QD505x Platform Strategy for Business

Instructor: Marshall Van Alstyne
Learning Facilitator: Brad Kyungmin Lee
Learning Facilitator: Jason Marmillion

Course Overview:

Understanding how business platforms start, grow, and compete can help entrepreneurs and executives thrive in modern economies. The rules of platform firms operate differently from those of product firms. Success stories such as Apple, Alibaba, Amazon, Facebook, Google and Uber operate as open ecosystems that match consumers with goods and services that they don't necessarily produce themselves. Platforms gain value and market share from network effects. They innovate openly using ideas from others. They monetize differently, often giving away free content and services. Instead of creating barriers to entry, they invite ecosystem partners to help grow their ecosystems but under terms that they control.

Platforms are economically important and widely observed in modern economies. They are transforming the automotive, banking, education, energy, healthcare, media, and technology industries. Yet, in creating strategies for platform markets, managers often rely on assumptions that apply to businesses without network effects. As a result, they make decisions in pricing, supply chains, product design, and strategy that work badly given the changing economics of their industries.

What's in it for Me?

This course will help you understand these dynamics and build your own platforms. It is aimed at people looking to start platforms companies or convert their products to a platform business model. We'll challenge you to think differently about pricing, innovation, control, and strategy. This course will combine real-world examples with explanatory theory. News and illustrations will emphasize practical approaches and draw from stories of books, enterprise software, exchange markets, Internet-of-Things, shoes, social networks, spices, software, and even tractors.

By the End of This Course, You will be able to:

- Define platform businesses and predict where they might arise
- Understand the basics of platform architecture, purpose, and design
- Solve the monetization problem, learn how traditional pricing models break down in the context of platforms, and design free pricing strategies that are profitable.
- Address transition barriers that firms face in trying to organize themselves as platforms. Anticipate mental model misconceptions from using a product perspective.

- Develop strategies for launching new platforms when critical mass is important.
- Learn how to open a business model
- Recognize and compete in winner-take-all markets. Predict unexpected sources of competition.

This course is designed to prepare you to operate effectively in platform environments by providing frameworks and theory to analyze and manage existing businesses and to develop launch strategies for new ventures. The diversity of industry coverage will provide a firm grounding across a variety of industries and a mix of business functions.

Course Faculty:

Marshall Van Alstyne (@InfoEcon) is coauthor of the international bestseller **Platform Revolution**. He is one of the world's experts on network business models and is Everett Lord Distinguished Scholar at Boston University's Questrom School of Business. He is a frequent speaker, board level advisor, and consultant to startups and global firms. His research has received half a dozen academic awards and appeared in journals such as *Science*, *Nature* and *Harvard Business Review*. Interviews appear regularly across *Bloomberg*, The *Economist*, The *New York Times*, The *Wall Street Journal* and *National Public Radio*. He studied computer science at Yale and information technology at MIT. He holds multiple patents; was among the first to measure the dollar value of social networks, and his theories of network businesses are taught worldwide. In addition to his academic interests, he loves a wife, two sons, dogs, exercise, travel, and questions of governance.

Learning Facilitator:

Brad Lee is a doctoral student at Boston University's Questrom School of Business. His research interests include business model design and operations strategy with a focus on two-sided markets. Before he joined the program, Brad worked as a consultant at a management consulting firm and an investment analyst at a hedge fund in Boston area mainly concentrating on high-tech and retail companies. While back in school, he continues helping a number of startups to build their business models and design processes. He holds a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from Purdue University and a M.S. in Mathematical Finance from Boston University. In his free time, he likes golf, watching movies, and playing with his little baby girl.

Jason Marmillion is a senior consultant at ECSI, a leading strategy and innovation consulting firm designated by Thinkers 50 as one of the top firms to watch. He earned his MBA at Boston University, and studied Mathematics as an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Arlington. Apart from his work, Jason loves sports (both watching and playing,) reading, cooking, and visiting new places.

Course Material

- Required: Online Articles – All provided Free
- Six Chapters of **Platform Revolution** (Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary) – Free
- Additional readings will be posted to the course resource site.

Learners, both in the audit and in the verified track are only responsible for material posted on the course website. All graded questions draw exclusively from the posted set of material.

The only required chapters of **Platform Revolution** are 2, 3, 5 & 6. Chapters 1 & 10 are optional. Registration provides free access to all six chapters to both auditors and verified learners. The full book, however, contains twelve chapters. Six chapters will not be covered in this short course. If you would like the remaining chapters, you may purchase the whole book here or at any standard bookseller.

Prerequisites

Some grounding in economic principles of supply and demand is recommended but not required.

Course Outline

Topic	Estimated Effort	Release Date
1) Changing Foundations	2-4 hours	Sept. 18, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
2) Design Elements & Architecture	4-6 hours	Sept. 25, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
3) Launch & Transition	4-6 hours	Oct. 2, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
4) Monetization	4-6 hours	Oct. 9, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
5) Open vs. Closed	4-6 hours	Oct. 16, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
6) Strategy	4-6 hours	Oct. 23, 2017 (UTC 19:00)

We attribute the variation in effort (4-8 hours) to two factors: (i) Verified learners receive additional content for their proctored final exam, and (ii) Learners without adequate preparation might need to fill gaps in their knowledge by working through optional links provided in this course.

Grading:

Participation on Online Discussion	15%
Multiple Choice Quizzes	30%
Peer Graded Open Responses	20%
Final Exam	35%

For those of you who are taking the class for a "Verified Certificate," a minimum grade of 67% is required to pass.

Open Response Assessment (ORA) Deadlines

ORA	Response Due Date/ Start Peer Grading	Complete Peer Grading by…
Part 2		
1	Oct. 2, 2017 (UTC 19:00)	Oct. 9, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
Part 5		
1	Oct. 23, 2017 (UTC 19:00)	Oct. 30, 2017 (UTC 19:00)

Final Exam Deadlines

Final exam (Audit learners) & Proctored exam (Verified learners)		
Track	Final exam	Assessment Due Date
Audit learners	Multiple Choice Questions	Oct. 30, 2017 (UTC 19:00)
Verified learners	Multiple Choice Questions	Oct. 30, 2017 (UTC 19:00)

Discussion Forum Guidelines

Throughout this course, you should post your own ideas and also comment on the posts of other learners. Discussion forums are meant to promote healthy interaction among learners. We encourage you to ask questions, share experiences, and offer resources. Explore various posts and contribute to a lively discussion forum community!

To aid in this goal, we ask that you do not post comments that are derogatory, defamatory, or in any way attack any member of our community. Be courteous and show the same respect you hope to receive. Moderators will delete posts that are rude, inappropriate, or off-topic. We also ask that you do not post answers to assessment questions anywhere. You may discuss how to approach a problem or help other learners who may have questions, but please do not directly provide answers. Commenters who repeatedly abuse this public forum will be removed from the course.

We do encourage course participants to answer questions posed by other learners. Course staff may purposefully refrain from answering immediately in order to encourage peer discussion.

Additionally, there is a feature in the discussion forums that allows you to select from two post types: Question and Discussion. The "Question" type is meant for specific issues with the platform or course content. The "Discussion" type is meant to share ideas and start a conversation.

Please read the edX Learner Guide for more information about Participating in Course Discussions.

FAQ

Q: Should I email the professor or any persons involved with this course directly?
A: No. If you feel the need to contact the course staff involved in this course, please post a question in the discussion forum. You will also have the opportunity to provide course feedback in the Course Evaluation. Course related emails to the instructor's personal emails or social media sites will not be answered.

Q: Do I need to buy any personal materials to take this course?
A: No. You do not need to purchase textbooks or any materials to aid you in completing the course. The material within the course website should be sufficient.

Q: I've never taken an edX course before and this is confusing. What do I do?
A: For further information, please visit the [demo edX course](#).

Q: I found a mistake in the course. Where do I report it?
A: To report an error or make suggestions, please post to the discussion forum and provide feedback in the Course Evaluation.

Honor Code

By enrolling in a course on edX, you are joining a special worldwide community of learners who have agreed to the Honor Code below.

edX Honor Code Pledge

By enrolling in an edX course, you have agreed to:
● Complete all tests and assignments on your own, unless collaboration on an assignment is explicitly permitted. You will not submit the work of any other person.
● Maintain only one user account and not let anyone else use your username and/or password.
● Not engage in any activity that would dishonestly improve your results, or improve or hurt the results of others.
● Not post answers to problems that are being used to assess learner performance.

Plagiarism

Simple rule: don't do it. Although we encourage study groups and wide ranging research, it's simply part of academic integrity to claim credit only your own unique contribution. Real people have received a failing grade for plagiarism. If in doubt, cite references for ideas and always quote text directly lifted from another document.

Terms of Service

For further information, please review the [edX Terms of Service](#).