

Rapid Feedback and the America's Cup

by Mike Cohn • 1 Comments

It's summer and I've been thinking about sailing. I didn't get to do any this summer, but I can still think about it. Thinking about sailing reminded me of the 1995 America's Cup race between the US and New Zealand. That race is a great illustration of the importance of both getting close to our customers and of rapid feedback.

To design their boat, Team New Zealand made use of software that would allow them to simulate the impact of various design changes on the speed of the boat. They evaluated thousands of design decisions. Each day the simulations were run on a small network that was located a few feet from the dock. To further evaluate designs, Team New Zealand made two boats and each day would alter one with a design change to be evaluated. The two boats then raced each other to assess the impact of the design change.

By contrast, the U.S. boat had been designed and tested using massive supercomputers. But they were located hundreds of miles from the dock. This created significant feedback delays. Feedback was also slowed because the team had only a single boat on which to test changes.

Getting close to their customer and using rapid feedback cycles led to Team New Zealand winning the America's Cup for the first time. If you are not cycling ideas past your customers quickly enough to get rapid feedback, consider moving closer to the dock.



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