

**20.08.2016**

**Ted Talks**

**Length: 7:20**

**Title: What can we learn from shortcuts? | Tom Hulme**

**URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9B8PmUR64U>**

0:10 - [applause]

Tom Humle:

When we're designing new products, services or businesses, the only time you'll know if they're any good - if the designs are good, is to see how they are used. In the real world, in context. I'm reminded of that every time I walk past Highbury Fields, in North London. It is absolutely beautiful, there is big open green space, there's Georgian buildings around the side... but then there is this mud track that cuts across the middle. People clearly don't want to walk all the way around the edge. Instead, they want to take the shortcut, and that shortcut is self-reinforcing. Now this short-cut, is called the desire path. And it is often the path of least resistance. And I find them fascinating because they're often at the point where design and user experience diverge.

Now at this point I should apologize because you guys are going to see these everywhere. But today I am going to pick three I find interesting and share what actually it reminds me about launching new products and services. So the first is in the capital city of Brazil: Brasília. And it reminds me that sometimes you have to just focus on designing for a real need, at low friction. Brasília is fascinating, it was designed by Niemeyer in the 50's. It was the golden age of flying, so he laid it out like a plane as you can see there. Slightly worryingly put most of the important government buildings in the cockpit. But if you zoom in to the very center of Brasília, just where the point is there, you will see it is littered with desire paths. They are absolutely everywhere. Now, they thought that they had future-proofed this design; they thought in the future we would not need to walk anywhere - we would be able to drive. So it was little need for walkways or pavements. But as you can see there is a real need. These are very dangerous desire paths. If we just pick one in the middle, you can see across 15 layers of traffic. It will not surprise you guys that Brasília has five times the pedestrian accident rate of your average U.S. city. People are resourceful, they will always find the low friction route, to save money, save time.

Not all these desire paths are dangerous. I was reminded flying here when I was in Heathrow, and many get frustrated when we are confronted with the obligatory walk through duty free. It was amazing to me how many people refused to take the long misandric path to the left, and just cut through to the right. Cut through the desire path. Now the question that is interesting is what do designers think when they see our behaviour here? They think we are stupid, they think we are lazy, or do they accept that this is the only truth? This is their port product. We are effectively co-designing their product! So our job is to design for real needs at low friction. Because if you don't, the customer will anyway.

The second desire path I wanted to share is at the university of California. And it reminds me that sometimes the best way to come up with a great design is just to launch it. Now, university campuses are fantastic for spotting desire paths, I think it is because the students are always late and they are pretty smart. So they are dashing to lectures, they will always find the shortcut. And the designers here knew that so that they built the buildings and then they waited a few months for the paths to form. They then paved them. Incredibly smart approach. In fact, often just launching the straw-man of a service can teach you what people really want. For example, Er Mure in Boston knew he wanted to open a restaurant, but where should it be? What should the menu be? He launched a service, in this case a food truck, and he changed the location each day, he would write a different menu on a side in a whiteboard marker to figure out what people wanted. He now has a chain of restaurants. So it can be incredibly efficient, to launch something to spot the desire paths.

The third and final desire path I wanted to share with you is the UNIH (U.S. National Institute of Health). It reminds me that the world is in flux, and we have to respond to those changes. So as you will guess, this is a hospital. I have marked for you on the left the oncology department. And the patients would usually stay at hotels down on the bottom right. Now, this was a patient-centered organization so they laid on cars for the patients. But what they realized when they started offering chemotherapy, is that patients rarely wanted to get in cars. They were too nauseous. And so they would walk back to their hotels, and this desire path that you see diagonally formed. The patients even called it the "chemo-trail". Now, when the hospital saw this originally they tried to lay turf back over it, ignore it. But after a while they realized it was an important need they were meeting for their patients - so they paved it.

I think our job is often to pave these emerging desire paths. If we look back at the one in North London again, that desire path has not always been there. The reason it has sprang up is that people were travelling to the mighty arsenal football club stadium on game days, from the underground station you see on the bottom right. So you see the desire path, if we just wind the clock back a few years when the stadium was being constructed - there is no desire path. So our job is to watch for these desire paths emerging. And where appropriate - pave them. As someone did here. Someone installed a barrier, people started walking across and round the bottom as you see, and they paved it. But I think this is a wonderful reminder as well that actually the world is in flux, it is constantly changing. Because if you look at the top of this image, there is another desire path forming.

So these three desire paths remind me that we need to design for real human needs. I think empathy for what your customers want is probably the biggest leading indicator of business success. Design for real needs, and design them in low friction. Because if you do not offer them in low friction, someone else will. Often the customer. Secondly, often the best way to learn what people really want is to launch your service. The answer is rarely inside the building, get out there and see what people really want. And finally, in part because of technology, the world is incredibly flux at the moment, it is changing constantly. These desired paths are going to spring out faster than ever, our job is to pick the appropriate ones and pave over them. Thank you very

7:15 - [applause]