle.

define > design > build > test > release

elapsed time: 12-24 months
(How about now? Feeling nostalgic yet?)
What was my job back then?
Getting everyone in the van.
Market Validation

Is the market real?
How big is the market?
Does the product fit the market?
What are the sales costs?
How we did it.

Find 30 prospects. Set up meetings.
Demo your idea / alpha / beta / product.
Ask questions. (Lots of questions.)
Take copious notes. Score your results.
Critical questions.

Do you have this problem?
Does this solve your problem?
How much would you pay for this?
Base hit or home run?
How would you spend $100 of our money?
We always learned new things.
Occasionally, we learned very new things.
### Table 1: Programming Task Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fill Id</th>
<th>Broker</th>
<th>Fill Date</th>
<th>Fill Time</th>
<th>Fill Quantity</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Get Stock</th>
<th>Bill Code</th>
<th>Other Fee</th>
<th>Ticket Change</th>
<th>FK Exec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>alex</td>
<td>06/02/2004</td>
<td>4:11:25 PM</td>
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<td>$65 0100 0009 0004</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$65 0100 0009 0004</td>
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<tr>
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<td>alex</td>
<td>06/02/2004</td>
<td>4:11:25 PM</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$65 0100 0009 0004</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>alex</td>
<td>06/02/2004</td>
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<td>60.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>alex</td>
<td>06/02/2004</td>
<td>4:11:25 PM</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>$65 0100 0009 0004</td>
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<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,800</td>
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</table>

### Table 2: Task Execution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Id</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Execution Time</th>
<th>Execution Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Task A</td>
<td>3:00 AM</td>
<td>01/01/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Task B</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>02/02/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Task C</td>
<td>1:00 AM</td>
<td>03/03/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Task D</td>
<td>12:00 AM</td>
<td>04/04/2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes
- Task execution times are approximate and may vary.
- Execution dates are subject to change based on resource availability.
Takeaway 1: If you can’t get 30 meetings...

...you don’t have a product.
Takeaway 2: Nothing’s better than seeing a user in context. 

(My GOD, *that’s* how they use our product?)
Let’s fast forward just a few years...

(New job: consultant.
Which is really the same as the old job.)
Act 2
(also known as Bubble 1.0!)

(Big money, big teams, big hardware, big dreams.)
“Let’s build a jukebox.”

(No van this time...instead, a trip to Vegas.)
Market research phase 1.

(DILO scenarios, experience architecture, lots of time in bars with beer.)
Market research phase 2.

(There are these guys with the keys...)
Time to non-functional prototype: 6 weeks.

(Goal: sell investors.)
Time to functional prototype: 12 weeks.

(Goal: sell distributors.)
Takeaway 3:
End users aren’t the only ones that matter.

(Can’t ignore the other actors in the value chain.)
Takeaway 4:
Prove it with a prototype.

Especially when you’re breaking new ground.
Takeaway 4 ½:
Turn it into a best seller.
Act 3
(also known as Bubble Web 2.0!)

(Everyone knock on wood three times.)
Let’s build a product.
Let’s build a product.
Let’s iterate a service.
We’ve learned the hard way.
July 4th weekend, 2005: TypePad 1.6

“Let’s change how users design their blogs. And how they’re rendered. And how users manage their communities. And most of the app’s JavaScript. I mean, hey! If it’s this big already, what’s one more thing? We get more bang out of QA, right?”
What went wrong that weekend scarred everyone involved.

(“Dude, you just had to be there.”)
We didn’t learn right away, though.

We had to iterate to iterate.
What’s the right periodicity?

- One month
- Three weeks
- One week

A release every two weeks
Software life cycle.

define > design > build > test > release

elapsed time: 12-24 months
(I had to use some of the new fancy clipart in Office 2007.)
How we make it work.

Roadmap and schedule on the wiki.
  Lightweight specs.
  Living in FogBugz.
  Iterating.
  Willingness to let go.
Simplify releases.

Infrastructure focused v. feature focused.
Let everyone be their own hero.

*-athon.
But what about the product management stuff?
Know your market.

(The 15,000 readers of TechCrunch are not a market.)
(What we’re doing.)
Make the customer part of the team.

The whole team sees the $$ metrics.
Support staff and support ticket DB.
Motivation, feature and usability research.
Eating our own dogfood.
(And it doesn’t hurt that we’re in the megaphone business.)
2. What is your age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 24</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 60</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 206

3. General attributes

3. How important were each of these attributes in your decision to choose a blog?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not very Important</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Response Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>66% (133)</td>
<td>23% (48)</td>
<td>5% (10)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-known industry leader</td>
<td>10% (21)</td>
<td>31% (63)</td>
<td>31% (63)</td>
<td>19% (39)</td>
<td>7% (15)</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>32% (65)</td>
<td>41% (82)</td>
<td>21% (42)</td>
<td>4% (9)</td>
<td>1% (2)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionality</td>
<td>65% (131)</td>
<td>32% (65)</td>
<td>2% (4)</td>
<td>0% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of use</td>
<td>69% (139)</td>
<td>26% (52)</td>
<td>4% (9)</td>
<td>0% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 201

4. TypePad attributes

4. Tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Response Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TypePad is a reliable and trusted hosted service</td>
<td>45% (89)</td>
<td>43% (85)</td>
<td>10% (19)</td>
<td>2% (3)</td>
<td>1% (2)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TypePad has powerful functionality</td>
<td>24% (48)</td>
<td>53% (105)</td>
<td>19% (38)</td>
<td>2% (4)</td>
<td>2% (2)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TypePad has professionally designed templates</td>
<td>26% (53)</td>
<td>49% (98)</td>
<td>17% (34)</td>
<td>5% (10)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TypePad is worth paying for</td>
<td>35% (70)</td>
<td>52% (102)</td>
<td>9% (17)</td>
<td>2% (5)</td>
<td>2% (4)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TypePad is constantly offering new features &amp; functionality</td>
<td>16% (36)</td>
<td>46% (91)</td>
<td>31% (62)</td>
<td>4% (7)</td>
<td>1% (2)</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Who doesn’t like charts?)
(Google AdWords keyword performance report redacted.)
Beware the vocal minority.

(1% <> 99%)
LJ at OSCON
Some of the best and brightest minds of the Open Source world (the stuff that makes LJ tick!) are gathering in Portland, OR, this week for a yearly get together. Six Apart is sending a large contingent to OSCON, including @crucially, @whitaker, @anildash, @xb95, @btrott, @bulknews, @markpasc, @byrnerese, @teknikill, and @bschoate. They're giving several talks including LiveJournal's Secret Spinoffs, Trying to Suck Less, and Stump the Band. Being open source means that the guts that make LiveJournal go are totally free for anybody to use, so they help power sites like Wikipedia, Craigslist, DeadJournal, Slashdot, and dozens more.

August is going to be hott
Stay tuned for some exciting news next month. We'll be launching LJ Talk, LiveJournal's own instant messaging service, in the first part of August. You may have heard a little about it already, and there will be even more discussion during OSCON since LJ Talk is a Jabber implementation. You can read the more technical stuff here, or just wait a few weeks until it's ready to launch with some quick and clear instructions as well as an LJ Talk client with powerful voice and chat capabilities. We've been testing it and we're all already addicted!

(2028 Comment: [Comment on this])
So what’s my job now?
Getting everyone in the van.
Takeaway 5: It’s the same old story.

Is the market real?
How big is the market?
Does the product fit the market?
What are the sales costs?
The more things change, the more things stay the same.

(Except things are faster. And cheaper.)
Still awake?

(Q&A)
Ping me.

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