START WITH THE PLATFORM:
From Platform Thinking to Platform Engineering

When Steve Jobs launched the app store in 2008, the market went "fragmental." He had already hacked music in 2001 *(why not just sell music by the note?)* and now his mission was to downsize software into bite-sized applets, a confirmation of the aft-bitten Apple logo reminiscent of original sin at the fall of Eden.

His version of digital media was a mere transposition of analog music. *Was there something truly magical about listening to 10K songs whenever you want to?* (At least the Walkman launched with radio.) More egregiously, itunes might best be described by what it isn't: it's not a bandwidth medium; it's not curated discographies; it's not music video culture. It launched as a online sales rack, with à la carte music singles, for a proprietary unibutton jukebox.

The same retail thesis was applied to apps. Yet there's so much utility beyond pay and play buttons, if you focus on interaction–first design, and then support it with technology. *(One can imagine a scenario where users build their own superapp from killer modules versus hyper-fragmentation.)* What I'm describing, Chaudary in Platform Revolution calls the "platform gap." In paraphrase: an unfulfilled amount of user value, leaving money on the table, as a consequence of a digital hacking strategy that foregrounds pipeline over platform.

Nevertheless, the most valuable companies in the world have one thing in common: they are platform ecosystems. As of 2024, Apple ($391B), Alphabet ($350B), Amazon ($638B), Microsoft ($245B) and Meta ($165B), have a combined annual revenue of $1.789 trillion, hosting multiple business models, that each service multisided users, through multiple product or service lines, which each participate in revenue creation.

The persistence of the ecosystem model defines a shift in market dynamics that can be described as a pivot from pipes to platforms, a paradigm shift under which value creation is driven not by supply chain management of a product from producer to consumer (iTunes music singles), but instead the management of data, technologies, and networks that maximize the value of user interactions (Spotify, the Apple Music pivot, etc.).

Since the global pandemic new business applications have seen a net increase (+25.7% in 2020, +22.7% in 2021, -7.4% in 2022, +8.7% in 2023). But since 2021, new unicorn creation has only grown fractionally (~803 in 2021, +1100 mid-2021, ~1248 by May 2024, and ~1260 by April 2025). Driving factors to stimulate entrepreneurship include job loss and shifts in consumer behavior, which triggered investment into demand driven remote work tools and digital commerce. Other factors include stimulus funding, a surplus of unbroken time and 24/7 networked mindshare. But why should the conditions for increased entrepreneurship be hinged on force majeure and black swan externalities?

Today, the U.S. has more than 82,000 active startups (independent venture scaled companies), of which 10-20% will survive early stage, and only one third of 1% will scale into billion dollar unicorns. Of the incumbent big tech firms an estimated 6-14% of annual revenue is reinvested in R&D, with Meta spending $38B (~12B per year from 2019-22) on it's Metaverse bet. Considering a 10% R&D budget for Meta, $16.5B from $165B in revenue, and a SAM/SOM of ~5-20%, or ~$5.5B, there is a market size of at least five times that size for B1ix to develop new products and platforms per incumbent market space (see IP Models), with B1ix leveraging unmined insights, sourced from intrinsic data capable of defining new product ecologies on top of legacy business models.

EXAMPLE: *Twitter/X has a slashed valuation of $15-$20B. It invests $10M to get to an MVP, with working business model. On an accelerated runway (6-9 months), Twitter acquires at $100M on a 4 year term. As Twitter/X's valuation goes up or down, the installment deal travels on a 10-1X cap-n-floor. Using FVP, a 4 year buyout starts at $400M (time-based multiples mitigate scalable market performance and valuation).*

Of course, dynamics have shifted since the AI race, with Meta planning up to $65B in capex for AI infrastructure, and xAI spending as much as $1B per month to broaden its data center training and inference capabilities. But the top of the AI stack application layer is still up for grabs. The particular experiences that will earn user favor exceed the current lurch into gen AI capabilities. And the copycat slice-of-the-pie mentally is endemic to half-brained engineers, who don't have a deep thinking apparatus like B1ix to think ahead of market trends and carve out spaces that solve unique problems, especially in consumer-facing sectors.

While I have envisioned specific product ecologies for Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft, Apple and Amazon, each incumbents with underdeveloped market spaces, this may no longer be the best strategy to collaborate with everyone during an AI war. Instead, it may better to build with a partner in mind, in particular an underdog, Twitter/X, which from my own investment in ideation has enormous market potential, and collateral ability to solve large social problems.

We are in the vestibule of an age that requires we carefully ask what problems we endeavor to solve with technology. Just as AI requires a prompt engineer to optimize output, the "platform engineer" can optimize a startup by understanding not just the user, but the broader ecosystem and market dynamics at play.

This two-sided coin, design thinking and platform thinking, can model highly aggregated market opportunities, bringing new platform efficiencies to VC driven dynamics. Rooted in general web technologies, media technology, and learning technologies, B1ix engineers hidden value from unexploited data, synthesized from research using the big idea methodology – an opportunity that leverages the creative founder to build value from idea to vision, and from IP to IT and beyond.