

Making safe product bets with data

Based on content presented by Jaime DeLanghe,
Director of Product at Slack

Grow your product with data

Slack is well known for “dogfooding”— aka being avid users of their own products. In their early days, dogfooding was a great way for their team to understand the needs of their users and create new features. At the time, most of Slack’s customers were similar to Slack itself—small tech companies that worked asynchronously.

But as Slack grew, their users became more diverse. The company found they weren’t able to use themselves for user research. Now they take a slower, more deliberate data-driven approach to product development, which makes rollouts more successful.

Here’s what you need to know about Jaime DeLanghe’s approach to using data in product development.

Four rules for using data in product development

Follow Jaime’s four rules carefully to make safer bets with your product development data.

1. USE DATA AT EVERY STEP.

Once your customer base diversifies so much that you can’t easily understand everyone, it’s time to bring data into every step of your product-development process.

Here’s where Slack gets its data from at every step:

- **Product discovery:** Dashboards, user surveys, and sales feedback
- **Growth hypothesis:** Industry research, competitor research, internal analytics
- **Design explorations:** Competitive research and internal reviews
- **Validation:** A/B testing, usability research, internal review, and quality assurance data
- **Product launch:** Product analytics, dashboards, and user feedback

That is a lot of data and understanding all of it will take time, but that’s exactly the point. Jaime stresses that slower is better when it comes to putting new features into production. You don’t want to get it wrong.

“We’re pretty committed to the antithesis of the Silicon Valley move fast and break things ethos.”

- Jaime DeLanghe

2. ALWAYS CREATE A HYPOTHESIS.

Before you make changes to your product, test your hypothesis. You need to test if your intuition is correct. If you make changes to the product without any data, there's a chance your product improvements will miss the mark.

Slack heard from users that their search function wasn't helpful. After they looked at the data, they realized that users were only using one feature of the search function. Users ignored almost all the other features involved with search. Slack hypothesized that their search UI was too complex.

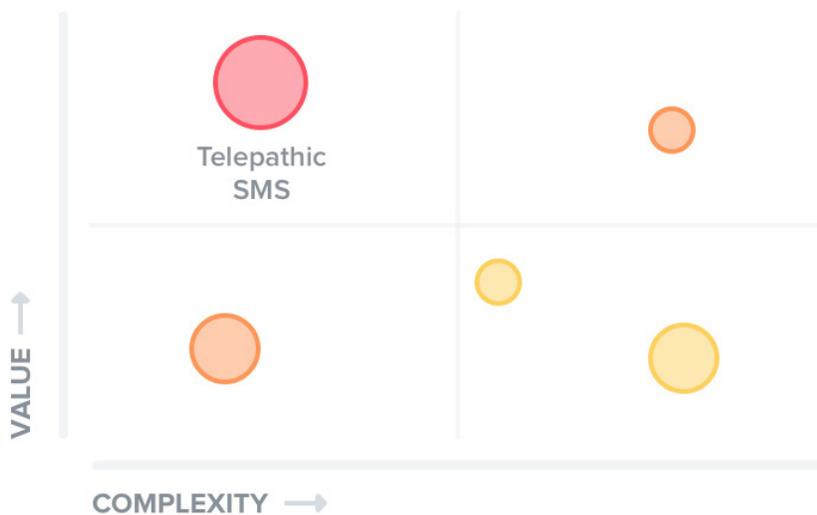
They could have put what they thought was a simpler UI search function into production, but would it meet the customer needs? Would it be an unused change? They needed to be sure that a simpler UI would make the search function more useful. To test that, Slack used a process of elimination. The company removed one feature from their search function at a time.

When a feature was removed, they monitored how it changed the usage of the search function. After removing multiple features, their hypothesis was confirmed that their search UI was too complex, and they were able to identify where.

3. PRIORITIZE YOUR DATA.

When you collect data at every step of the product development process, you're left with a lot of data. That can make it hard to decide what to work on first. Jaime recommends using machine learning to help make sense of your data.

Use a product prioritization matrix. The matrix will help you understand what features are most important, but also the easiest for your team to build. You'll do this by giving each product feature a score based on two variables: value and complexity.



Once you've done that, plot each feature on a chart, like the one above. Then, start building the least complex, most valuable features first. This will help your team get a few quick wins that make a measurable difference for your product.

4. ROLL OUT THE PRODUCT IN STAGES.

When you're finally ready to roll out your product improvement, don't send it to all of your users at once without warning.

Instead, send it to a small number of users. If you get positive feedback, send it to a larger set of users. If everything still looks good, then you can do a full rollout. If you receive negative feedback, you might need to restart the process and try a different solution.

Slack releases product improvements to just 5% of their users at first. If something goes wrong with the rollout at this stage, it will affect only a small number of users.

If everything looks good, Slack expands the release to half of their customers. Once the company has positive feedback, they'll roll out the product improvement to all of their customers, with enterprise customers being the last to receive the release.

How Segment can help

Segment is built to help with integrations that enable data collection and analysis, a key piece of Jaime's method.

Start by looking through our [integrations catalog](#) to find the analytics tools you'll need. You'll also need the following:

- An A/B testing tool
- A customer success tool to help you gather feedback
- A feature flagging tool to help you test different features
- A data warehouse to store all of the data you'll be collecting
- A Business Intelligence tool to help you analyze all of your data

In addition to those essentials, you might also want to check out a survey tool to gather feedback, and a heat mapping or session recording tool that will show you how users engage with your product.

Keep reading to learn more

- [The Growth Stacks of 2019](#)
- [Reducing a 40% Drag on Your Business: How Houseparty Experiments](#)
- [We Test in Production. You Should Too.](#)
- [5 Advanced Testing Techniques in Go](#)