

THE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AUTHORITY

PRAGMATIC MARKETER

SPRING 2017



**WHERE DOES
PRODUCT END AND
BRAND BEGIN?**

**BRANDING AND LEAD
GENERATION:
BATTLE OR
BALANCING ACT?**

**BRANDING
YOURSELF AS A
PRODUCT**

**BRANDING:
THE OTHER HALF OF
YOUR GO-TO-MARKET
JOURNEY**

THE BRAND ISSUE

PEOPLE ASK ME WHY I WORK AT PRAGMATIC MARKETING. The answer is simple. In marketing there is nothing better than working for a brand that you fully believe in. And there are just two brands that I'm completely loyal to and passionate about: Diet Coke and Pragmatic Marketing. Not wanting to live in Atlanta, the choice seemed obvious.

My feelings about the Pragmatic Marketing brand meant I moved my entire extended family to a new state I'd only ever even visited once. That's brand power.

So what kind of power does your brand have? How do people feel about it, describe it to others, interact with it? And, what can you do to strengthen your brand and its impact? Those questions and more are tackled in this issue of *Pragmatic Marketer*.

But we don't just talk about the branding of your products, we also talk about the branding of you. Our own Kirsten Butzow digs into how you can use product management best practices to improve your personal brand and career.

We're also launching "Pragmatic Implementation," a new column that is an extension of our brand promise to deliver practical, actionable training and best practices that you can implement immediately. Be sure to read this issue's piece from Stacey Weber on using market facts to change your corporate culture and check back in future issues as we provide detailed implementation tips, case studies and more.

Happy reading.



Rebecca Kalogeris
Editorial Director
editor@pragmaticmarketing.com



CEO/PRESIDENT

Jim Foxworthy

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Rebecca Kalogeris

EDITOR

Lisa Sorg-Friedman

ART DIRECTOR

Norman Wong

DIGITAL CONTENT

Kristin Burkhart

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Sarah Mitchell

Pragmatic Marketer™

8910 E. Raintree Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85260

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BRAND

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Erin Young

Founder and principal user experience architect at Slide UX

Q: HOW DID YOU BECOME A UX DESIGNER?

A: I studied marketing as an undergrad, and my first full-time role was as a web producer. I became fascinated with the relationship between strategic planning and the analytics that our work produced. I saw that small changes to the UX could produce immediate, measureable changes to how a user's experience performed against our goals. I wanted to focus on planning those good user experiences, which meant understanding usability and the quantitative ways companies measured the success of their digital projects.

Q: WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

A: After working as a web producer, I joined an advertising agency as an information architect and observed how bigger brands tackled UX. It soon became clear that I wanted to form my own business and work with clients who not only focused on creating strong foundations for their UX strategies, but who also wanted to measure those strategies and iterate upon them.

I started in a cautious, risk-averse way with contract work in 2010. As my reputation grew, so did demand, and I founded Slide UX in 2012.

Q: WHAT KIND OF CUSTOMERS DO YOU WORK WITH AND HOW DO YOU GENERALLY ENGAGE THEM?

A: We like to work with smart clients who know what their success looks like, and most of our clients are in product management or product marketing.

We specialize in taking client ideas and visions and untangling them to create something that's organized and sensible for the end user. Our goal is to form user experiences that address what users want to do, while ensuring that users move in the direction of what the organization wants to accomplish.

To start, we look at what research the organization has available for us to leverage and what research we'll need to conduct. For example, have they done stakeholder conversations, individual interviews, usability interviews, focus groups or surveys?

Q: WHAT ARE SOME PROBLEMS YOU HELP CUSTOMERS SOLVE?

A: Many prospective clients reach out to us because something needs to be simplified. Often, feedback indicates that a product in the market is confusing and doesn't effectively serve the organization.

Another reason they reach out is to untangle something. Perhaps it's a collection of ideas that need to be organized into a potential product blueprint. We can add clarity and definition to user stories or find examples and other interfaces that help them sidestep potential quagmires in the design process. Sometimes, even just sketching, whiteboarding and sticky-noting can help articulate an idea so it can be organized and worked on.

After doing the first phase or the first couple of activities, we may end up with research that takes the project in a different direction than we initially planned. Often those departures end up being big wins for our clients because they help them move closer to understanding what they need to do to achieve their vision.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU WISH PRODUCT TEAMS KNEW ABOUT WORKING WITH UX DESIGNERS?

A: One of my key tips for working with designers is to explain why, instead of simply saying that something doesn't work. Understanding why something is being done empowers people and encourages them to identify better solutions to the problem.

Another thing to remember is that although UX designers advocate for users, they don't have a crystal ball for telling you what your target market thinks. They need to connect with real users to develop an understanding of the end user, and you can support that by allowing time and budget for it in your projects.

Finally, it's important for your organization to derive maximum benefit from the designer's time. People don't always realize that when a designer works 40 hours a week on your project, you need to be available for meetings, requirements-gathering or just raw-material collection. You're wasting time if you can't provide prompt and detailed answers to questions, dig up material that the designer may not have access to, provide thorough reviews, or invest in setting clear boundaries for defining design activities.

Understanding why something is being done empowers people and encourages them to identify better solutions to the problem.



TRAVEL TIPS FOR ROAD WARRIORS

Awesome Austin

With an unofficial motto of "Keep Austin Weird," the Texas state capital is one of the country's fastest-growing metro areas, and the self-styled "Live Music Capital of the World." Considering there are almost 2,000 bands and artists in the city, and 200 live music venues, there is no excuse for being bored.

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library | lbjlibrary.org

Dedicated to the 36th President of the United States, the library features a replica of the Oval Office during Lyndon Johnson's tenure, his presidential limousine, and the Social Justice Gallery, which highlights legislation passed by LBJ, including the Civil Rights Act, consumer protection laws, Medicare and more.

Sixth Street | 6street.com

One of Austin's most iconic streets, Sixth Street is the embodiment of what makes the city the "Live Music Capital of the World." A portion of Sixth Street known as "Dirty Sixth" is one of Austin's leading tourism drivers, resplendent with bars, clubs, music venues and shopping destinations.

Rainey Street | raineystreetbars.com

If college kids and tourists aren't your cup of tea (or pint of beer), locals suggest bypassing the more highly visible Sixth Street scene and heading over to Rainey Street. The converted bungalows boast a variety of bars, live music and eats, perfect for more grown-up palates.

The Oasis on Lake Travis | oasis-austin.com

It may be touristy, but there's a reason why this four-story restaurant that seats 2,500 people and features two live music venues attracts the crowds: the beautiful sunsets on Lake Travis.

Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail and Boardwalk at Lady Bird Lake | austintexas.gov

The city's most recognized and popular recreational area, the 10-mile trail in the heart of Austin is open to runners, walkers and cyclists. The trail borders Lady Bird Lake and connects with the lake's 7,250-foot boardwalk.

Zilker Botanical Garden | zilker garden.org

Often called "the jewel in the heart of Austin," the 26-acre botanical garden features rose, herb and Japanese gardens interconnected with streams, waterfalls and koi-filled ponds. Don't miss the Hartman Prehistoric Garden, which recreates a local dinosaur habitat.

South Congress Bridge Bats | batsinaustin.com

The Congress Avenue Bridge is home to the largest bat colony in North America. During peak season you can watch the city's 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats fly out from underneath the bridge at dusk. ▼



Austin Barbecue

There are as many opinions about Austin's best barbecue as there are barbecue joints. With that caveat in mind, here are four options to tantalize your taste buds:

La Barbecue | labarbecue.com

This no-frills barbecue joint is known for its handmade sausage, beef ribs and brisket. You can avoid the line by pre-ordering five days in advance. But if you do get caught in line, there's always free beer. Plus, there's live music every Saturday and Sunday.

Stubb's Bar-B-Q | stubbbsaustin.com

With three locations, Stubb's has been a Texas institution since the original restaurant opened in Lubbock in 1968. Check out the Sunday Gospel Brunch, an Austin mainstay that features live gospel music and a buffet that includes Southern-style grits, migas (a scrambled egg dish with fried, chopped corn tortillas), fried catfish and BBQ brisket.

Franklin Barbecue | franklinbarbecue.com

Chef Aaron Franklin earned the 2015 James Beard Award for "Best Chef: Southwest." His lunch-only restaurant routinely has waits of up to five hours, so eating here requires planning and patience.

Micklethwait Craft Meats | craftmeatsaustin.com

Offerings change daily but include sausage, beef ribs, pulled pork and homemade bread. There's even brisket Frito pie, lemon poppy seed coleslaw and moon pies for dessert.





2017 PRAGMATIC MARKETING

INSTRUCTOR NOTABLES

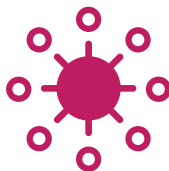


EXPERIENCE

Pragmatic Marketing instructors must meet several criteria before they join the team ▼



Have held multiple executive-level roles in marketing and product management.



Be a Pragmatic Marketing alumnus and have implemented the techniques we teach at multiple companies.



Be a compelling public speaker, able to motivate and inspire teams.

COLLECTIVELY, THE PRAGMATIC MARKETING INSTRUCTOR TEAM REPRESENTS ▼

308

Years of Experience

223

Years of Experience in Product and Marketing

155

Years of Executive/VP Experience

58

Years of Teaching Experience

20

Years of Software Development and Engineering Experience



INDUSTRY COVERAGE

The Pragmatic Marketing instructor team has worked in a variety of industries, including ▼

BIG DATA • CONSTRUCTION • CONSULTING SERVICES • CONSUMER ELECTRONICS • E-COMMERCE • EDUCATION
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BRANDS

Pragmatic Marketing instructors have worked at some of the biggest names in technology. Here's a small sample ▼



Microsoft



Blackboard



LexisNexis



Pearson



maxim integrated



EDUCATION

Pragmatic Marketing instructors have compiled an impressive record of education and degrees ▼

Years of secondary education

66

Bachelor's degrees

18

Master's degrees

5

Ph.D.

1

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY • COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY • COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY
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TEMPLE UNIVERSITY • THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN • UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
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SATISFACTION

Pragmatic Marketing instructors deliver an exemplary learning experience for students. **Pragmatic Marketing's average NPS across all of our classes and instructors is +72**, which means students rate their experience very highly and recommend the training to their peers. In fact, 80 percent of Pragmatic Marketing's business comes via word-of-mouth referral.

NPS

+72

Pragmatic Marketing

Verizon +26

TripAdvisor +43

Apple +60
(Mobile Devices)

Amazon.com +66

0

+25

+50

+75

+100

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ASK THE EXPERTS:

How can we pick the best pricing model for our SaaS products?

ALTOUGH THERE'S NO GENERIC ANSWER THAT WORKS FOR ALL SITUATIONS, here are several things to consider when choosing a pricing model.

Where does value come from? An ideal pricing model charges more as the customer receives more value. Many SaaS companies charge by the user count. This is usually correlated with the value delivered, but it is not identical. To get even closer to ideal, imagine charging by the transaction. Instead of charging for the number of bank clerks that use your product, what if you charged by the number of transactions they process—or better yet, the total value of the transactions?

What does your competition do? Always put yourself in the shoes of your buyer. They are comparing you to a competitor. Sometimes it's in your best interest to have a different pricing model (think Netflix when they started). Sometimes it may go against the norm and be an uphill battle. Make a conscious decision about whether you want to be different or the same. (You can also offer multiple pricing models and let the buyer choose. For example, car purchase vs. lease.)



An ideal pricing model charges more as the customer receives more value.

What does your customer expect? Your customer has a set of beliefs about how you should price. It's always easier to follow them than to try to change them. Try to understand what's going on inside your buyer's mind. You may find a market segment that thinks differently, and maybe your best bet is to target them.

What does your billing system allow? Sometimes we think of brilliant pricing methods; for example, pricing based on the improved health of patients in healthcare industries. The problem is we probably don't have systems in place that would allow us to bill that way.

What can you monitor? Many times we come up with a great pricing model, but it just isn't possible to gather the data effectively or truthfully. For example, maybe Goodyear would like to charge for all-weather tires by the number of miles driven in bad weather. It just isn't possible to gather this information without the user self-reporting (at least for now). Similarly, companies sometimes try to share the increased profit with their customers, but it's almost impossible to monitor. If you can't objectively monitor something, don't price based on it.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all answer to selecting the best pricing model, once you consider the competition, customer expectations, your billing system and what you can monitor, you'll have a better sense of what should work best. **PM**



Mark Stiving, Instructor
Pragmatic Marketing



Do you have a question for our experts? Send us an email at experts@pragmaticmarketing.com.

WHERE DOES PRODUCT END AND

BRAND

BEGIN?

BY ROBERT WALLACE



YOU DON'T GO TO STARBUCKS FOR THE COFFEE. Coffee is what you walk out the door with, but it's not what keeps you returning to Starbucks (or to another favorite coffee shop). Given the landscape of retailers brewing and selling what essentially amounts to the same commodity, the fact that we pledge our loyalty to one roaster over another is further proof that the coffee is not the "thing" we're after.

Need more evidence? How about the price of a cup at Starbucks? There are plenty of cheaper options that are just as good and deliver the same effect, including making coffee at home. But since coffee isn't the thing, we're willing to pay a premium.

So what is the thing we seek if it's not the product itself? It's the experience and the promise of that experience delivered consistently. Starbucks gives us something *emotionally* that no other competitor can: a completely unique experience. Our favorite café pours more than a hot latte in our cup; it fills us up with emotional satisfaction.

Whether it's that first sip that brings a spark of joy, the sense of community, the way the employees engage with us or the soundtrack that plays in the store, successful companies create a consistent brand feel that gives extra life to the goods they sell. We may arrive at a business through its products or services because we have a need to fulfill in the moment, but

we stay for the emotional connection. We keep coming back to a brand because to us it delivers on a promise that speaks to what's important and makes us feel good at every touchpoint.

Emotions bridge the gap between product and brand, creating real connections with customers. Many believe a great product should sell itself, and so they focus on a few tangible features and benefits. But while a great product is essential, it's only one piece of the puzzle. Without a story or promise to bring the audience along and establish a deeper connection, customers won't remain loyal.

THE MAIN CHARACTER OF YOUR STORY: CUSTOMERS

Customers are people, and great brands go into business to solve people's problems. Stop solving the problem and you stop having customers.

The taxi industry no longer meets the experience consumers want? Then there's a market for an on-demand car transportation service that behaves differently. People don't use Uber or Lyft because it gets them to their destination faster. Customers use Uber or Lyft because these brands understand everything they hate about taxis and do the exact opposite at every turn.

Brands like Uber and Lyft take the time to understand what is important to today's consumer and recreate the experience: clean, modern cars, a sleek app, an instant feedback rating system, convenience. These are carefully scripted chapters of these brands' stories and overall products. And they're designed to make people feel good.

When is the last time you thought about how to evoke emotion in your customers? If you haven't done a deep dive into your audience's underlying desires, then you can't properly craft a resonant brand story or, for that matter, a resonant product.

There's a subtle but massive difference between telling a story of how your product can save the day vs. a story that makes your customers the hero. The first is feature-focused. For example, Slack makes office life better because of easy file-sharing. The second is all about customer experience. You will enjoy greater harmony with your co-workers because you'll love all the fun ways you can communicate with them in Slack—and oh, by the way, the platform will delight you with cleverly crafted messaging that has been thoughtfully baked into the product. Slack knew they had to hook their users on more than just a solid communication tool; they had to make the experience one worth talking about—the brand had to be built alongside the product.

BE A REFLECTION OF WHAT PEOPLE WANT

For companies in the app economy, the line between product and brand is more blurred than it is in the coffee-shop world. But, as Slack has shown, you can take a service as innocuous as an instant-messaging tool and grow it into a communications beast. Successful brands know that customer experience is not

limited to the times when a customer is actually interacting with the product. It also includes the softer, more qualitative parts of your business.

Terms like “values” and “purpose” are not only nice-to-haves for a company, they're vital components that will determine the success of a business more than any other factor. You cannot convey a strong message, have a cohesive brand or a “sticky” product if you're not internally aligned on your mission. Your values are how you add emotion to your brand and convey the experience you promise, even before any interaction takes place.

GitHub is a development platform that enables a self-organizing office of developer teams to follow their passions free of traditional structure and hierarchy. Who wouldn't want to be a part of a work environment like that? But a

Emotions bridge the gap between product and brand, creating real connections with customers



collaborative meritocracy can't sustain itself unless the engine behind it lives a similar mission every day. In this case, GitHub's brand, and thus its product, offers users a chance to be part of something greater than self because that's what the company offers its own people. GitHub attracts a certain type of selfless customer, and that works for them.

Other companies use value and purpose to give themselves cachet, becoming a status symbol that plays to customer ego. MailChimp says it loud and clear on their homepage: “Being yourself makes all the difference.” Deconstruct the things that are important to your stakeholders—those will be the emotional drivers that attract them to your story and engage them in your product.

CUSTOMERS ARE NOT YOUR ONLY STAKEHOLDERS

There's another group perhaps more deeply impacted by your brand than customers: your internal team. Values, mission statements, reasons for being—these can all be wrapped up in one tidy package called company culture.

Starting from the top down, culture is something great brands work to maintain and enhance every day. Your



6 QUESTIONS TO HELP IDENTIFY YOUR BRAND

The following questions will help identify what you want your brand to accomplish so that you can begin focusing on how to get there.

- 1 What promise are you making to your stakeholders (customers, employees, partners, investors, etc.) and why should they care?
- 2 What benefit do you deliver beyond features and functionality?
- 3 Why does your company exist; what deeper purpose do you serve?
- 4 How do customers and employees describe you and how do they feel about your company? Don't guess, ask them.
- 5 What gets you and your team excited about coming to work?
- 6 What do you do differently than any other competitor or peer company in your industry?

internal ecosystem—the types of experiences team members have with one another and with leaders, how connected they are to the deeper purpose your brand serves—all impact the experience that reverberates through the entire brand.

Culture is always present, whether intentionally established or not. When it is created purposefully, based on a foundation of core values and vision, it creates a motivating, collaborative and passionate environment inside and out. When culture lacks purpose or the all-important “why” element, the result can be a competitive, misaligned and disconnected environment. Why we do what we do is what establishes a deeper emotional connection with all stakeholders, communicates the brand’s promise and enrolls them in the brand’s story.

Think about the terms commonly used by human resources when they talk about hiring talent. Words like “attraction” and “retention” are borrowed from marketing parlance and are used in the same way here: How can we showcase our brand to bring the right people in, then keep them feeling good while they’re here? Your brand’s culture is the first step.

WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE BRAND?

It’s a good question to ask yourself when thinking about the brand you want to create. Some of the greats—Nike, Apple, Harley-Davidson, Nordstrom—may come to mind, but not solely for the actual product they sell. It’s something much deeper than that; it’s the experience they create, the promise they fulfill and the emotional connection they establish with their most diehard fans.

You may argue that it’s easier for brands with a brick-and-mortar presence to create an experience for employees and customers, but some of today’s most successful brands operate from the cloud with a team of remote workers. InVision is a wildly popular design and prototyping tool for websites that took the time to understand what customers consider to be important at every point along the web and mobile design process. They know that time, efficiency and quality outputs are the end goal of their customers, and they provide an experience to foster that.

Great brands practice empathy and selflessness because they value customer success over all else. It’s why brands like InVision can have such a profound impact. Their customers feel empowered and have so many of their emotional desires met that the brand becomes an extension of them. For brands, that level of relevance doesn’t come overnight. However, companies that only communicate in product terms will never achieve it.

The next time you’re in your favorite coffee shop, think about why you’re really there. Then do your best to give your customers the same experience you have when you interact with a brand that speaks your language, understands your wants and anticipates your needs.

A cup of coffee is just a cup of coffee, but the experience elevates its position in the hearts and minds of your audience. [PM](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Wallace is the executive vice president of marketing at Tallwave, where he oversees the company’s branding, thought leadership and communications programs to drive growth. Robert has led some of the agency’s largest engagements for clients including, FindLaw, Baker Tilly and AppointmentPlus. Contact Robert at robert.wallace@tallwave.com or on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/wallacera](https://www.linkedin.com/in/wallacera).

BRANDING YOURSELF

AS A PRODUCT

BY KIRSTEN BUTZOW

A GRANDFATHER CLOCK OR A WATCH.

Those are the symbols of career longevity I remember from my youth. You'd work for one company your entire career, and when you retired, you'd receive some sort of timepiece as a farewell gift.

My first real job out of college was with Fujitsu, a \$50 billion company. I thought I'd be there for 35 or 40 years. I figured I'd get my clock.

It was a great company and I did spend five years of my career there. Unfortunately, in 2001 as the dot-com boom went bust, Fujitsu, for the first time in the company's history, lost money. As a result, the company closed any business unit that wasn't in excess of \$500 million in revenue. I was working for a highly profitable division, but its revenue was just \$250 million. We were one of the casualties.

Despite my shock, it was probably one of the greatest gifts of my early career, because that's when I realized that jobs are not guaranteed. It doesn't matter how big the company is; it doesn't matter how stable or profitable it is. Your job simply doesn't come with a guarantee anymore. And that means having to manage your career in a completely different way than previous generations.

This change in the labor force isn't just anecdotal. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average tenure of a U.S. worker in his or her job is 4.2 years. The average American will hold 11.7 jobs by the time he or she is 48.





THE ANSOFF MATRIX AND YOUR CAREER

One helpful product lifecycle management tool is the Ansoff Matrix, which explores four main strategies for managing a product over time. Essentially, the market and how you're reacting to the market will dictate your product strategy. This is similar to our careers. So we can apply the four quadrants of the Ansoff Matrix to our careers.

MARKET PENETRATION. If this is your strategy, focus on being the best you can be—strive to excel at being the absolute, deepest, best version of yourself in your existing role. Go above and beyond; earn advanced degrees and certifications.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT. Here, you plan to stay within your market, but seek to develop new skills to use in that market. An example would be an engineer who wants to move into the business side of their industry. To do that, they might have to earn an MBA to develop their business understanding and mindset.

MARKET DEVELOPMENT. With this strategy, you might want to change companies or industries but still utilize your existing core skills. For example, when I moved from product management in the telecommunications industry into education technology, I didn't have to learn any new skills, just a new industry.

DIVERSIFICATION. This strategy is about developing new skills for new markets. This is the riskiest strategy because it's so far from what you know today. But it also could also be very successful, if plotted out correctly.

	Existing Products	New Products
New Markets	MARKET PENETRATION	PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
Existing Markets	MARKET DEVELOPMENT	DIVERSIFICATION

LAUNCHING: VERSION 1.0

Before you can manage your product, you have to launch it. When you graduate from college or business school, you don't know exactly where your career will go. But you should still build a roadmap that answers this question: Where do you plan to be in two years, five years, 10 years? Sure, you might take a detour somewhere in the future, but start with a plan that moves you in the general direction of your ultimate target.

What does this mean? It means you will be interviewing for many jobs. So you will need to keep your skills fresh and nurture your relationships. Moreover, you and your skills should be transferable to different environments. Put another way: Your personal brand is more important than ever.

You are a product. And if you are the product, why not manage your personal brand like a product?

YOUR CAREER AND THE PRODUCT LIFECYCLE

In a typical career lifecycle, you start with a deficit. When you finish college, you have some tools, but you lack real-world, hands-on experience. Then, as you gain expertise, your responsibilities increase and your success grows.

Just like in a product lifecycle, though, there will be times when your industry and technology evolve. If you don't evolve too, you risk a career plateau and irrelevance. The key is to create long-term extensibility for your brand. What you need is a product strategy. How do you leverage your skills to ensure a triumphant product launch and continued relevancy and success?

Put yourself on the right path by the way you leverage your assets, degrees and experiences. More often than not, relationships will be key. Carefully develop and cultivate your LinkedIn network, engage in industry networking groups and talk to people in the industry. After all, 78 percent of recruiters find their candidates through referrals.

In addition to connecting to people in your industry and with those who share your interests, Google yourself. We are in the age of the internet, and just as you need to know how a product is perceived online, you should know how you are representing yourself in the marketplace.

Jobvite, a recruiting website, conducts an annual survey of recruiters and HR professionals. And they've discovered that some things in the public domain put you at a real disadvantage. For example, a host of spelling and grammatical errors in your posts or your tweets doesn't bode well for you. Likewise, if you can be seen drinking alcohol in multiple photos posted, that doesn't reflect well either (though it's not as bad as your grammar errors). On the other hand, participating in local and national organizations and groups that are relevant to your industry reflects positively on you.

CONTINUOUSLY MARKET

Once you have that successful first or second job, then what? As you embark on version 3.0 and 4.0 and onward, you have to ensure you don't fall off the roadmap, that you continually leverage your skills and stay relevant.

And you must regularly refresh your career roadmap, just as you would for a product. Identify challenges or new interests that may make you reconsider your target destination.

Of course, to ensure you're intelligently reacting to market changes, you continually have to be in the market. Take every chance you get to talk with your customers, peers, executives or industry thought leaders. Ask for their thoughts on the industry. What training do people seek? What skills do you need to brush up on to be current with your industry?

You don't wait to iterate your product until you see a dramatic fall in sales, right? Likewise, be sure you continually hone yourself as the product, changing and adjusting your roadmap throughout your career.

Spend at least three hours a week fostering your career. Read an industry article, go to lunch with a colleague or reach out to somebody in your network who hasn't heard from you in a long time. If a colleague has had a promotion or an anniversary (which you can see on LinkedIn), send them a note. When you do need a job, people will be more willing to help you if you've been talking to them along the way, rather than just when you need something.

ONGOING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

To help you achieve your goals, continually assess your skills. Start with a competitive assessment of you as the product. What skills do you currently have? What skills do you lack? What skills are evolving in your marketplace? What additional skills might you need to acquire? Then, devise a strategy for how to foster and develop those skills. That should be part of your roadmap.

And remember, it's not enough to have only great technical skills. Pragmatic Marketing conducts an annual survey of product leaders, and one of the top things we hear is that soft skills matter, too. The top seven soft skills we hear about are abilities to:

- Inspire others
- Build consensus
- Debate and negotiate
- Pitch to peers, executives and customers
- Synthesize information
- Communicate truthfully
- Express empathy

Make sure you don't neglect this aspect of your career development.

YOUR DISTINCTIVE COMPETENCY

Lastly, think about your distinctive competencies—your competitive advantage in the marketplace. How do you differentiate yourself? Do you have specific experiences or skills other candidates might not have? How do you highlight those?

You need to recognize and be able to articulate how you can uniquely solve an employer's problem. In other words,

Refresh your career roadmap regularly, just as you would for a product.



what's your elevator pitch? This short statement encapsulates your competitive advantage as it relates to increasing the success of the organization. If you can't distill that into a sentence or two, it's time to get to work. Just like you'd write a product statement, spend time crafting your competitive advantage.

YOU AS THE PRODUCT

As you consider your career and where you aspire to go professionally, your product management skills are an asset. From your product launch to managing the lifecycle to avoiding irrelevance, you can ensure continued success in the marketplace via the strategy (or combination of strategies) of your choice. When you are the product, success is a long, fulfilling career—without a timepiece in sight. [PM](#)



Kirsten Butzow has 20 years of experience leading technology companies, including Fujitsu, Pearson and Blackboard. She has held vice president roles for the past 10 years, allowing her to bring a strong executive perspective to her role as a Pragmatic Marketing instructor. As a leader, she has directed product management portfolios, created business plans and strategic product roadmaps, and implemented many aspects of the Pragmatic Marketing Framework. Contact Kirsten at kbutzow@pragmaticmarketing.com.

**BRAND**

BRANDING BATTLE

IT SEEMS THERE IS A NEVER-ENDING COMPETITION FOR customer mindshare. We all want prospective customers to consider our brand. But we also want them to know who we are and what we offer long before they make a purchase.

For many executives and product managers, the decision to focus marketing efforts on brand awareness or lead generation can feel like a constant wrestling match. On the one hand, brand marketing efforts help expand audience size. On the other hand, lead generation helps pinpoint a group of individuals who are willing to exchange their contact information for your content.

The good news is that you do not have to let awareness and lead generation tactics constantly battle it out. In fact, when used strategically and effectively, the two methods complement each other.

The key to determining the right balance between branding and lead generation is to realize that while each has a certain ebb and flow, the two strategies must work hand in hand to be effective.

BRAND AWARENESS

To achieve the right balance, it's important to understand the premise behind both marketing strategies. As you know, everything you do drives your brand: the quality of your product or service, the experience of using it, the way your company responds to problems, the way customers feel when they have an issue.

Loosely defined, brand awareness is your company's visibility to the public. It is the emotions and attitude the public associates with your organization. When someone searches for a product or service within your industry, you want your company to come to mind.

Companies are increasingly focusing on branding via content marketing. HubSpot and Fast Company are two examples of companies that do it well.

HubSpot continuously produces useful branded content that has earned them widespread recognition and trust as an industry thought leader. From videos and white papers to webcasts and ebooks, HubSpot consistently develops content B2B audiences desire, while simultaneously promoting their brand. Even if viewers haven't invested in the company's software, it is likely they have downloaded a piece of HubSpot's valuable content.

And while it may feel like infographics are a dime a dozen, progressive media house Fast Company has figured out how to use them to inform (and entertain) its C-level audience with original and compelling content. Not only does Fast Company promote their brand by giving readers what they want in the form of powerful, quick chunks of information, but they also use social engagement to boost sharing and drive results.

To effectively increase brand awareness, several factors must first be in place.

Brand Foundation. Your company's website is your brand's foundation. Is it functional and user-friendly? Is content fresh, relevant and SEO-optimized? Make sure the landing pages and forms work and that your site is mobile responsive. And what about traditional marketing? Make sure your brochures and other printed materials are up to date so prospective customers can easily learn more about your products or services.

Message and Positioning. Be clear about the products or services you want to sell. What is your brand's message? Does your product or service provide a solution to customer needs? More important, can you fully understand how your product or service works for the consumer?

Diverse Content. Once you have garnered attention, it's important to actively engage with your customer. And engagement means content, such as social media, video, blogs,

Focusing on traditional
marketing approaches to
define and shape your brand
is simply not enough.

**BRAND**

ING AND LEAD GENERATION: OR BALANCING ACT?

BY
SHEILA KLOEFKORN

images, graphics, infographics and more. Not all customers look for you the same way, so make sure they can connect with you in a way that's comfortable and appeals to their preferences.

Thought Leadership. Without question, today's customers are a research generation. They thoroughly review items, visit multiple websites and scour background information before deciding to buy. As a trustworthy brand, you must prove yourself as a valuable resource and industry thought leader.

LEAD GENERATION

Capturing leads is one of the most crucial parts of content marketing. When done properly, high-quality, relevant content draws users in, enabling lead capture while simultaneously boosting your brand's SEO rankings.

Lead generation usually results in a specific call to action, as well as a distinct value proposition. And while it does not always require brand awareness, lead generation is far more effective when the two are working hand in hand.

To be successful with lead-generation efforts, start with a solid plan that includes the following steps.

Plan your campaign. What do you want to achieve: leads or product sales? Be sure to further reinforce the purpose behind your content. Create downloadable opportunities for users to connect with you via landing pages, infographics, case studies or white papers.

Provide collateral. As a marketer, it's important to understand the difference between a pull campaign and a push effort. Use collateral to drive leads and begin a nurture funnel. Remember, simply because someone is not a hot lead does not mean they are not worth the sales-cycle effort.

Gather and analyze data. Any time you encourage customers to sign up for a webinar or interact with one of your publications, you're engaging them. And that means you are gathering data, plain and simple.

IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO: A CAREFUL, YET STRATEGIC, DANCE

In this day and age, focusing on traditional marketing approaches to define and shape your brand is simply not enough. The key to any effective marketing plan is to discover the right balance between brand awareness and lead generation.

To further convince yourself, go online and scan through every big brand in the market such as GE, Accenture and Emerson and see how smoothly and seamlessly they have managed to combine these elements to create a perfect marketing plan.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Today's brands cannot expect to generate leads and drive conversions for the foreseeable future if they are not also continuously enhancing awareness and building the credibility of their brand.

Brand building and lead generation are interrelated. For ideal growth, you must use the right amounts of both. There should never be two polar sides in the process, but instead, a flexible range to achieve the right balance between the two. [PM](#)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheila Kloefkorn is president and CEO of KEO Marketing Inc., a full-service B2B marketing agency specializing in marketing strategy, messaging, digital infrastructure, execution and analytics. She was recently recognized as one of the "Top 10 Business Leaders of the Year" by the *Phoenix Business Journal*. Sheila can be reached at skloefkorn@keomarketing.com.



BRANDING:

THE OTHER HALF OF YOUR GO-



TO-MARKET JOURNEY

BY JUSTIN TOPLIFF

THE OLD ADAGE THAT GOOD MARKETING CAN'T SELL A BAD PRODUCT is true. I've seen brands throw millions of marketing dollars at products that ultimately flopped.

As product professionals, we internalize this lesson and combat its occurrence by taking an outside-in approach when it comes to product development. But what about the inverse of that adage? Have you ever considered that good products can't sell themselves? And that bad marketing or branding could sabotage the success of your products?

Product/market fit defines the degree to which your product *could* be successful. Marc Andreessen famously claimed, "The only thing that matters is getting to product/market fit." Those of us who have read *The Lean Startup* by Eric Ries or gone through Pragmatic Marketing certifications know that fully understanding your customers and solving their needs is paramount to product success.

But after you've done that and reached product/market fit, what do you do next? Getting to product/market fit is only half the battle. Breakdowns occur when little thought is given to customer/message fit and how to talk about that product and its brand.

Here's the deal: Almost everyone has no idea they want your product. Aside from the customers you interviewed to discover market problems and develop product requirements, the rest of the world has never heard about your product. It could be code complete, launched and available, but it needs a soul to come to life. It needs a distinguishing brand of its own and alignment with your company's brand.

This branding dictates perception and crafts a buyer's emotional experience with your product. Branding is what claims real estate in the buyer's mind. Without branding to evoke that emotion, the buyer would have no desire to actually try your product, let alone purchase it. Ultimately, buying decisions boil down to emotion, and branding is one of the few tools that can influence the emotions of a buyer on first contact with your company and its products.

BRAND AND PRODUCT ARE DIFFERENT BUT MUST ALIGN

While products fulfill a customer's *needs*, brands fulfill a customer's *wants*. A product's ingredients are functionalities and features that satisfy needs. A brand's ingredients are promises and emotions that satisfy wants. Your customers may need a product or a solution, but they want and are drawn to the brand providing that product.

For example, I may need an airplane ticket to visit family, but I want a no-hassle experience. For this reason, I may be drawn to purchase from Southwest Airlines, a brand known for charging no fees for checked bags, itinerary changes, etc. The product is similar to that of other airlines: a plane, seats,

overhead bins. But the no-hassle brand enveloping the product is what differentiates it from other similar products and attracts buyers based on their emotional response (in this case, perhaps their hatred for being nickel-and-dimed by other airlines).

Customers initially buy into a brand and its promise, not a product. No customer looks at lines of code and says, "Yes, this is what I need." They interact with a brand that humanizes and personifies that code through value-based messaging that resonates.

Bridging the gap or playing translator between brand and product is the specialty of product marketing. While it's important to build useful products that satisfy customers' needs, equally critical is to understand what customers want and translate the value of our products into their language. If the product team ignores the brand promises while building the product, or marketing ignores the product's abilities while

making brand promises, you are destined to fail. Brand and product are sisters, not enemies.

Companies with strong brands and products that deliver on that brand enjoy better sales-funnel metrics, higher revenues and a deeper connection

Products fulfill a customer's needs. Brands fulfill a customer's wants.

with customers yielding stronger engagement and advocacy. So, the million-dollar question is, "How do I succeed in achieving customer/message fit and uniting my product with my brand?"

THE BRAND EXPERIENCE IS THE SUM OF ALL PARTS

Branding isn't about slapping logos all over everything anymore. It's about considering all customer touchpoints. At every point of interaction with your company and its product, customers must receive a congruent brand experience. Many companies fail to realize that details matter here.

For instance, Starbucks' brand is about community and bringing people together in a neighborhood café, not coffee. If you're trying to deliver on the Starbucks brand promise, coffee is only one piece of the puzzle, and focusing only on it would be shortsighted. What about the customers' experience when they visit the physical location to get their coffee? Does the space feel like home, with artwork and comfy furniture, or like the department of motor vehicles? Are the baristas friendly? Did they write a favorite drink on the chalkboard to foster a sense of connection?

As a product organization, are you paying attention to all parts? Do all areas of your product experience, beyond the code, support your company's brand? Customer experience must be

congruent with brand promise; any breaks in these areas will erode the perception of your brand. And when that happens, customers leave.

BE CUSTOMER-DRIVEN WHEN CRAFTING YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

The best brands are based on values, benefits or the innovation you're producing. But it's a complicated, noisy world. To brand products properly, brand builders, technologists and designers need to partner in innovation.

An example of success is the brand Apple created for their mid-2000s Macs through the "I'm a Mac/I'm a PC" campaign. From a branding standpoint, what did they do differently than their competitors? They didn't center their brand on the product,



Customers stick with brands and products that deliver on their promises.

they centered it on the customer experience. Their brand wasn't "here's our awesome computer with this long list of technical specs that you don't understand," it was "here's the delightful experience you will enjoy if you own a Mac, compared to the one you will hate if you own a PC."

They brought to life their product's brand promise of delight and simplicity with humorous videos. Actors played the parts of a Mac and PC and acted out the contrasting experiences. The actual product only appeared in the video for a few seconds at the end. Apple realized they weren't selling a computer, they were selling a user experience—a way of life that came with owning a Mac. Not only was this a better and easier thing to sell, it was a brand that people could immediately relate to.

Apple took the time to understand their buyers and the problems they encountered. By taking this outside-in approach, the brand they created for their product achieved customer/message fit. The brand was integral to the experience of the product, and vice-versa. To this day, few product brands remain as memorable or as successful in minting lifetime evangelists and contributing to company/market fit.

EXAMINE THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT AND MARKETING

Being customer- and market-driven shouldn't be a mantra limited to product development. I'm always surprised at how many marketing departments have not done customer research or leveraged the research already done as part of product development. Most marketing departments hedge their

bets through A/B testing, but this step could be even more successful with some up-front research.

Does your marketing team know as much about your customers as you do? When is the last time your marketing department got out of the building and spent time with customers? Or the last time you passed along your customer research to them? Knowing the pains of your customers can halve the amount of time they spend A/B testing their way to customer/message fit.

Persona documents are useful here, as are interview notes or any qualitative responses around customer problems you have from larger research projects. Product marketing can champion this information between product and marketing. If you don't have a product marketing team, encourage your marketing department to get out of the office and spend time with customers directly.

DELIVER ON YOUR COMPANY'S BRAND PROMISE

Your brand, and every piece of messaging attached to it, helps you control perception in the marketplace. It's everyone's responsibility to ensure that the message and brand your company uses is consistent across all channels, assets and communications. This doesn't stop with sales and marketing materials. Messaging lives everywhere: tooltips in your products, verbal call scripts, billing reminders, etc. It all must be consistent. Your brand is the sum of all parts of the experience spanning the customer lifecycle.

As a product leader, take ownership of your portion of this responsibility. Consider the macro and micro touchpoints your customers have with your product.

Do your product's sign-up experience, onboarding sequence, product emails and in-app alerts match your company's brand?

If any customer touchpoint is incongruent with your brand, it will show. Sweat the small stuff here because it matters. Nobody goes to Ruth's Chris Steak House to eat on paper plates. If something is wrong, fix it quickly and educate that team or area of the company on the importance of delivering on brand promises over the entire customer lifecycle. Be a brand champion by fighting for brand integrity across everything you own.

At the end of the day, customers stick with brands and products that deliver on their promises. Branding is what initially brings awareness to your product and convinces buyers to purchase. Your product delivering on its brand promise is what makes customers stay.

Don't underestimate how important the relationship between brand and product is to your company's success. The good news is that being successful here is easy. So long as branding—and everything else—is developed from an outside-in approach, congruity is almost certain. **PM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin Topliff is director of product marketing at VTS.com and the founder of ProductMarketingSummit.com. He lives in New York and joined VTS to scale the product marketing function after growth investments from OpenView Partners and Insight Venture Partners. Contact Justin via justintopliff.com or justin.topliff@gmail.com.

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10

TIPS FOR GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BUYERS AND USERS

DEPARTMENTS ▼



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IN THIS WORLD WHERE SMART + CONNECTED IS BECOMING THE NEW ordinary, our job is to understand how people (customers, buyers and users) will experience new technologies and how these technologies will shift the experiences of their daily life. Officially titled principal engineers, we are experts respectively in human factors and cultural anthropology. While our coworkers at Intel and our collaborators at customer and ecosystem businesses focus on: *can we?*, we ask: *should we?* What will be the future experience? How do we create a future ordinary that empowers all of us digitally and in the physical world? We spend our days gathering and analyzing rich contextual data about how people live and work—the very data that is used to create personas and other artifacts used to design experiences. We often apply our research skills in untraditional areas (e.g., industrial spaces), and are responsible for driving changes outside of the scope of traditional user research.

We meet a lot of interesting people as we lug our video cameras out in the field, taping people's daily lives. Faith has gone out on truck rolls with fiber-optics installers, hung out in doctors' offices to see how staff share information about patients, collected data from oil workers over lunch, interviewed rocket scientists to understand decision-making on deep space missions, and collaborated with fifth-graders using cardboard, glue sticks and whatever else they could find to come up with the next-generation educational technology. Alex has roadtripped in an RV and interviewed retirees who've given up their "stick homes" to understand the challenges of mobile domesticity, and interviewed everyone from a feng shui master in Chengdu to an urban planner in Stockholm to a facilities manager for public school system in Oregon. She has even lugged a shower curtain and folding stepstool to eight countries to unpack the contents of car interiors.

Our research may seem eclectic or "fun," but it is deadly serious. What we do prevents the product teams we work with from wasting time when bringing a product to market: wasting time pursuing a strategy not valued outside the companies; wasting time building the wrong solution; wasting time designing a product experience in a way that doesn't fit with how people live and work. Instead, we help them understand the behaviors, needs and motivations of the people who will buy and use the product. We start by focusing on people. We spend our time discovering how people currently do things, so we can predict how they would like to do things in the future. We employ techniques that allow people to collaboratively define the future experience with us. Then we take what we learn about people and make their stories sticky in the business. We

Good experience research improves the quality and velocity of decision-making throughout product planning.





LEARNING TO KNOW OUR STAKEHOLDERS AND USERS

BY FAITH MCCREARY AND
ALEXANDRA ZAFIROGLU



package these stories in innovative ways to bring themes to life for our stakeholders, making them part of the lore, the ground truth and the fabric of the organizational culture moving forward.

Good experience research improves the quality and velocity of decision-making throughout product planning. Here are 10 tips to help you scope and evaluate research, whether you are a professional researcher, a product-team collaborator or even curious to try your hand at a bit of research yourself. Following these tips won't replace engaging an experience professional,

or make you an experience researcher yourself, but they can help you gather useful information from the right people and help you know what to expect when you do engage with an experience professional.

TIP
1

Start with the decision that you need to make. The main goal of experience research is to inform a design decision. This is the big question that your research needs to answer, your objective. Your question can be very

concrete (Where should we place a button on a web page to maximize user success at completing a task?) or more strategic (What are the most important problems for our “widget” to solve for a certain type of users?). It should guide everything that you do from this point on. And the question must be one that you can act on if you answer it. If you can’t, why do the research?

TIP 2 **Be lazy.** Don’t rediscover the known world. Look for reports or information about your target audience, including existing personas and industry reports or surveys that relate to your big question. Don’t ignore sources like support logs or social-media postings that allow you to see what people complain about, care about or say they need. Then focus your research on filling the gaps.

TIP 3 **Always have a plan.** Now that you know where the gaps in your understanding are, come up with a plan for how to gather the information. At a minimum, you need to:

- *Decide what kinds of people you need to answer your big question* (e.g., potential buyers or people doing a certain kind of work). Make a list of specific characteristics you are looking for, anything from the decisions they’re responsible for to the years they’ve been performing a task.
- *Figure out a way to find these people.* Will you put an ad on an online forum? Ask for help from your friends or family? Engage a professional recruiter? Make sure the research participants you choose are a good fit for your list of characteristics. If they aren’t, you may not care about their answer or their answer may steer you in the wrong direction.
- *Decide how you will gather the information.* At its most basic, it comes down to whether you need concrete answers about your product, or exploratory stories that provide a broad understanding of your users. If you want concrete answers, usability testing is usually the easiest way to go. If you are looking for exploratory information, interviews or observations will often get you there.
- *Be specific about the questions that you will ask.* The finer points of creating questions depend on your research method, but we live by a few basic rules. First, avoid leading questions. Ask the question in a manner that doesn’t

assume you already know the answer. For example, don’t say “Is the reason that you didn’t use this product feature because you didn’t see it?” Second, focus on asking people about what they already do, not on what they might want help with in the future. Instead of asking, “Do you want feature X to help you do task Y?” ask, “Tell me about the last time you did Y.” This helps determine where the pain points are today and if the product solves them.

TIP 4 **Get buy-in before you start collecting data.** The most frustrating experience a researcher faces is collecting great data that no one uses. There are lots of reasons why this happens, but it often comes down to one of two things: either people don’t believe your data or there isn’t time to take action on what you discovered. And if that’s the case, why collect data?

The best way to ensure that stakeholders believe in your research is to engage them in the process early on. Get





their input at each step and help them connect what they need to accomplish back to the questions you ask. Also encourage them to observe the research process; just don't invite so many people to a session that the research participant feels ganged-up on.

TIP 5

Use the buddy system. Don't try to do research on your own. Coming up with questions, collecting data

from participants, and figuring out what the data you collected means or what to do about it are not solo exercises. Different people bring different perspectives, which makes for a better result. So bring a buddy along. Plus, when you interview or observe people, it helps to have one person ask questions while the other takes notes.

TIP 6

Stay legal. The human beings who participate in your research have rights. Legally, you must allow a participant to withdraw from the research, not answer a question, take a break or not do a task. Keep the information that they provide confidential and do not use it in a manner that allows others to determine the identity of the participant. If you take pictures, videotape participants or record audio, you will need a formal consent form. If you show them concepts or products that are not currently available, you will need a non-disclosure form signed. Your organization may already have standard versions of these forms; just be sure to get signatures.

TIP 7

Do a trial run. The first time you try gathering research using your plan should not be in front of an actual participant. Try it on your research buddy, other team members or family. This trial run allows you to fix problems in the plan and understand what you can reasonably accomplish in the time you've allotted for each participant. You likely will find that you are trying to capture too much information, so expect to ruthlessly prioritize or trim your questions. You also may find

that some questions aren't capturing the information that you expected to and will need to be fine-tuned.

TIP 8

Make your data sticky. Your job doesn't stop with data collection. You have to turn your data into a story others will act on. Finding the right story isn't about picking the perfect story; it's about making visible the challenges people face and triggering action to solve their problems. As quickly as possible, get the preliminary results out to those who can act on them. Also use the data to create personas and use cases, a great way to put a friendly face on your data.

TIP 9

Don't blindly do what people tell you. The people who participated in your research aren't designers, but they will often tell you how they would solve a problem. Take their suggested improvement as a symptom of a problem, but don't treat it as the right solution. This approach will also reduce the thrash that results from making changes based on whomever you spoke with last.

TIP 10

Know when to get help. Sometimes do-it-yourself is not good enough. If you notice any of the following signs, it may be time to enlist the aid of a professional experience researcher.

- You can't get the information you need through a simple interview session or usability test.
- Your decision will have a significant impact on the business.
- Your questions are designed for children or other specialized populations.

When you get to know your buyers and users and share their stories with your product team, you'll minimize wasted time and increase the odds of building a product experience that complements the way people actually live and work. And you'll know what to expect when you do engage with an experience professional. [PM](#)

About the Authors

Faith McCreary is principal researcher in user experience at Intel Corporation. She has graduate degrees in mathematics, industrial engineering and human factors engineering. Faith has worked as a mathematician, software engineer and rocket scientist, and in a range of UX roles. She has a passion for using data to transform complex systems in ways that work for humans. Faith has published widely, including on deep space navigation, the impact of technology on elementary students and how technology is transforming the human experience of work. For the last two years, she has focused on the internet of things. Contact Faith at faith.a.mccreary@intel.com or connect with her on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/faithmccreary](https://www.linkedin.com/in/faithmccreary).

Alexandra Zafiroglu is principal engineer in user experience at Intel Corporation. Her research directs innovation and strategic decisions for multiple teams across Intel working on platforms and technologies related to domestic computing, by understanding user contexts, practices, values, desires and needs. Alex defines transformational experiences in domestic spaces, including homes and private passenger cars, and across Intel device categories from desktop computers to gateways to set-top boxes and internet of things platforms and devices. Contact Alex at alexandra.c.zafiroglu@intel.com.



IS THE

Product Manager CEO of the Product?

BY ROGER HICKS AND MIKI TOKOLA

WHEN SOMEONE CALLS THE PRODUCT MANAGER CEO OF THE PRODUCT, what does that mean? And is it a helpful analogy? The product manager as CEO of the product sounds powerful and strategic. It brings to mind strong leadership skills, influence and accountability, all key traits of successful product managers.

But when people hear product manager as CEO of the product, many also jump to the conclusion that the product manager is then *the* product decision-maker, that this person will oversee all the areas of the product, including engineering, sales, marketing, support, etc. And that interpretation can cause confusion in at least three areas.

1. Inflated Authority

A major point of dissimilarity between CEOs and product managers is the difference between their authority and influence. CEOs have the ultimate authority. Based on their position, control of resources and ability to reward and punish, they are the company's final decision-makers. Product managers have little authority. They normally have no budget, no direct reports and few resources. They must rely on persuasion and inspiration to make a positive impact. CEOs manage down; product managers influence across and up. Any power or influence product managers exert is based on their product, market or business expertise.

2. It Is Not Reality

The second misconception is that "CEO of the product" describes the reality of the product management function at most companies today. Product management covers a broad range of responsibilities and varies dramatically from company to company. While product managers may be CEOs of their product in some places, it isn't the norm.

The product manager role covers a variety of important duties, including representing the customer in new product development projects, providing expertise in creating sales materials and supporting selling efforts. The visibility and urgency of tactical requests from engineering, marketing communications and sales—plus a lack of priority and support from senior management for inbound research and strategic

thinking—can place severe constraints on the product manager's ability to act as CEO.

In fact, this year's annual product management and marketing survey from Pragmatic Marketing showed that product managers are typically individual contributors who spend 72 percent of their time on tactical activities. This profile doesn't reflect the powerful, strategic, decision-making product manager who is CEO of their product.

3. Product-Only Focus

The third misconception is the exacting focus on the product. The phrase "of the product" places too much emphasis on the product itself, which plays into a narrow view of product management that many people share: that it's only about the product.

This product centrality is often reinforced by those who enter product management from lateral functions, like engineering and customer support. Their strength—and a major reason they were chosen for the product management



Product managers who are told to *act* like CEOs should understand that they actually need to *think* like CEOs.

role—is their understanding of the technology, functionality and operation of the product. Their weaknesses tend to be on the business side and include market and customer research, marketing communication, finance and business strategy.

So, should we do away with this analogy? No, we should be clear about what it means.

Product managers who are told to *act* like CEOs should understand that they actually need to *think* like CEOs. Product managers should focus on identifying and addressing challenges and influencing results, rather than acting as if they have ultimate authority.

CEOs gather information and ideas from many different sources to help them define the path to follow to accomplish the purpose of the business. Similarly, product managers gather information from external sources, functional areas, and customers and process those inputs to make choices and

influence activity. And much like CEOs who have a vision for where their business is going and how to get there, product managers need to have a vision for where their products are going and how to get there. Their objective is to find the best way to describe market requirements in order to create and position a product that will attract the right customers.

Agents of Change

Product managers who think like CEOs will become agents of change, establishing a perspective on how to achieve future success. The path forward is not always obvious, so effective product managers will need to find creative ways to change course and accomplish important objectives even as challenges come along.

Product managers must be experts in both market needs and product capability. They must understand evolving technology and how to leverage it in their products. But this expertise is not enough. Just like winning CEOs, successful product managers have the ability to do and say things that motivate others to make changes in the way work gets done. They can influence decisions that change which activity and investments have the highest priority.

Being a powerful communicator is a prerequisite to becoming an effective change agent. Just like CEOs who use personality power to influence change, successful product managers must also find ways to be heard. Effective change agents focus on strategic priorities and emphasize the coordinated tactical efforts across resources that address worthwhile business opportunities that provide the right products to the right customers.

Business Orientation

In many companies, the product management role focuses on technical and product concerns that must be addressed during product development. Being an expert on products and technologies, and helping designers define features and performance specifications, is important to the product's success. But product managers who think like CEOs are also concerned with business issues and how to make and adapt whole product solutions that have the best payback over the full lifecycle.

This business thinking involves positioning the brand in chosen markets, deciding how to manage the product portfolio and designing business plans that make the best use of resources in the value chain. This business orientation improves new-product analysis and planning and efficient matching of design and selling efforts with customer requirements, all of which will increase results and ensure we address problems that are worth solving.



To make this work, the responsibilities and areas of accountability assigned to product managers need to be clear and consistent. Product managers need to think like a CEO to find ways to work on the right products and focus on customers while meeting stakeholder expectations.

A Product/Market Pairing

Typically, product managers spend too much time on the product and not enough time on the industry, the market, the customer and the competition. But those who think more broadly about their role recognize that product managers must understand market problems, product solutions and how customers gain value from business offerings. It's this duality of the product/market pair that product managers should be responsible for, yet too many companies underemphasize this aspect of product management.

Many people in the company are product experts, but being the voice of the market



Being the voice of the market back to the company is where product managers make the strongest contribution.

back to the company is where product managers make the strongest contribution. Product managers should be the chief explainers of the product/market pair, both inside and outside the company. Where are the greatest opportunities in the market? How does the company's offering provide great value to targeted customers and how is it superior to alternatives? Successful product managers answer those questions convincingly and persuasively. The product/market pair approach ensures that customers get what they need and companies can make the best use of investments to generate stakeholder rewards.

Cultural Shift

Even when product managers act like change agents, have a strong business orientation and motivate others with a compelling product/market pair, they will not succeed unless senior management and the corporate culture support their activities. Too often, there is a major disconnect between the product manager role as defined in the company job description (if one exists), and the day-to-day demands that senior management and other departments place on product managers.

If these directives are reactive, tactical and technical, they contradict the "think like a CEO" approach. Product managers will be torn between representing a strategic, market-oriented mindset and a tactical, product-oriented one. For product managers to have the positive impact we advocate, they must receive adequate time, prioritization and resources.

For example, if the product manager is proposing a market-research project targeted at understanding a new, emerging need in the target market, the VP of engineering is requesting that the product manager work with the UI designer on some interface refinements, and the VP of sales is requesting that

the product manager get on a plane to help close a deal, which activity does senior management prioritize? If it isn't the first one, that product manager is being treated as a technical, product-oriented resource, not as CEO of the product.

So, are product managers CEOs of their product? No, not today. The analogy we've shared doesn't describe the activities and behaviors of most product managers. Their focus remains too narrow and they lack the authority and resources that CEOs have.

Should product managers be CEOs of their products? Yes, but with some explanation. Product managers are not suddenly granted authority to make unilateral strategic decisions and direct others to obey. Instead, they should think like CEOs by becoming change agents and articulating a compelling business vision of the product/market pair. **PM**



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About the Authors

Roger Hicks is the principal at Roger Hicks Consulting, where he creates winning product strategies and market-driven business models. He has led new business initiatives and product launches involving instrumentation, displays and computing for Tektronix, Planar Systems and Intel. Roger has also managed projects that feature market-changing innovations used by industries ranging from food processing to solar power to LED lighting and more. He co-founded the Be Market Oriented collaborative and has served on the boards of The Indus Entrepreneurs, Product Development and Management Association and Smart Grid Northwest. Contact Roger at roger@bemarketoriented.com.

Miki Tokola is a 30-year veteran of high-tech product management and marketing, managing products with revenues totaling over \$500 billion and establishing marketing/product management organizations at five companies. His products have been used by people ranging from lumbermen and oyster graders to a Nobel Laureate in physics. A co-founder of ProductCamp Portland, Miki also serves on the board of directors. In addition, he is former president of the Oregon Chapter of the Product Development and Management Association. Contact Miki at miki@bemarketoriented.com.

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Are We Doing Content Marketing Right?

BY
GERARDO A. DADA

A FEW MONTHS AGO, DURING A CONTENT MARKETING PANEL at the Texas Marketing Summit in Houston, I came to the conclusion that our understanding of content marketing is still in its infancy, much like social media was eight years ago. We have a lot of opportunity for improvement and much to learn as marketers. And it sometimes feels as if we are failing. It made me wonder: Are we doing content marketing right?

Start With the Basics

To understand the right way to do content marketing, it is important to be clear about what it is not.

- Content marketing is not new. It's been around for a long time.
- Content marketing is not a strategy, but it should support your existing strategy.
- Content marketing is not a program, but it should influence your marketing programs.
- Content marketing should not be a department within marketing; all of marketing should embrace it.
- Content marketing is not a tool or a set of tools, but tools should support it and enable it.
- Content marketing does not simply mean publishing blog posts, SlideShare decks and Instagram posts, but each of these could be part of your content strategy.

If your view of content marketing falls under one of these bullets, you are limiting your success. Content marketing is far more powerful than that.

Defining Content Marketing

Many people define content marketing as a process or set of tactics. I have a slightly different viewpoint: *Content marketing is a philosophy based on the premise that marketing needs to be useful, educational and customer-focused.*

Implicit in this definition is that marketing needs to shift from talking about what you want to talk

about (your products, most likely) to talking about what the customer wants to learn about.

What does this mean?

- As a philosophy or mindset, it is something everyone in marketing must believe. It should guide most of your marketing activities.
- Adopting this philosophy requires us to accept that good marketers must be good writers. Marketers need to be able to write content that is visual, understandable and effective.
- It requires understanding customers' interests and needs.
- The best marketing is educational; it helps customers achieve their goals, answers their questions and makes them smarter.

Becoming Better Marketers

One of the benefits of the recent focus on content marketing is that it also brings about a renewed focus on customers (personas). Understanding customers, how they think and the problems they want to solve is the fundamental source of value that marketers bring to the organization.

It is important that personas focus on the customer's context, goals and their specific questions during the buying process. And increasingly, marketers are learning how to effectively use personas as a tool to create customer empathy.

Good content should not only be useful for customers, it should also help the company achieve its goals. Therefore, good content exists at the intersection of what is helpful for customers, your unique knowledge and what will predispose customers to buy from you.


**The best
marketing is
educational.**

Failing at Content

The truth is that we are creating a lot of bad content. Much of the content marketing out there is really just promotional marketing disguised as useful content. In fact, Brainshark recently reported that 62 percent of buyers called vendor marketing content useless.

An article about your products with a nice headline and an intro is not much different from an ad. The worst offenders are people who promote coupons and discounts on social channels and call it content marketing or social-media marketing when it is simply advertising.

Forrester Research recently found that 87 percent of B2B marketers struggle to develop compelling content. And B2C marketers are not doing much better. But why is it so difficult?

This quick test will help determine if your content is customer-centric: How many times are your products mentioned in your average content-marketing piece? I challenge you to create content that does not focus on your products—and content that does not even mention them.

Measuring Content Marketing

Not everything that is important can be measured in marketing, and not everything that can be measured is important. Because attribution models are in their infancy, it is impossible to know exactly how much your content has resulted in success. To an extent, you must trust that you are doing the right thing. This does not mean, however, that you should not measure. You can start with the basics: engagement, which is the easiest thing to measure. But keep in mind that engagement can be a meaningless measurement, an indication that customers are looking at excessive amounts of content because they cannot find what they need.

Too much weight and the wrong metrics can lead to the wrong behaviors. For instance, you could produce tons of cat videos to achieve a high number of views and engagement. However, it would not help the business in any way.

Engagement is only useful when it is helpful for customers and predisposes them to buy your products. Good content allows you to establish your point of view, educate customers, demonstrate your expertise and create affinity for your company's products.

The only measurement that matters is impact on the business. You must find metrics that indicate a move toward reaching the business's goals and find leading indicators that map to those goals. Those might include awareness, interest, leads, growth, loyalty and recommendation.

Improving Your Content-Marketing Proficiency

When you embrace content marketing as a philosophy, that dictates how you do marketing. You won't need to create a separate content-marketing team because everyone in marketing will be responsible for content. For example, when I worked at Microsoft, the company had thousands of bloggers. Why? Because every employee in the division was not only encouraged but expected to interact with the community or blog. It was part of the job, not the responsibility of a content team.

Remember, the best marketing is educational, not self-serving. And successful content marketing will focus on solving customer problems, not promoting your products. **PM**

About the Author

Gerardo A. Dada is the vice president of product marketing and strategy at SolarWinds. A marketing strategist, technology marketer and entrepreneur, Gerardo has worked for companies like Microsoft, Rackspace, Motorola and Bazaarvoice. Read his blog at TheAdaptiveMarketer.com, follow him on Twitter at @gerarodada or email him at gdada@hotmail.com.



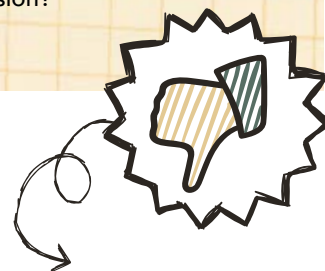
A FAILURE IN CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY

A few months ago, I wanted to buy a large TV or projector for our media room. I spent considerable time doing research, including hours looking at the websites of some of the largest consumer electronics manufacturers and retailers.

I had a lot of questions. Should I get a large TV or a projector? What are the advantages of LCD over DLP? What is throw distance? Is 5000:1 contrast good or bad? What is MHL? Lag? Lens shift?

None of these large manufacturers or retailers were useful in answering my questions. They missed an opportunity to be helpful, to educate me and to predispose me to buy from them.

Think about it: As a buyer, how many times in the past month have you encountered content that was actually useful in making an informed purchase decision?





DUE YESTERDAY:

The New Market Reality

BY SARAH TRUMAN

I, LIKE MOST PRODUCT PROFESSIONALS, have chuckled at the programming humor “code today, deliver yesterday and think tomorrow.” That was until I was presented with THE most intense project of my 14-year product management career, which has ranged from warp-speed startups to Fortune 5 giants.

Just what was so special about *this* initiative? Allow me.

This project had an absolutely outrageous deadline of less than one year and a gargantuan, highly fluid amount of work—the scope of which had never before been attempted by the 330+ employees at our 15-year-old company. To help you fully appreciate the outrageousness of this initiative, let’s break it down.

I’m talking about a 125,000-man-hour project that:

- Built or modified 14 different internal applications
- Developed and deployed multiple APIs for use by eight separate integration partners who had to change and—in some cases—gut their products on this same short deadline (without any accompanying revenue)
- Created a complex dynamic pricing engine in an industry where none existed before
- Inherited the workload of exiting software partners with no change in deadline

This initiative challenged me to find ways to deliver yesterday. I wasn’t chuckling anymore.

Making Chaos My Friend

Anyone who has been in product development over the last five years knows that today’s software environment is turning into survival of the fittest, especially for product teams. Teams that survive and thrive are the ones that embrace chaos as the norm, live to relish the changing priority of the day, bow down to agile—and every other lean software development process—and leverage the fact that partners are competitors and competitors are partners.

I embraced the chaos and succeeded. Now I’m sharing some of my survival tactics for managing the anarchy, corralling the troops, embracing seemingly unachievable deadlines and delivering a product the customer wants the first time out of the gate.

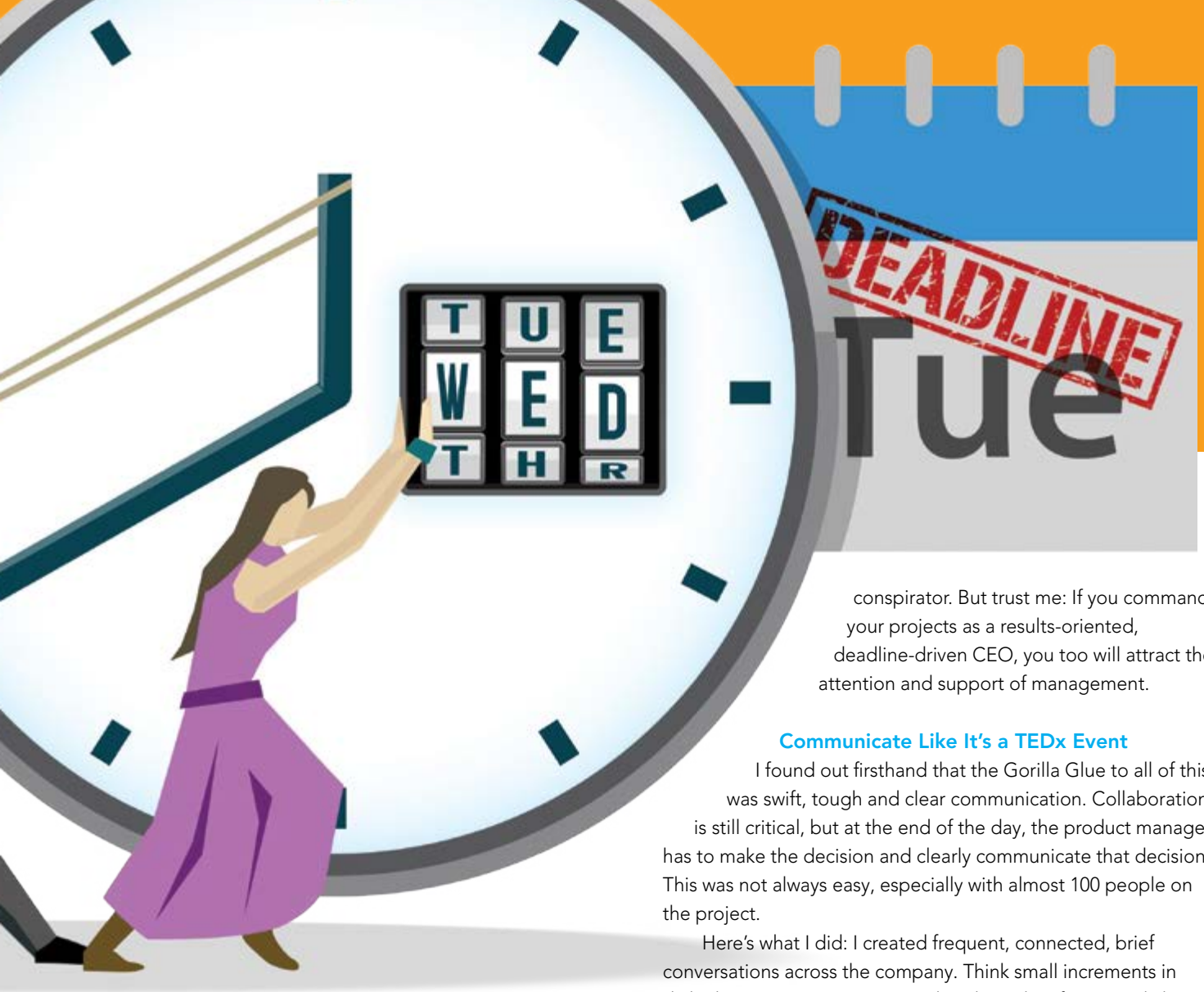
These tidbits worked for me, and they can work for you too. So read on as I tip my Red Bull to your similar project success and personal survival.

Lead Like the CEO of a Do-or-Die Startup

Coming from a do-or-die startup, I had a leg up on this one. Essentially, you have to lead the project as if it’s the deciding factor in your firm’s success (or demise). This means seeing the big picture of the role your project plays in the company’s and customers’ strategy and then ingraining a sense-of-urgency mentality and work culture throughout the organization.



Teams that survive and thrive are the ones that embrace chaos as the norm.



This project was for the world's second-largest automaker and our company's largest customer. Not only did it deliver significant product cred by changing the industry's pricing paradigm, it also established broad market awareness of our company as the go-to provider of dynamic pricing engines. How's that for a high-profile project?

Failure wasn't an option, so I surveyed the project landscape, quickly secured resources (up to one-third of our 330-person organization) and partnered with a technical manager who became my new best friend and primary collaborator. I created frequent, brief communication touchpoints to sustain motivation and momentum, showed ruthless resolve in time management (my own and everyone else's) and mandated that every meeting (yes, we still had them) have a set purpose and measurable outcome.

This commander-in-chief approach wasn't always easy, but it's exactly what this project—and most of today's high-profile projects—require to get quality product to market in record time. Granted, I was fortunate to have top management's support behind me and a top-notch technical manager as my co-

conspirator. But trust me: If you command your projects as a results-oriented, deadline-driven CEO, you too will attract the attention and support of management.

Communicate Like It's a TEDx Event

I found out firsthand that the Gorilla Glue to all of this was swift, tough and clear communication. Collaboration is still critical, but at the end of the day, the product manager has to make the decision and clearly communicate that decision. This was not always easy, especially with almost 100 people on the project.

Here's what I did: I created frequent, connected, brief conversations across the company. Think small increments in daily doses. For instance, I mandated (nicely, of course) daily cross-functional scrum of scrums, daily stand-up training for customer support that included role-playing scenarios, and weekly all-departmental report-outs. Are you getting the communication connection here?

Frequent targeted conversations that are focused on challenges, next steps, big-picture importance and relevant updates will go further than you can imagine in inspiring people to do their best and deliver solutions that innovate on a technical, market and deadline level.

Play Outside Your Sandbox

You know the old quandary of buy, build or partner? Well, this project involved all three. The real challenge was trying to determine which pieces we needed to buy, build or find a partner for.

API integration was a critical component that we needed yesterday to meet our deadline. Since we were virtual novices in the API world, it became a foregone conclusion to purchase best-in-class API management software. This single decision immediately replaced a roadblock with an accelerator. Our finite staff redirected their programming focus to simultaneously



Apply KISS, not only to product design but also to communication, training, documentation and market promotion.



build multiple market interfaces for use with no fewer than eight integration partners who had agendas and timelines that rarely matched ours.

This brings up another challenge. We needed to convince these same companies to partner with us to deliver the best streamlined solution for our mutual customers. They owned market share we couldn't begin to parallel. And we owned pricing data vital to making their products relevant. The WIIFM factor—or what's in it for me—took some negotiation, but we got there.

Bottom line: By making these decisions, we provided integration partners with 24/7 support, established our technology as premier within the industry and jump-started a new portfolio of services. Yep, it cost money, but we met the deadline and reaped far greater rewards for the next outrageous project. These were results the actual CEO understood.

KISS With a Passion

Don't go blushing on me now. KISS, or keep it simple stupid, has never had a more profound application than in delivering products that the market wants and can use the first time out of the gate. We all know that nothing destroys a project timeline, or successful market launch, faster than a faulty understanding of the user experience or doing anything half-baked. Yet it's tempting to skip vital steps, such as customer involvement or heavy functional and performance testing, simply because it takes time. But if we do, it will come back to bite us in the patootie.

Spend the time up front to thoroughly understand user personas and workflow, while testing your solutions hardcore in the early phases of the project. Then apply KISS, not only to product design but also to communication, training, documentation and market promotion. Think agile on steroids in doling out the right amount of product, information and everything else required to gain rapid market adoption.

In our case, KISS was our lifeline as we launched a bodacious amount of code on the same day: enhancements to 14 internal

applications and new API integrations with eight separate companies. What were we thinking? Fortunately, the KISS mantra prevailed and we nailed it.

Dream Out Loud

In our dreams, we do the impossible or improbable while defying manmade limitations. Why not apply this same thinking to innovation and overcoming barriers in product design, partner collaboration, market implementation and just about everything that stands between you and your deadline? Play hardball to find and use time-saving shortcuts; force *CliffsNotes*-style requirements, training and documentation; and focus more on results than on protocol.

When deadlines are jeopardized, don't hesitate to pick your battle and do everything you can to win it. You're fighting for your product, your company, your customer and your end user. Follow these few tidbits and you can meet yesterday's deadline. More important, you and your company will be better positioned to streamline time-to-market while upping your competitive game. And that, folks, is what it's all about. **PM**



About the Author

Sarah Truman is the enterprise product director at OEConnection (OEC), the leading automotive ecommerce marketplace for original equipment replacement parts. Sarah is part of the new breed of product managers who are leading the industry in innovation and thought leadership. Managing five distinct product lines over her career, she has met and overcome the challenges presented by global product design and refined these elements as best practices for truly effective, market-driven product launches. Adept at managing product life cycles for small startups to billion-dollar organizations, Sarah invites you to connect with her at Sarah.Truman@OEConnection.com.

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Jobs To Be Done

Obstacles: What Holds New Ideas Back

BY STEPHEN WUNKER,
JESSICA WATTMAN
AND DAVID FARBER

WHILE RESEARCHING THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SECTOR A FEW YEARS

Wback, we came across a young woman living in what she described as a “unique” apartment. It had no kitchen. We don’t mean that the apartment had a small kitchen, or that the kitchen wasn’t separated with walls. We mean that there was no kitchen. No oven. No burners. No kitchen sink. You get the idea. When we talked to her about the idea of moving, she acknowledged that she had planned to find a new place, but after a while she didn’t really mind the quirks so much. Plus, moving is such a hassle. Other things came up, and the idea of moving became much less of a priority.

The spread of new products works in a similar way. There may be some early adopters who are excited about the new offering, but many people will sit back and wait until their circumstances dictate a change. Beyond general inertia, specific obstacles to adoption and use can also depress new product sales. Had our client released an oven-prepared meal, our kitchenless friend wouldn’t have purchased it. While the lack of a kitchen may be a somewhat atypical hurdle, it also serves to illustrate some of the more common factors that stop customers from buying or using enticing new products.

The Fight Against Inertia

Just because there is a better product or a better way of doing something, it doesn’t mean that customers will embrace the new solution. If a new offering doesn’t fit with engrained behaviors and expectations, customers will be reluctant to change and will look for reasons not to shift to a new solution. Companies will be forced to invest resources fighting both actual and perceived obstacles.

In many parts of the world, mopeds are a popular way of navigating congested urban areas. Despite similar traffic and hassles in many U.S. cities, mopeds have never really taken off in the States. Part of that can be attributed to perception. When you think about mopeds in other parts of the world, you often think of old, loud, dirty contraptions that—while practical—aren’t particularly comfortable or esteemed. We think of them being used to carry families of four down dusty roads in South America or through crowded traffic jams in India. Back in America, we just don’t see the need. If we want to get around the city, public transportation is typically good enough to get the job done. When it’s not, cars are becoming more and more luxurious. Cars give us the option to turn on our seat warmers, sip our coffee, make a phone call or two and belt out the lyrics to the newest Taylor Swift song completely free of judgment. You can’t do that on a moped. And with favorable lease terms, a car can actually be pretty affordable.

But things are changing, and cars aren’t always ideal. Parking costs are starting to soar. Gas is getting more expensive, and people are becoming more environmentally conscious.

Cities—though historically designed around cars in the United States—are making strides to be friendlier for bikes and mopeds. People are getting married



later, delaying the move out of urban areas. Even families are choosing cities over suburbs with increasing frequency. As urban areas become even more densely populated, cars begin to make less sense. And when you need to carry groceries or bulky items home from the store, public transportation is less than ideal. There's clearly a market opening for mopeds in U.S. cities, but consumers are going to need to be convinced. They're not going to shoulder the burden of determining why mopeds are actually a good idea. Companies need to be well aware of stubborn behaviors that can impede the successful uptake of their new product and think, from the very outset of the design process, how they can excite people out of their comfort zone.

GenZe has taken a number of steps to fight inertia and nonconsumption, in hopes that its new electric scooter will take off among younger, urban consumers in the United States. Before launching its new bike (the GenZe 2.0), company employees traveled to cities around the country to talk to people about how they were commuting today, where they were experiencing pain points and what they were trying to get done in their commutes. Using that knowledge, they designed a bike that accounts for the jobs and job drivers of their target demographic. It offers cargo units to carry briefcases, groceries and other personal items. Those units are even rainproof for people in cities with less forgiving climates. The scooters are environmentally friendly, allowing riders to save on fuel costs

and feel as though they're doing their part for the environment. The scooters are also visually appealing and tech-heavy, featuring a 7-inch touch-screen control panel. Consumers don't choose the GenZe 2.0 because they can't afford something better; they choose it to make a statement. The bike also helps lower the barriers to adoption by introducing features that make it safer and easier to use, such as taller windscreens and a special driving mode for those still learning to ride. While it

remains to be seen how well the GenZe 2.0 will do in the United States, GenZe's dedication to customer centricity and its focus on defeating traditional purchase obstacles will give it the best possible chance to succeed.

Fighting inertia means lowering the barriers to trying a new product. While some companies continually "wow" their loyal customers with a parade of shiny new products, most do not. This latter group has to work hard to induce trial. Other obstacles may also stand in the way of customers adopting or using your new product. The next two

sections identify 10 of the most common obstacles that slow the spread of your new product.

Obstacles to Adoption

Obstacles to adoption are barriers that prevent customers from buying your products in the first place. Even customers who might benefit from your product—or otherwise be inclined to buy it—may choose a competitor's product or nonconsumption

Just because there's a better product or better way of doing something doesn't mean customers will embrace the new solution.

in the face of these obstacles. Therefore, it is important to find ways to reduce or eliminate them. The following obstacles are some of the most frequent barriers to product purchases.


Lack of knowledge. One of the most fundamental reasons that customers don't buy your product is that they don't know they need it. It's not that the innovator is making up a job to be done that didn't actually exist—a tough road to take, for sure—but rather that customers had just gotten used to the old way of doing things. Look at medical records at a physician's office, which are typically a mess of free-form text, checked boxes, and scans of faxes from diagnostic labs and other doctors. It's very tough to find useful information quickly, and sometimes critical data gets overlooked. Yet vendors of "golden record" solutions that create a single integrated file have found the market slow to materialize because physicians don't realize the cost—in terms of both money and suboptimal medical outcomes—of the current make-do approach. Only by quantifying the situation and evangelizing about the dangers of the typical practice have they made people realize that these jobs can get done in a far better way.

Behavior-change requirement. Getting people to change their behavior can be difficult. Ozon, often referred to as the Amazon of Russia, is the largest e-commerce company in Russia. It started with book sales, moved into movies and music, ventured into consumer electronics, then ultimately became a full-range retailer of virtually every consumer good imaginable. Despite its relative size in Russia, growth has been challenging in Russia's cash-based economy. In particular, Ozon has had trouble selling its proprietary e-reader (the Ozon Galaxy), eBooks and digital music. With digital content requiring a credit card for purchase and Russian consumers being generally unwilling or unable to move away from cash, these categories have seen lackluster sales.

Multiple decision-makers. Even great ideas can be hindered by the need to bring many disconnected decision-makers on board, some of whom may have misaligned incentives. Systems that enable teams of doctors to consult online about shared cases seem to make a ton of sense, but they have grown quite slowly. IT, hospital departments and individual physicians all need to come on board, or else the system will be stymied. Some of these entities may embrace change, whereas others see mainly risk. Even if the benefits of the solution are clear to all, simply getting people to agree on a proposition and action plan can take far longer than implementing the actual system.

High costs. Costs can be high in a number of ways. The actual cost of a new product can be prohibitively expensive. At around \$40,000 (or roughly 80 percent of the median U.S. household income), a Nesmuk diamond-studded knife is simply too expensive for most consumers. A product also can be too costly compared with rival goods. Harrods, the UK department store, launched its £29.95 Pot Noodle in 2008. Although the launch was part of a stunt to celebrate design innovation (while also sending proceeds to charity), one can't help but wonder whether that price is a bit high for a cup of instant noodles. Finally, the cost of switching to a new solution can be unpalatable. Along this third vein, cell phone carriers decided years ago that they would make it hard to switch carriers by imposing an early termination fee. More recently, as carriers have battled for market share, they have begun buying out termination fees from other carriers and eliminating the idea of a standard two-year contract altogether, thus helping to reduce the costs of switching carriers.

High risk. Customers will be reluctant to adopt a new solution if it involves a lot of risk or a high potential cost of failure. Even with the recent rise in lawsuits by patent trolls, the uptake of patent litigation insurance has been slow. In part, attorneys believe that this is because buying such insurance might actually invite patent suits with liabilities that quickly exceed coverage limits. Even though the insurance could prevent crippling lawsuit damages, the risk of attracting patent troll attention has been too great to allow for fast adoption.



Customers will be reluctant to adopt a new solution if it involves a lot of risk or a high potential cost of failure.



Unfamiliar category. Sometimes, products are so innovative that they define a new category that the customer doesn't really understand or have a budget for. Consider the internet of things (IoT), a network of potentially millions of connected devices and sensors in a workplace that can keep tabs on just about everything happening in a facility. For all of the hype surrounding the idea, uptake by major corporations has been slow. There typically isn't anyone with IoT in their job title or an IoT line item in the annual budget. IoT vendor en-Gauge has addressed this challenge in a clever way, focusing tightly on monitoring the readiness of fire extinguishers. Fire safety usually is someone's responsibility, and few people dissent from spending modestly to improve a company's readiness in this area. Once en-Gauge introduces its IoT solution through this route, it plans to be in prime position to sell much more expansive offerings later.

Obstacles to Use

A second set of obstacles to consider are **obstacles to use**. These are the reasons that customers stop using your product or service after initial adoption. Obstacles to use can take a few different shapes. You may see an early wave of enthusiasm with a rapid falloff of purchases. Or, more straightforwardly, people simply stop repurchasing your product, buying add-on features or upgrading to later editions. Obstacles to use present a major hurdle to creating a sustainable business model. The following categories represent some of the most common reasons a customer will not use a product.

Limited supporting infrastructure. Sometimes a product can be great on its own, but lacks value without a system to support it. Imagine downloading a peer-to-peer app but having no peers! Similarly, electric vehicles offer a number of benefits for both drivers and the environment. Yet even eco-friendly consumers who are willing to buy electric cars are often dissuaded by the lack of available charging stations. Those who drive long distances arguably have the most to save (assuming the price of gas stays high relative to the price of electricity in your area), but they are the ones for whom the solution is least viable. Without the infrastructure that allows you to get the full potential out of your purchase, use becomes prohibitively difficult.


Use creates pain points. Customers will not continue to use a product that is overly complex or difficult to use. Yet companies often insist on overloading their new products

Many times, a new product sounds really exciting, but it ultimately doesn't do a better job than the existing solution.

with features rather than focusing on satisfying important jobs well. According to an NPD Group survey of over 1,500 consumers, 13 percent of consumers had returned an electronic device due to frustration when trying to get it to work. Windows Vista, launched by Microsoft in 2007, was surrounded by high expectations from both consumers and the company. As incessant compatibility and performance problems plagued the product, even some of Microsoft's most loyal customers defected for Apple.

It's cool, not better. Many times, a new product sounds really exciting, but it ultimately doesn't do a better job than the existing solution. Generally, customers rush to try these products but stop using these solutions when they realize that they don't excel along the dimensions that they find most important. The technology that allows you to purchase items using a cell phone has been around for a relatively long time. Although a number of people tried it once or twice, they ultimately found that it didn't perform any better than a standard swipe of a credit card. In fact, it often took longer. As Google and Apple reignite the race to get mobile payments off the ground, this second wave is focusing on jobs that are now top of mind for customers, such as data security.

Offering isn't targeted. Similarly, new offerings need to be targeted to specific jobs and customer types. The Segway was another fun device that was launched without much purpose or direction. Once the company stopped trying to sell the Segway to the general public—who couldn't afford it and didn't know what to do with it—it found success among customer types with undersatisfied jobs, including police forces, urban tour guides and warehouses.



Getting consumers interested in a new product can be an uphill battle.

Getting customers to even consider your product in the first place can often be quite the challenge, but finding ways to overcome obstacles to long-term use can be just as important a task. Without opportunities to resell to past purchasers, you may find that your business model is simply unsustainable.

Fighting Inertia in E-Commerce

When we started a project for a major retailer, the kickoff team identified Amazon as a major competitor. It made sense. The retailer's website had a relatively small share of online consumer spending in its merchandise category, and analyst reports suggested that the retailer's prices were frequently being undercut. Nevertheless, as the company looked to build its e-commerce presence, it became clear that Amazon was actually doing the retailer a favor. As it turns out, Amazon was doing several things to fight consumer inertia and lower the obstacles to online shopping in the category. First, by visibly promoting the sale of the product category online, Amazon raised awareness that the retailer's products could be affordably purchased online, despite how heavy they were on average. Second, by allowing consumers to buy the products as an add-on to other Amazon purchases, Amazon helped normalize

the idea of routinely shopping online in the category. Third, Amazon's prices forced the retailer to reconsider and optimize its own shipping mechanisms, ultimately reducing its costs and increasing its ability to pass cost savings on to the consumer. While Amazon may ultimately be more of a competitor than a partner, its own actions are currently helping to defeat obstacles to adoption industry-wide. Our client decided to piggyback on the behaviors Amazon was already introducing, using its superior selection and local store pickup option to compete in ways that Amazon could not.

Getting consumers interested in a new product can be an uphill battle. For the most part, consumers already have a set list of products that they regularly buy or consider for satisfying a particular job. Alternatives need to be compelling enough to shake consumers out of their routines. By lowering the obstacles to buying a new product—such as by making it inexpensive to try or by being clear about its benefits—companies may be able to win over early adopters, who will then act as reference customers that tout your product's benefits to others. To ensure long-term success, companies also need to eliminate the barriers to use, thus ensuring that customers have a reason to turn to your organization again after the first sale has been completed.

People are creatures of habit, and they tend to change their behaviors and buying habits slowly. Simply creating enticing products may not be enough to get people to take a chance on your new offering. The burden will be on the organization—not the customer—to defeat any excuses that justify maintaining the status quo. **PMA**

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About the Authors

Stephen Wunker is a leading consultant on growth and innovation. He founded New Markets Advisors in 2009 and advises innovative companies across industries, including Nestlé, Boston Scientific, Cognizant and Nike. An entrepreneur and corporate venturer, Stephen has been a pioneer in the development and use of smartphones. He led the team creating one of the first, in the late 1990s, and since then he created trailblazing companies in mobile marketing, commerce and social networking.

Jessica Wattman is a veteran at creating strategies for environments in rapid flux. Her work has been predominantly in the public and nonprofit sectors, where she deployed Jobs To Be Done and other innovation methodologies to create a wide range of trailblazing programs in conflict and other unstable environments. She is director of social innovation at New Markets Advisors.

David Farber is a manager specializing in growth strategy and innovation at New Markets Advisors. His work focuses on helping companies find organic sources of growth and capture value through new business models. He has extensive experience employing the Jobs To Be Done methodology in his client engagements. He is also a licensed Massachusetts attorney.



HOW TO

Change Your Culture Using Market Data

BY STACEY WEBER

REMEMBER HOW EXCITED I FELT ABOUT WHAT I'D LEARNED AFTER attending my first Pragmatic Marketing course. What I didn't immediately realize was how quickly I could harness that enthusiasm and use market data to make a real impact on my company culture.

Shortly after training, I had a meeting with customer support. The conversation went something like this: "We have this terrible error. We have to release right now." I channeled my recent training and asked, "So, how many calls have we actually received about this error?" I did some quick calculations based on their response. "Okay," I replied. "So we received calls from less than 1 percent of the client base."

Everyone's jaws dropped as I put that information into perspective for them. Bringing the conversation back to facts quickly changed the conversation and the rhythm of the team. When the problem was put into perspective, it was much easier to work together to assess what needed to happen and whether a fix was necessary.

That conversation with customer support sparked a change in the way we handled hot fixes out to the market. Instead of having a sky-is-falling mentality, we started digging up whatever facts we had available and did fixes in a more logical way.

Getting involved in when to release a hot fix is a tactical exercise, but I was able to prime that team to start thinking in terms of facts. Sometimes companies believe that they have to act based on instinct, based on the loudest person in the room or based on what the boss says; many times, they don't realize they have an option. Market facts will transform your teams, your products, even your companies.

Using facts that customer support themselves provided also helped to increase buy-in. It empowered the entire team to say, "We will make the best decision if we all understand the situation."

When you pull out the facts you have available, you change the conversation. You also change the mindset because you no longer have to guess. You can work collaboratively to figure out what the facts are and then find the best solution.





Using Data for Executive Conversations

Before you can have a credible conversation with executives, you must have some facts under your belt. Even doing a handful of market visits and gathering those market facts will allow you to inject better information into the conversation. Executives are often accustomed to driving the company based on their available data. This can cause problems, depending on the data they are actually exposed to.

I remember having conversations with executives who basically said, “Based on what I know, the entire market is going to move in this direction.” By asking, “How do you know that? What have you heard?” I could better understand where they got their information.

For instance, one vice president of engineering was a technical, brilliant engineer. He was participating regularly in



analyst briefings, hearing all about what those analysts thought was going to happen in the market. He became confident that he knew exactly where the market was going, which problems people were having, and what they were doing. I said, “I’ve been out to three client visits in the last month, but I’ve never seen anything like that. What makes you think that?”

I was not in a position to go head-to-head with this VP based on my opinion; but when I shared my facts and asked him where he had gotten his facts, it enabled an objective conversation about what the analysts were predicting and whether there was any correlation with our market data. As it turned out, there was not a lot of correlation. The analysts were off; they had a myopic view, which they passed on to the VP. If no one had asked whether those facts were reflective of the actual market, we could have invested a lot of money in something that would not have succeeded.

It’s a good illustration of what happens when you don’t see all the parts. You can think you’re headed in the right direction, but you must get enough information to validate.

Your job is to tease out the facts from others and share your market data. Remember, they have a tiny part of the picture. If each person puts their facts on the table, everyone can take a step back and say, “Wow. None of us had the right answer.”

Start With Available Data

You can begin to identify trends right away by identifying what data you already have. Available sources of data might include trip and event reports, sales engineer reports, enhancement requests, or information gleaned from employees who have returned from trade shows.

Get some really good qualitative discussions in as well with the buyers and users who are most important to your business or product. Once you get a handful of market visits within a particular market segment, you have some numbers to share.

You do need to be careful about how you share that information. For instance, if you have done five market visits and seen the same market problem three times, it’s not fair to say “60 percent of the market has this problem.” It is fair to say, “I don’t know the entire market, but I have done five visits in the last couple of months; I’ve seen this problem crop up in at least three of those visits.” Be open about the data you’ve collected, though, and don’t exaggerate or extend.

There are many things that can skew your initial sample. Maybe you did a half-dozen visits, but they were all in the same city. Perhaps you did five market visits, but they were all during the same week as a major international event that impacted what people were focused on. When you reach a point where you want to make an investment, you don’t want to proceed based only on five market visits, especially when you understand how easy it could be to have a bad initial sample. To mitigate that risk, you’ll want to do surveys with a larger audience to ensure you’ve accurately identified the trends.

Changing your culture isn’t actually about changing the culture—it’s about changing the conversation. It’s about changing the relationship between people. It’s about changing the rhythms inside your company and inside your meeting rooms. You make that change by becoming truly market-driven: by injecting facts into the conversation. Bring people together, get them centered with a common understanding of the facts and allow them to make the right decisions. When you follow this approach, one day you’ll look around and realize that you have dramatically changed your culture. **PM**



About the Author

Stacey Weber is an instructor for Pragmatic Marketing and has used the Pragmatic Marketing Framework to manage the full product lifecycle, from launch to managing in mid-life maintenance to retiring at obsolescence. In addition, she has extensive experience leading cross-functional product teams, strategy teams and multiple product management groups. Contact Stacey at sweber@pragmaticmarketing.com.

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Put this issue's ideas into action.

Make People Feel Good

Take time to understand what is important to consumers, then recreate that experience with your products and brand.

Robert Wallace

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Manage Your Career Lifecycle

Create a strategy that leverages and nurtures your skills to ensure a successful launch and continued relevancy throughout your career lifecycle.

Kirsten Butzow

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Actively Engage Customers

Create content that appeals to a variety of customer preferences so they can engage with you in the manner they prefer.

Sheila Kloefkorn

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Listen to Your Customers

First understand what customers want, then translate the value of your product into their language.

Justin Topliff

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Start With What's Known

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Act Diplomatically

Successful product managers identify challenges and influence results, instead of acting as if they have ultimate authority.

Roger Hicks and
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Develop Compelling Content

Create content that focuses on solving customer problems, not promoting your products.

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Communicate Often

Frequent, connected, brief communications shared across the company encourage people to do their best and deliver innovative solutions.

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Fight Against Inertia

To gain buy-in for a new product, think of ways to excite people out of their comfort zone beginning in the design process.

Stephen Wunker,
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Use Market Data

Empower yourself by using facts to increase buy-in from internal stakeholders.

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