The Marketing Journal for High-Tech Product Managers • A Pragmatic Marketing® Publication

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Volume 1 Issue 2 June 2003

Listening to the Market

How to Interview your Customers

There's a Reason No One is Listening

Building Tomorrow's Products Requires Listening to the Market

Why Do We Even Have a Marketing Department?

Since the bubble burst two years ago, we've seen a huge transition in the perception of technology marketing. As belt tightening sets in, senior management must reevaluate the value provided by each department. Without hard evidence that marketing is a contributor, CEOs begin to ask, "So who needs marketing, anyway?"

Part of the reason that technology marketers find themselves in this dilemma can be attributed to their infatuation with tactical activities. Focusing on closing one more deal, living the role of sales support, and general product fire fighting can be a rewarding, low-risk job. Tactical product management is a job that is easy to replicate by someone else in the company. Hello pink slip.

Marketing people become invaluable to the company when they become experts on the prospective customer. Virtually nobody in the company (including sales) makes proactive calls into the market purely for the purpose of understanding their unresolved problems. Combine that set of quantified problems with your company's unique ability to solve these problems, and you have a winning product, and the essence of marketing.

On the Pragmatic Marketing Process (pages 15-16) we list "Market Problems" on the far left, or strategic, side of the chart. Understanding these problems is the most important "box" on the entire chart since the information we collect in this phase, drives the rest of the more tactical activities. This issue of *productmarketing.com* focuses on specific techniques about how you can get in touch with your prospective customers and become the "Market Expert" in your company.

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About Pragmatic Marketing, Inc.

Based in Scottsdale, Arizona, Pragmatic Marketing, Inc. was formed in 1993 to provide product marketing training and consulting to high-tech firms by focusing on strategic, market-driven techniques. Pragmatic's training courses emphasize business-oriented definition of market problems, resulting in reduced risk and faster product delivery and adoption. Since its inception, Pragmatic Marketing has successfully graduated over 20,000 product managers and marketing professionals, and was named one of the Inc 500 fastest-growing companies of 2000. For more information about Pragmatic Marketing and its courses, please visit the website at http://www.pragmaticmarketing.com or call 480-515-1411.

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How to interview

By Kristin Zhivago

your customers

You know you should be interviewing customers. But you just never seem to get it done. Why not? There are deadlines, sure, but the real reason is that you just aren't very comfortable making "cold calls." And you're not sure what you should say.

Well, get over it. You simply can't be successful in marketing if you're not talking to customers. There is no other source of political power. None. If you don't talk to customers, you can't win any internal arguments about your strategy, campaigns, and budgets; you can't represent the customer to all of the people in the company who have a product-centric or company-centric point of view; you can't create campaigns that will resonate with customers; you can't make the right product decisions; and you sure as heck aren't going to get promoted. In other words, your personal success—your professional standing, your mortgage, your retirement, your kid's college education—depends on making these calls.

This article will help you make these calls. The advice comes from someone who has made thousands of calls to customers, and knows exactly how you feel before making a call.

1. Don't think of these calls as "cold calls." You're not selling anything. You're asking someone, politely and respectfully, what they think. You're letting them talk and listening attentively. As long as you don't start selling or defending yourself (this is very important), the customer won't get bored and will spend anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour and a half on the phone with you. Call enough customers, and you'll start to realize that these are the "warmest" calls you've ever made.

2. When you call to interview, you can keep calling until you get through (one CEO whose company makes 2 million cold calls a year says it takes 13 tries, on average, before you reach someone at their desk). Or, you can leave a message. But don't ask them to call you back. Tell them they don't need to call you back (leave your number anyway) and you'll call them again the next day, and then do so. Some people will call you back the first time. Others will appreciate the fact that you didn't ask them to call you back, and will be friendly when you reach them. Others will blow you off no matter what you do. When you call the second time, leave a message, and this time ask them to call you back. Try several more times to reach them at their desks (without leaving a message) and then give up. There are always other customers to call.

3. When you get through, introduce yourself again, tell them why you're calling, and then ask for permission to go ahead. If they sound rushed, stop. Say, "Gee, you sound rushed—should we do this another time?" If they are trying to meet a deadline, they will appreciate your courtesy, and will be glad to set up an appointment. They may also say, "Well, I do have a meeting in twenty minutes. Can we do it in that amount of time?" Say yes, and then keep an eye on the clock. At the ten-minute mark, say, "We've got ten minutes left." Do it again at the 15-minute mark. At twenty minutes, say, "It's been twenty minutes. Do you need to go to your meeting now?" Sometimes they will say, "Well, I can be late for that one. What other questions do you want to ask?" One woman even missed a plane on purpose because she thought it was so important that my client hear what she had to say. Because you are respectful of their time, their appreciation will translate into more time for you.

4. If they ask you, "How much time will this take?"—because they're terrified of those 200-question surveys—just say, "Well, it's up to you, since I'm just going to be asking a few open-ended questions. But normally these calls take about twenty minutes." This is true—if the person is a bit rushed, that's how long they take. But if they enjoy the conversation, they'll talk longer.

➔

5. Take copious notes as they talk. Immediately after the conversation, go back through your notes and add details. Don't wait to clean up your notes; you'll want to capture the mood of the call and phrases they use. If you record the call, tell them up front and assure them that their comments will NOT be attached to them. Keep your promise, even if someone in your company asks you, "Who said that?"

You should be talking to two customers a week. That's about 100 customers a year.

6. Assume that they will test you. They will say something negative, and then wait for your reaction. If you don't defend yourself, they will continue and tell you the whole truth. Listen as a friend would, empathizing and staying engaged. Don't check your email during the conversation; they'll sense that you've disengaged, will become insulted and bored, and will terminate the conversation.

7. If they do bring up a problem you know has been fixed, hear them out before you tell them. Then say, "Actually, that was fixed three months ago. We sent out a note, but it's obvious that we didn't do a good job of communicating. What could we have done to make sure you got the message?" If they bring up a problem that you can fix later, tell them that you will talk to others about it and keep them up to date on your progress.

8. Ask two types of questions: open-ended questions listed below and questions that help to draw them out during the conversation, such as, "How long has this been happening? What did you do after that?" Open-ended questions include: How do you feel about our products…service…company? What's your typical buying process for this type of product? What happens—and who's involved? If you were looking for this type of product again, what would you do? (If they say they'd use a search engine, find out which terms they'd use). What do you think about our website? Who do you consider our competitors, and what could we learn from them? What trends do you see in your market right now? What is your biggest problem or challenge in your job?

9. If they express doubt, draw them out. They may answer a question with a tentative-sounding "yes." Pursue it courteously. "You don't sound too convinced. Was there another problem?"

10. At the end of the call, thank them enthusiastically and ask them if you can call them back later with specific questions about products or pricing. Over time, you will "collect" an "advisory board" that will help you make better decisions and sell your ideas internally.

After you make one of these calls, you'll wonder why you were so hesitant to do it before. It will energize you. Next time you get into an argument with your salesperson, who insists that the last person she called on represents a market trend, you'll be able to say, "Actually, I talked to sixteen customers this month, and they all said that they didn't want us to do that, which is why I'm using this other method."

Yes, you should be talking to two customers a week. That's about 100 customers a year. Even though you'll be conducting in-depth interviews, you'll still be able to gather statistical data from these calls. We have found that you can assume you have identified a trend if at least five people in a given market feel the same way about something. They will even use the same phrase to describe something, even if they've never spoken to each other. Make sure that you talk to at least ten people in that market just to be confident in your findings. You will be able to track trends over time. You will spot buying trends long before they're covered in the press (sometimes as much as six months to a year earlier).

Categorize the data by subject matter, so you can track trends and present them to your managers. If they do require that you conduct "check the box" surveys across a wider audience, use what you've learned in your telephone interviews to create the surveys. The questions and the answers will be far more relevant than if you made up the questions without interviewing customers first. You will find that the results from the "check the box" surveys simply confirm what you've already learned in your telephone interviews.

As you gather these data, you will find new confidence and clarity. You will know what is really important and what doesn't matter at all. You will know what you should be prioritizing in your marketing materials—and we guarantee it isn't what you thought.

Why do we recommend phone interviews? Because people speak more freely on the phone than they do in person. They're in their own familiar environment. They aren't influenced by anyone else, as they would be in a focus group, or nervous about "the people behind the mirror." They aren't trying to show off how much more they know than the guy at the other end of the table. They're just talking, one person to another, telling you how they feel.

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Kristin Zhivago began her career as the first woman to sell machine shop tools for a Pratt & Whitney distributor in 1969. She's been on the bleeding edge of the tech market ever since. She founded Zhivago Marketing Partners, Inc. in Silicon Valley in 1979. The company moved to a waterfront location in Rhode Island in 1996. Clients range from thriving young start-ups to those in the Fortune 500, including Dow Jones, IBM, and Navision (Microsoft).

She has a working knowledge of hardware, networking, security, instrumentation, electromechanical, microelectronic, and telecom systems; and all types of software, including programs used for application development, computer-aided design, content management, manufacturing, business processes (including marketing and sales automation), point-of-sale, and more.

Kristin is the editor of the Revenue Journal, a newsletter for CEOs, and Marketing Technology, an online ezine for marketing leaders. She is also a monthly columnist for Adweek's Technology Marketing magazine. Her articles have appeared in numerous trade and business journals.

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- Market research
- Market problems
- Technology assessment
- Competitive review

III. Quantitative Analysis

- Market sizing
- Sales analysis
- Product profitability
- Win/loss analysis

IV. Strategic Planning

- Business case
- Buy, build, or partner?
- Pricing
- Thought leaders
- Innovation

V. Product Planning

- Product definition
- Positioning
- Sales process
- Roll-out process

VI. Case Study

VII. Delineating Responsibilities

- Communicating market facts to Development, Marcom, and Sales
- Drawing the line between Product Management and the other departments

Day 3 Requirements That Work™

(for those who write requirements)

VIII. Building the Market Requirements Document (MRD)

- Writing requirements
- Implementing use-case scenarios
- Programming for the "persona"
- Determining product feature sets
- Creating the MRD

IX. Analyzing Business and Technology Drivers

- Reviewing specifications
- Prioritizing the product feature set
- Creating the Business Case

X. Getting (and Keeping) Commitments

- Product contract
- Getting the product team in sync
- Getting executive support
- Communicating the plan in the company and in the market

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There's a reason no one is listening

By Adele Revella

The content published on most vendor websites and collateral ranges from useless to incomprehensible. If I had a dime for every company that describes their high-tech solution as flexible, scalable, and compatible, I could retire. It's difficult to tell what the company does, and impossible to differentiate one solution or vendor from another.

Here's a data point for you. According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point,* the average American sees 254 commercial messages each day. You can probably double that number for your prospects, given their responsibilities and the number of vendors vying for their attention. It is easy to see why you must instantly speak to the buyer's most urgent problem. I know, your product does a lot of great stuff, but this volume of messages ensures that no one will read through a list looking for their pain point. Nor will they be impressed that you are one of many companies selling a product in a specific category. To get executives' attention and move them into the sales pipeline, you need a sniper's precision, hitting the prospect at the specific point of greatest pain.

If you think that marcom is the source of fluffy, empty, generic language, read on. Marcom has an important role as it transfers the messages to various mediums, and granted, there is always room for improvement. But marcom has no hope of communicating the message if no one knows— really knows— the people to whom they're talking.

The solution to the problem: product managers must have regular contact with potential customers (not just customers). Just as Product Management reports market info to Development in the form of requirements, Product Management must report the market problems and solutions to Marcom in the form of positioning documents.

For your marketing programs to work, you must be on the lookout for the one problem that is most pervasive and urgent among your prospects. When you build the positioning documents with your product teams, everyone must understand a tightly focused, urgent problem and its solution. Without this information, even the best marcom team will execute programs that fail.

Product managers who hope to fulfill this role must clearly understand the business context for their solution, which is usually different for each type of prospect the programs will target. The product manager must understand the way that each of these buyers relates to the problem, and build positioning documents (yes, multiple documents) that explain the solution in words that prospect would use.

Each type of buyer in each market segment has a different way of articulating their problem. So why do most companies try to "get by" with a single positioning document? Because the marketing team hasn't understood the need to build marketing materials that articulate the answer to prospect problems. We've been too busy filling data sheets with vendor-speak to stop and find out what prospects really need to know before they choose our solution.

Joe Costello, former CEO of Cadence Design Systems, says it well. "High-tech marketing is atrocious— the material sounds like plumbers' journals."

You can have a single message if you sell to only one buyer persona in one market segment. Otherwise, you don't have a choice. You'll need positioning documents for each buyer persona in each target market segment. Sure, it's a lot of work. But you can't reach multiple audiences with a generic message.

The high-tech industry is maturing and our marketing needs to catch up. It's impossible to differentiate solutions on features alone, and prospects are less willing than ever before to listen to technology messages. Leading high-tech companies are starting to recognize what other industries have long understood: Success requires you to solve a market problem, and then clearly tell the market why yours is a significantly better answer to that problem.

There's a reason no one is listening. Most marketing programs have nothing to say.

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To get executives' attention and move them into the sales pipeline, you need precision, hitting the prospect at the specific point of greatest pain.

Adele Revella is an expert in strategic marketing programs, with over 20 years of experience in high-tech marketing. She is the instructor for Pragmatic Marketing's Effective Marketing Programs™ class, built for product marketing and marcom teams.

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Role of Product Management

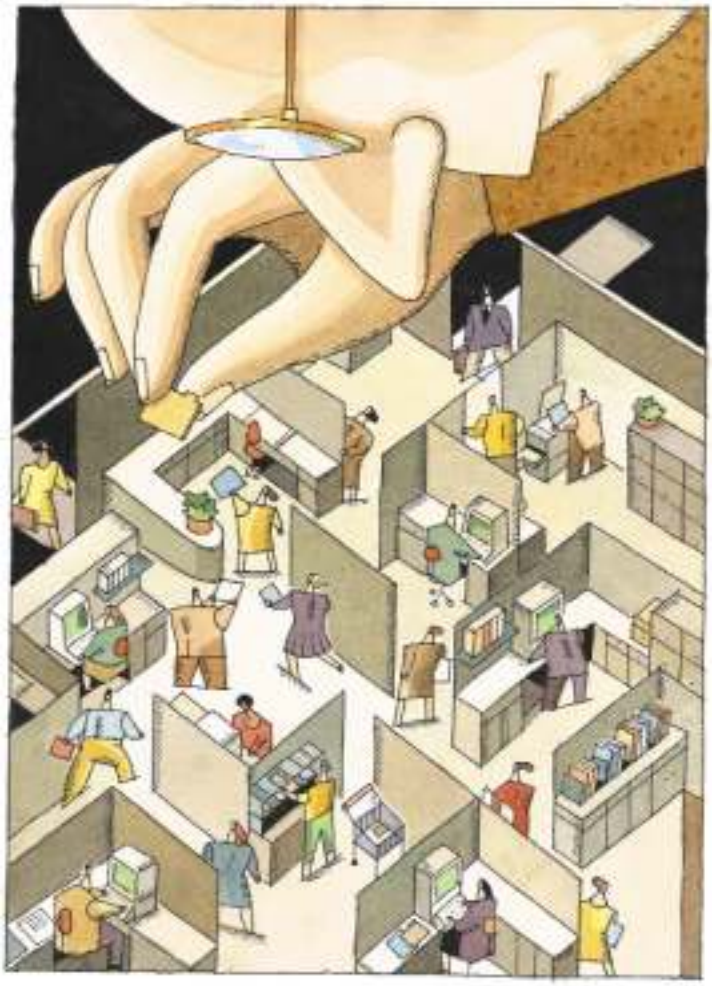
by Steve Johnson

Management often plays a support role: supporting the channel with demos and product information, supporting developers with user requirements and project scheduling, and supporting marcom with screen shots and technical copywriting. Is this the correct role for Product Management?

Product Management was created in the 40s at Procter & Gamble for managing the business of a specific product. Through the years, product managers (and brand managers) have served as "president of the product" in consumer goods companies. Then along came technology.

Technology companies often start with a single developer and a single product. As the product becomes popular, they add sales people. The sales people need sales tools such as brochures and demo disks, so we hire marcom people. And all three groups complain that they need additional technical support. Then someone remembers the title of "product manager."

In many technology companies, Product Management is a support role. And yet, we struggle to create successful new products; we struggle to direct the sales channel to successful deals; we struggle to create sales tools that successfully speak to the buyer.



Referencing the consumer goods model though, we realize that this is the tail wagging the dog. In consumer products, Product Management knows more about the prospective customer than anyone in the company, and more than the prospect knows himself or herself. The problem with the high-tech approach is that a support function is all about talking to the market, but who is listening to the market?

Developers know technology. Sales people know about the deals they're working. Marcom knows how to communicate. All need market information from Product Management.

What is preventing the rest of the market from purchasing? If your market share is 30% of the segment, what's preventing the 70% from buying?

- Maybe the 70% doesn't know about us. Instead of new features, we need only attend new shows, or direct mail to a new list. Wouldn't you like to know this?
- Maybe the 70% is slightly different and needs one new feature to make it fit. Wouldn't you like to know this?
- Maybe the 70% is very different and needs substantial changes to the product. We may have to add double-byte character set support to move into Asia, or incorporate a major new technical capability. Wouldn't you like to know this?
- And maybe the 70% will never buy. Perhaps we have misdefined the market as "everyone with money" or "everyone with a computer" yet the 30% that have already purchased the product represents market saturation. Wouldn't you like to know this?

Wouldn't you like to know about the market before putting out another release of the product? The solution: product management should be the expert on the market and the market problems.

This is the correct role of Product Management. Be in the market, observe customer problems that our company can solve, and then tell the Development organization about the problem.

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Steve joined Pragmatic Marketing in 1996 after 18 years in software and hardware. Steve's background includes technical, sales and marketing management positions at software companies. His market-driven orientation allowed him to rise rapidly through the ranks from product manager, where he launched 22 product offerings, to vice president.

Finally !

As a Product Manager, you're probably overwhelmed by features, ideas, product requirements and market intelligence data that's spread across a number of databases, applications and/or spreadsheets. Keeping this information organized and easily accessible can be a nightmare.

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The Product Management Triad

by Steve Johnson

How many product managers do you need? What are their roles in the company? Is Product Management a support role for Sales or Marcom or Development? I'm often asked to contrast product management, product marketing, program management and other titles in a high-tech company. All are poorly understood and are defined differently everywhere I go.

An ideal solution for many companies is the "product management triad."

Some people have a natural affinity for development, others for sales and marcom, and others prefer to work on business issues. Finding these three orientations in one person is an almost impossible task. Instead, perhaps we should find three different people with these skills and have them work as a team.

Start with a business-oriented, senior product manager. Make this person a director of business development, or a product line manager (PLM). Now add a development-oriented technical product manager (TPM) and a sales-oriented product marketing manager (PMM). Have the TPM and the PMM report to the PLM.

One company had nine product managers and nine products, one product manager per product. Yet the Sales people liked some of the product managers but not others. The ones that the Sales people loved were disliked by developers. So we created three product lines with a product line manager for each and then assigned a TPM and PMM to each product line.

Now for each product line, we have one person concentrating on product strategy and the business of the product line, while another works with Development to build the best product, and another takes the product message to the channel by working with Marcom and the Sales force.

Here are some job descriptions to consider:

Director, Product Management

Product Management teams provide career paths from entry-level positions to director, all within the product line. The director has a business-orientation and is responsible for the development and implementation of the product plan for a specific product family. Maintains close relationship with the customer/prospect for awareness of customer needs and perspectives. This includes identification of appropriate markets and development of effective marketing strategies and tactics. This person is involved with the product through all stages of a product's lifecycle. Duties include:

- Articulating the company's distinctive competence
- Initiating market research
- Documenting market problems
- Analyzing sales success
- Market sizing and product profitability
- Creating and maintaining the business case
- Determining buy/build/partner decisions
- Product pricing
- Serve as the product expert when dealing with thought leaders and press
- Positioning the product for all markets and all buyers
- Documenting the ideal sales process
- Approving final advertising and lead generation activities

Technical Product Manager

The technical product manager is responsible for defining market requirements and packaging the features into product releases. The position involves close interaction with Development leads and key customers. A strong technical background is required. Job duties include gathering requirements from potential prospects, recent evaluators and existing customers, writing marketing requirements documents, and monitoring the implementation of a product project. The TPM owns:

- Technology Assessment
- Competitive Review
- Win/Loss Analysis
- Monitoring industry innovations
- Company-wide product roll-out, facilitating training for all departments
- Product Contract with development teams
- Writing business requirements
- Monitoring the implementation of the product project

Product Marketing Manager

The product marketing manager provides sales and marcom support such as corporate demos, periodic proposal content review, technical verification of collateral, and field demo scripts. The PMM owns:

- Creating presentations and demo scripts
- Providing technical assistance for printed and electronic collateral
- Writing white papers and news flashes
- Documenting competitive threats and related industry news
- Supporting trade shows and company-sponsored seminars
- Providing technical support for corporate visits
- Limited onsite channel support and phone assistance

Consider also a "product line" of your base technology or architecture with a Triad for issues that span product lines. The architecture triad can own acquisitions, third-party partnerships, and common tools needed across all product lines.

Does this model make sense for you? First take inventory of the skills of each of the product managers. Create an organization chart of one triad per product line with no names assigned. Now try to move the business-oriented staff (usually your senior product managers) to the PLM positions, development-oriented product managers to TPM and sales-oriented ones to PMM. Whatever holes remain in your org chart represent your new hiring profiles.

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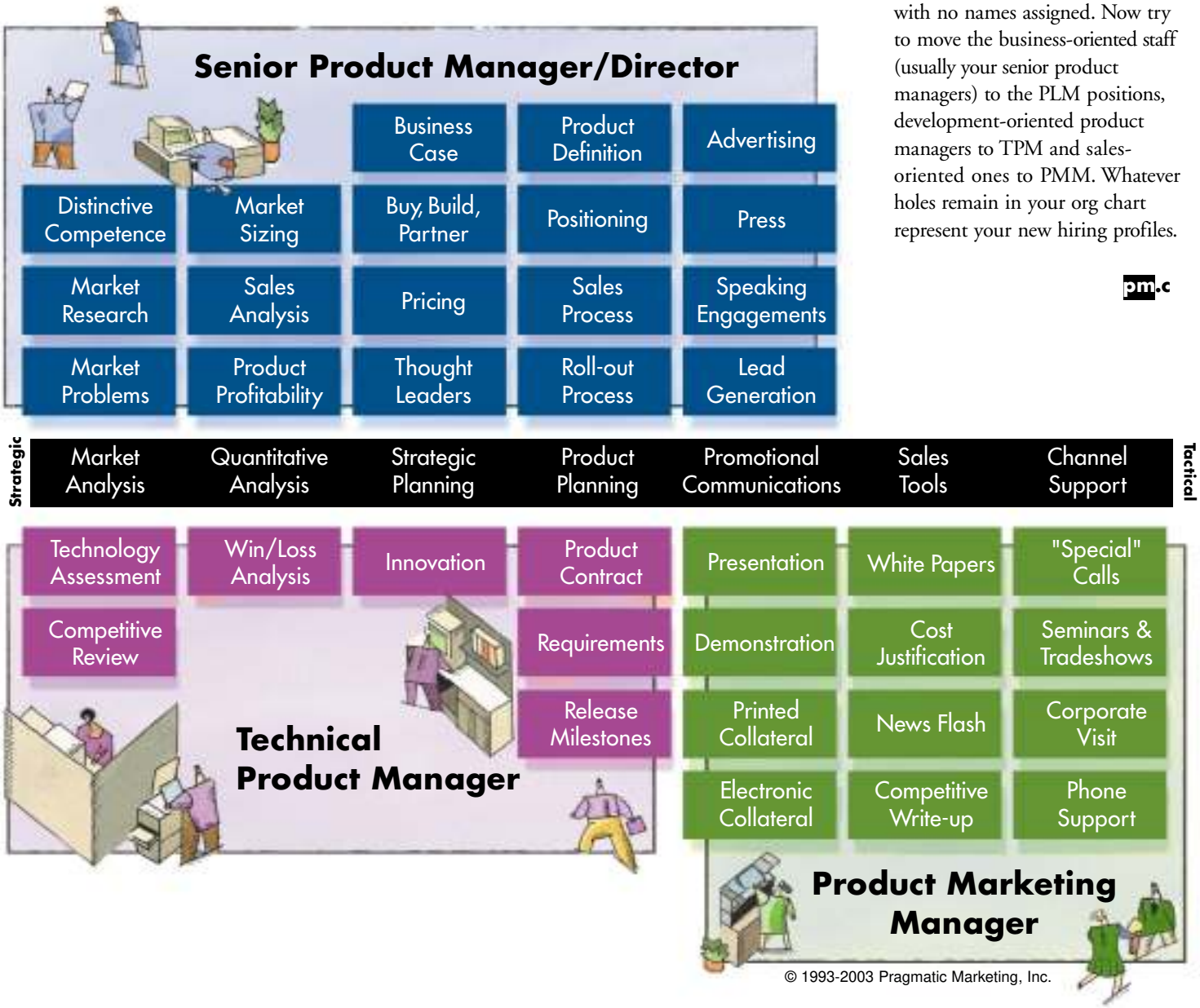

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The Pragmatic Marketing® Process

Practical Product Management™ introduces a process that gives product managers the tools to deliver market-driven products that people want to buy. It focuses on the practical aspects of juggling daily tactical demands of supporting the channel with strategic activities necessary to become expert on the market.

Watch for future issues of *productmarketing.com* as we continue to highlight and further explore the process.

Positioning – how we communicate with Marcom

Positioning articulates precisely what we do for the market. We produce a simple statement that is used to create all communications. Marcom professionals are the primary recipients of the positioning document (or documents).

Positioning seems to have changed tone in recent years: positioning now appears to be about tricking the buyer. Positioning documents seem to say "all the products in this category are fundamentally the same so we'll position ours differently." Instead, positioning should focus on what your product can do for the target market. What problems does it solve? What value does it provide? What about your product is unique? In Practical Product Management, we teach a positioning method that consistently generates top-notch results. There are books about positioning, but they talk about the why of it rather than the how of it.

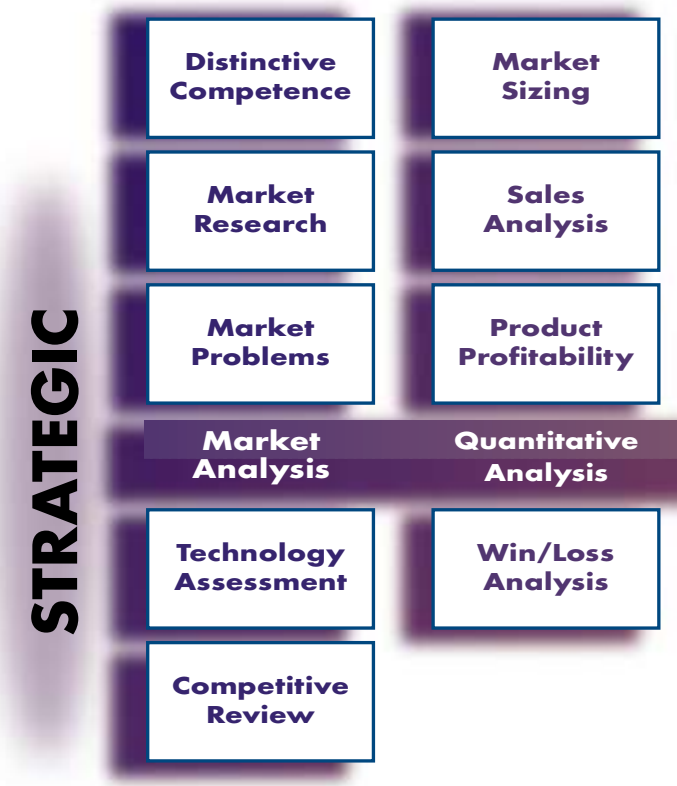
The positioning documents serve as the "connection point" between inbound product management and outbound product marketing. We combine all that we've learned about the buyers in a specific market— their problems and our solutions. Product marketing, working with Marcom, defines communications programs based on this messaging.

Product Definition– how we communicate with Development

Look at the product from the perspective of the market and create a market requirements document. Understand what the product really does, how people use it and what criteria they use to buy it.

There are two product definition activities of product planning. On the technical side, Requirements address specific problems and proposed features. Product Definition looks at the product from a less technical, more business-oriented view. Within a specific market segment, who are the buyers and users of the product? In most technical product categories, users don't buy the product and buyers don't use it. What features should be emphasized? How robustly should those features be implemented?

Product definition comes from combining the individual requirements, use cases, personas, and goals. The resulting Market Requirements Document (MRD) is how product management communicates market data to Development.



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A model for successful product management

Sales Process—how we communicate with Sales

Why do product managers spend so much time supporting sales? Marcom is constantly barraged by the sales channel to deliver ever more collateral. Yet, are they using the collateral that we've already produced?

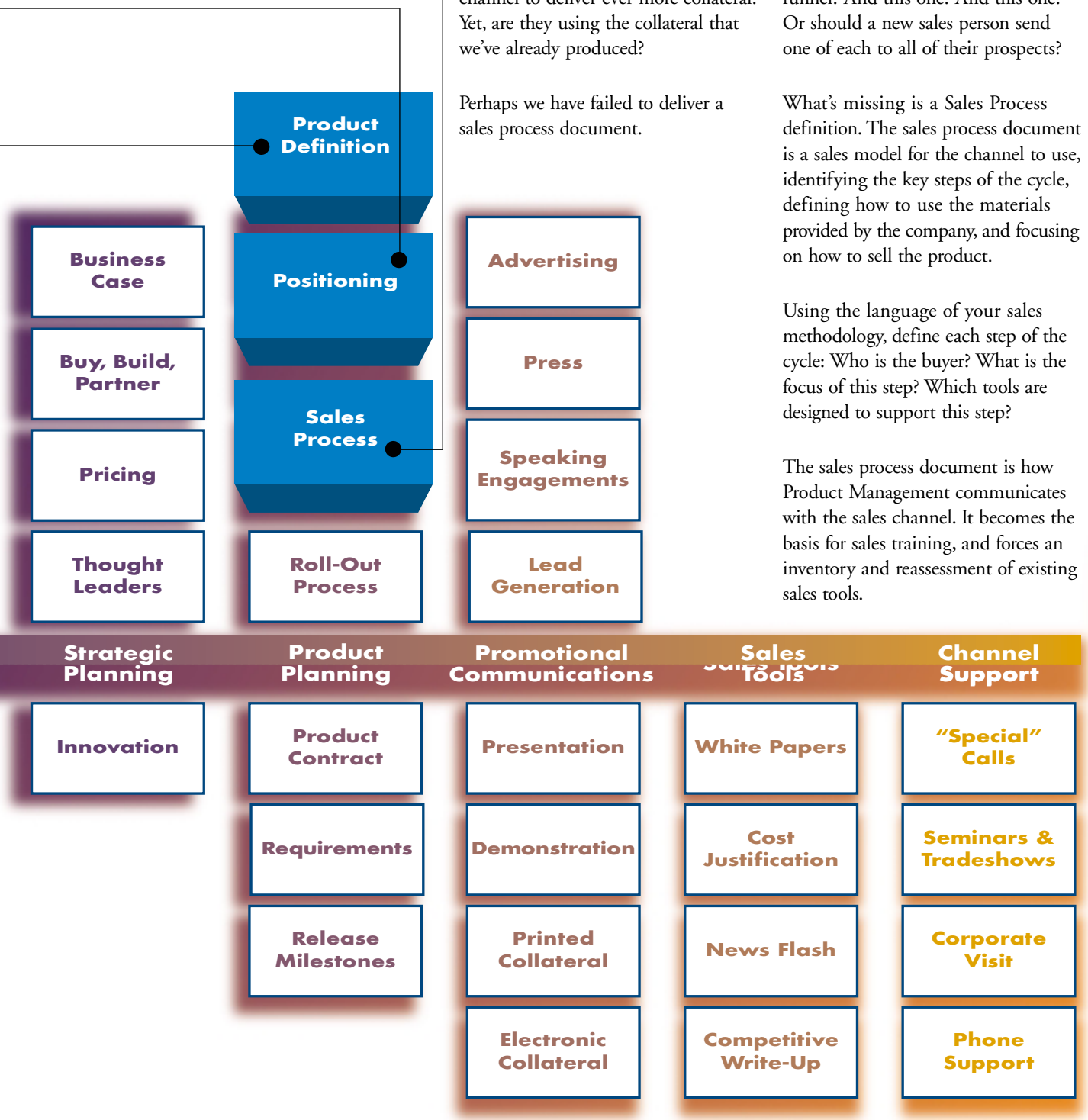
Perhaps we have failed to deliver a sales process document.

Imagine all the sales tools and collateral in the typical sales literature room. Where should this tool be used in the funnel? And this one? And this one? Or should a new sales person send one of each to all of their prospects?

What's missing is a Sales Process definition. The sales process document is a sales model for the channel to use, identifying the key steps of the cycle, defining how to use the materials provided by the company, and focusing on how to sell the product.

Using the language of your sales methodology, define each step of the cycle: Who is the buyer? What is the focus of this step? Which tools are designed to support this step?

The sales process document is how Product Management communicates with the sales channel. It becomes the basis for sales training, and forces an inventory and reassessment of existing sales tools.



I Am Customer,

A Product Manager's Irreverent

By Les Jickling

I am strong, I am invincible, I am your customer…If you are a product development house, your customer's needs should sound the call of a lion's roar. If not, you may soon be hearing quite another sound—the ring of the creditor's call. Ignore your customer's needs at your own peril. Current economic imperatives dictate the need to be "customer-centric" and listen to the voice of your customer. If nothing else, your competitive edge depends on it.

Recognizing this need, technology executives have issued the company edict to become more "customer-centric," to listen to customers and build solutions that meet their needs. For in the evolution of technology companies we have all too often seen the disastrous effects of technology-driven companies. Companies that have produced a product based on "neat", but often unnecessary, technology that developers dreamed up and then passed over to marketing to "find a market." More recently we've witnessed the even more daunting specter of the finance-driven company. The beast born in that unfortunate era of superfluous VC money where "instant products" were thought to spawn from the mixing of heavy funding, dubious business plans, ill-defined markets and a great deal of alchemy. In the wake of widespread business failures we've seen a lot of angry investors asking who those mythical customers were that were supposed to buy the technology.

Perhaps due to the mistakes of the past (in some cases in spite of them) or intense pressure to develop competitive advantages in fierce markets, technology companies are now zealously looking at ways to closely listen to their customers. To become that marketing-driven company that everyone has parroted since time immemorial but never been capable of implementing. By definition, marketing implies developing products or service in response to known market demands. To market, you need know your customer's demands.

Before touting marketing-driven companies as the technology savior, it is important to remember that too much customer attention is not without its pitfalls. Geoffrey A. Moore, in his seminal work "Crossing The Chasm" has repeatedly warned us about falling into the trap of developing custom solutions. If we are to develop products that allow us to pass into the mainstream market where the bulge of customers reside, we to need listen, not to the whims of a few vocal customers, but to the needs of a cross-section of informed users. So how does one effectively listen to customer needs? How does one rank and prioritize development resources? How does one sift through the "white noise" of feedback to establish consistent needs across an entire market segment?

"Get On Your Bicycle, Put Your Ear To The Ground"

Over the years I've heard some pretty creative suggestions about how I might collect customer feedback. The suggestions always seem to revolve around things like, "Well just ask them, how hard could it be?" But the difficulties of this approach become more obvious when you dig down to the next level and consider the logistics, the collection methods and the sorting of data.

I remember once being told to "Get on your bicycle, put your ear to the ground." By "bicycle," my boss clearly meant "fly" all over the continental U.S. and "ear to the ground" presumably

Hear Me **Roar:**

Look At How Technology Companies Listen To Their Customers — or Fail To.

meant take notes. In Memphis, I remember visiting a large company, being given a massive dump of information, taken out for a pork dinner, plied with alcohol (to push their special requirements up the list faster) and sent off to Graceland with every variety of heartburn imaginable. Much of the rest of the trip followed in the same vein. Needless to say the system was not very efficient. When I returned home, it was no small job trying to sort and come away with actionables from the jumble of notes I had taken. This is an approach all too common with product managers. Apart from this approach being inefficient, it is next to impossible to validate what each of those companies wanted against all the other companies' needs. The obvious goal is to come up with a set of needs common to most, if not all, the customers. This would lead me to get the biggest bang for my development buck. Getting qualified, empirical data from a large number of customers about what product features or enhancements they need has always been the bane of a Product Manager's existence.

Typical Approaches to Listening to Customers

Research on customer needs is nothing new; consumer-product manufacturers have been spending hundreds of millions of dollars on customer research for years, mainly through time-intensive and costly focus groups and surveys. Unfortunately for product managers, these aren't viable alternatives as, typical in technology companies, short development cycles and limited resources are insurmountable challenges.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions have often been, mistakenly, thought of as a way to get customer information into product development. However, CRM merely provides historical data such as recency, frequency and monetary value to help predict future trends. CRM is not designed for a product manager to engage customers to gather, manage and prioritize input for product development.

The Emergence of Customer Voice Management (CVM) Software

You can imagine my delight when I heard that there might be a way out of this thicket. I first heard about Customer Voice Management (CVM) software a year ago when a fellow product manager began implementing customer input software that utilized internet technology. At the time I remember thinking it was surprising I had never heard of such software before and even more disappointing that I hadn't thought of it myself. From a product manager's standpoint I immediately understood the "pain" it would cure and as a simple and effective solution, CVM seemed intuitive and perhaps even obvious. But hindsight is often like that. You know you've arrived when you hear people announce "I can't believe they stole my idea…"

Unlike CRM, CVM allows a product manager to capture customer intentions, motivations and special requirements. Much like Robert Kennedy's famous quote "Some people look at things as they are and ask, why? I think of things that never were and ask, why not?" CVM gives your customer the voice to tell you things they would like to see as well as the things they liked or disliked about your product. Therefore, CVM provides a much needed complement to CRM solutions. Knowing the voice of the customer helps companies deliver value by developing to their customer's unique needs and giving them the tools to effectively communicate that value in language that their customers understand.

Benefits of CVM

In a nutshell, CVM software is simply a customer's pipeline into the product development cycle. It allows the customer an efficient way to take part in the development process by providing real-time feedback on much needed features, functionality and product suggestions. By allowing customers to visit a simple web page for product feedback it is possible for product managers to reduce, if not eliminate those cross-country treks where they are told to "get on home and make the stuff work". CVM gives product managers an efficient way to gather empirical data on customer needs. This data can then be used to help define the scope of a product, ultimately, leading to the development of a product that gives customers what they need.

CVM Vendors

There are many types of companies operating under the umbrella of CVM each one catering to a slightly different niche; some more complex and costly than others. There are companies such as CustomerSat and SatMetrix that primarily focus on software to capture customer satisfaction. Product Managers in technology small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be interested in ProductScope Software, a company providing a cost-effective solution designed specifically for the needs of Product Management teams in these types of companies. Other firms such as BetaSphere and Informative focus on the needs of Fortune 1000 companies.

A Hero's Welcome

To Product Management the emergence of CVM software is heralded as the beginning of a new era of product development that is truly customer-centric. CVM allows the customer to finally give voice to the lion's roar they deserve.

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Les Jickling is a freelance technology contributor and a former product manager with a software development company. He has worked for the last eight years in the technology sector primarily in the area of software applications, e-commerce and the Internet. He welcomes feedback at: sato@axion.net

High-Tech Product Marketing Training

Analyzing Market Opportunities™

Build a compelling business case for your high-tech product

Analyzing Market Opportunities is a two-day course that illustrates how to properly listen to customers and prospects, evaluate their input, determine market opportunities for any high-tech product—and build a compelling business case.

The course includes a systematic, disciplined methodology to understand potential opportunities, accurately size the market, assess costs and evaluate risks.

A template is provided for compiling and presenting the business case. Also discussed is how and when to terminate an existing product.

Course designed for:

Those responsible for market analysis, quantitative analysis, strategic planning and business aspects of high-tech products.

I. Building Business Cases

- Why write business cases?
- Understanding the perspective of senior management
- Defining the essential elements of a business case
- How to get control of the situation as the CEO of your product

II. Market Sensing

- Gathering information from prospect and customer interviews
- Effective primary and secondary research tools
- Essential competitor information and where to get it

III. Opportunity Validation

- Target market segmenting
- Market sizing
- Positioning into the competitive landscape
- Market Adoption Cycle™ assessment

IV. Planning & Analysis

- Essential information sent and received from Development, Marcom, Sales and other internal areas
- Building the pricing plan
- Creating tactical plans
- Building the financial model, human resource and risk assessments
- International considerations

V. Selling the Plan

- Writing and editing the business case
- Laying the groundwork with the key decision-makers
- Presentation approaches

VI. The Product (or Project) Termination Decision

- Early warning signs
- Gathering facts
- Reasons to keep or terminate products/projects
- Evaluating alternatives

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On-screen Notes with PowerPoint®

Some Pragmatic Marketing instructors use a cool feature of Microsoft® Windows and PowerPoint to see notes on our laptop display while showing the slides on the data projector. This feature is available on most laptops under all versions of Microsoft Windows. You need to update some Windows display settings plus specify the monitor to use in your PowerPoint presentation settings. Here's how to do it:

1. Windows Settings

In the control panel, go to "**Display Properties"** and click on the Settings tab.

If your hardware and drivers already have this capability, you'll see two squares (labeled 1 and 2) that represent your two monitors.

With your data projector connected, click on the 2nd monitor (the square with the "2" in it) and then check "Extend my Windows desktop onto this monitor." You may also need to change the screen resolution of the secondary monitor to 800x600 (or lower) as many older data projectors cannot display the higher resolutions. Click OK and you are done with the Windows settings.

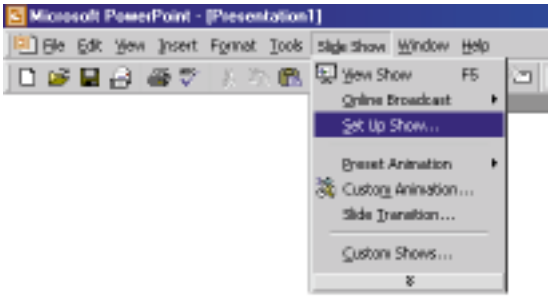
You now have the ability to move the mouse from monitor 1 to monitor 2, as if you have a very wide monitor. You can drag windows from one display to the other, which is handy for having email in one window and a browser in the other, or for having your presentation notes on one display with the slide presentation on the other.

If your Display Settings dialog doesn't have two monitors, the dialog box will only show one window, as shown in this Display Settings dialog.

If so, you either don't have the hardware or your PC's display drivers don't support dual video. You can try updating your device drivers by working with your tech support organization or going to the PC vendor's support site.

2. Presentation Settings

Load a PowerPoint presentation and go to "**Set Up Show...**" on the Slide Show menu.



If you have your external monitor connected correctly, you can click on the second monitor under the "**Show On:**" drop-down. This will now show the presentation slides on the secondary monitor instead of the primary monitor. Your primary monitor can display whatever you want. Some instructors have their PowerPoint notes plus an on-screen clock, and perhaps a browser window. If you want to show the rest of your group something on the web, just move the window from the laptop display to the external monitor.

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Building Tomorrow's

This is the first part of a three part series exploring how we listen to the market to become experts in what they need. The first article shows how product managers should listen to potential customers, the inactive members of our market who have not bought our products or our competitors' products (and are not looking). The second article discusses finding and listening to evaluators. The third article covers on-going communication with our existing customers. By listening to all three types, product managers become "experts on the market."

Products Requires Listening to the Market

by Barbara Nelson

Although product knowledge is important, spending time listening to the market is where the real learning takes place, and the quicker you become acclimated, the more value you add.

What is your comfort zone as a product manager? Is it the product? The technology? The competition? The customer? When you first became product manager, how did you get up to speed on the job? Unfortunately, many new product managers gravitate towards their comfort zone: the product. They learn about "the product" by reading the user guides and brochures, going through the tutorial, attending formal training, surfing the web, and sitting through product demonstrations on sales calls.

Although it is important for a product manager to learn the product, it is imperative for you to get out into the market as soon as possible to learn what's going on there. Your objective in listening to the market is to become a *market expert*. This series of three articles will focus on how to become a market expert by listening to three constituents in your market: customers, evaluators, and potential customers. Let's define the three groups within our market:

Customers — At some point in time, members of this group realized they had a problem to solve and bought your product to solve the problem.

Evaluators — This group recognizes they have a problem to solve and are actively looking to solve a problem with your product or your competitors' products. This is where your sales channel spends its time during the sales cycle.

Potentials — This group is within your identified market segment but they have not bought your type of product (from you or your competitors) and are not currently looking at these types of products.

Most companies think they listen to the market. What they typically do is listen to the noisy 20% of the customers and "listen" to evaluators during sales calls. (Actually, they are busy "talking" most of the time, not really "listening.") They rarely (or never) listen to the third group, potentials: those who have not bought the product and are not looking. The danger in only listening to noisy customers and active sales leads is that you might build products that only appeal to noisy customers and active sales leads. You might have some initial success, but eventually, the size of the market you have "created" is not enough to support your business. The future of your product (and your company) lies in also understanding the quiet 80% of your customers, knowing why evaluators buy from you or why they bought the competitor's product (through win/loss analysis), and learning why "inactive" potentials aren't looking and haven't bought anything.

For each group we must learn:

1. **Who** are they and how do we find them?
2. **What** are we trying to learn?
3. **When** do we listen?
4. **Where** do we listen?
5. **How** do we listen?

It is important to balance your visits with all three groups in the market to get a good perspective on the market and where your company fits. We need to use a different process to listen to each group to get the information we need.

In the first part of this series, we are going to focus on listening to potentials because this group is most neglected.

➔

Who are potentials and how do we find them?

Sales sometimes call hot leads "prospects." The group we call potentials are those in our market who have not bought one of our types of products and are not currently looking. Think of them as inactive prospects.

Your first objective is to find potentials and setup an appointment to visit them. If you have additional resources to assist you in getting the appointment, use them. But don't outsource the appointment itself.

List

How you find them...

Talk to your direct marketing group and ask, "If you were to send a direct mail piece to our market segment, what list would you use?" This is the list you would start with. Then, remove customers and anybody in the sales pipeline (evaluators). What you have left is potentials.

How to engage them...

Call them—"I am a product manager for XYZ company. I am researching how to deploy our development resources over the next year." If you have domain expertise, say, "I used to do what you do. I am trying to learn what has changed since I was a [job title]."

Trade Show

How you find them...

Trade shows are usually targeted to a market segment (such as construction), a technical platform (such as Linux or Microsoft® Windows), or a type of problem to solve (Customer Relationship Management or CRM). As a product manager, you might already be signed up to attend the trade show. Talk to the trade show coordinator and make sure you will have time at the show outside of the booth.

How to engage them...

In the booth—ask qualifying questions. Sort visitors into customers, evaluators (these are the "hot" leads we give to sales), and potentials (they might be tire kicking or just want the tchatchke). Contact the potentials when you get home ("You stopped by our booth. I know you aren't currently looking but I am a product manager…[similar script as above]).

Work the show—go to the pretzel or coffee stand. Start up a conversation with other attendees. "I am a product manager…"

What are we trying to learn?

This is qualitative market research. Essentially, you are trying to learn how they are surviving without your technology. Why haven't they bought your product or your competitors' products? Is it because:

- They don't know about you?
- They have a slightly different problem?
- They have a dramatically different problem (where you need to re-architect the product)?
- They don't have the problem?

Until you know why they haven't bought, you won't come up with the right solution to get them to buy in the future.

Once you get the appointment, learn about the key players. For complex business-to-business solutions, there is usually a decision maker, key user, and technical reviewer. It is important to listen to each of these players.

Decision Maker—what keeps him or her up at night (not just in context of what you do). You are competing not only with your competitors, but also for mind share and resources against everything else the decision maker has to deal with. If the final decision maker is the CEO, you are competing with both internal and external forces over which you have no control. The CEO can decide to spend money on internal infrastructure systems, more personnel, benefits, office space, security, sales, marketing, development, services, (and the list goes on…). Why should he/she buy your product? What kind of ROI is he/she looking for? If you focus your business on solving critical problems, your product will be more likely to be recession-proof.

Key User—what problems does he or she face every day? This is the person for whom you will be building the solution. But keep in mind; the problems might not be large enough that the decision maker will pay to solve them.

Technical Reviewer— This person can veto the decision if it doesn't meet the technical expectations, but generally this person isn't choosing which solution to buy. If the solution is a threat to his/her job, they could cause a roadblock, however. Understand how to get on his or her side. Also, learn what "cool" products they have seen lately. You might become aware of new technologies earlier than you would have on your own.

Other things you are trying to learn:

- Do they know you? What is their level of awareness or perception of your company?
- Where do they buy products like yours, what process do they go through, what channels would be acceptable (direct, distributors, VARs, web, catalog), what kind of pricing constraints might there be?
- Who is your competition and what do they think of them?
- Who do they go to for advice about products such as yours?

When do we listen?

Becoming an expert on your market is not a one-time project. It should be an ongoing process. When you first begin, immerse yourself in this activity. Spend one month visiting 10-12 sites to give you a jump-start. Then, on an ongoing basis, visit one potential a month so you can stay in touch with what is going on in your market. In high-technology, things can change relatively quickly, and if you don't stay in touch, you might miss a new trend or shift in technology.

Use every opportunity you have to visit potentials. You might already be traveling to a trade show or conference. Meet potentials there. When you do a speaking engagement be sure to collect business cards and make an appointment later in the day or the next morning. If your travel budget is constrained (and whose isn't?), don't overlook potentials that might be in your own neighborhood.

Don't forget to stay in touch with those you are able to engage. When you need an outside view, call them to test ideas, positioning, names, and feature possibilities. However, be careful not to skew your results by only listening to the same few.

Conference

How you find them...

Speaking engagement—collect business cards

Go to sessions. Listen to the questions from the audience.

How to engage them...

Contact people who came to your session. "Remember me? I'm the one that gave the speech at XYZ conference. Can we meet…?"

After the session, "That was an interesting question you asked. I'd like to learn more…"

Trade Association

How you find them...

Join the local trade association for your market segment (usually vendors can join as associate members). Go to the meetings.

How to engage them...

At the meeting, get to know the members. Make sure they know you are not a salesperson, but that you are a product manager trying to learn more about your market.

Executive Introductions

How you find them...

Ask your executives to introduce you to executives at other companies in your market.

How to engage them...

These are the decision makers. Don't abuse the introduction by taking too much time.

Friends & Family

How you find them...

Ask your friends and family if they know anybody in the markets you serve. You might find a friend of a friend who is the perfect candidate. Ask for an introduction.

Get to know people at your kid's soccer games, at cocktail parties, anywhere groups of people meet.

How to engage them...

People you meet personally or through a mutual friend are usually the easiest to engage. This is the method many sales people have used for years to "cold call" prospective customers.

Where do we listen?

Visiting potentials, onsite, is by far the best scenario. Viewing them in their "natural habitat" is where you will learn the most and have the best context of their situation. But if you are not able to always do this, it's all right to also listen to them at the trade show or conference, or on the telephone. If you have usability labs at your office, observe non-customers using your products and then listen to them one-on-one afterwards to get more information.

How do we listen?

Don't outsource this part of the process! Own it! This is where the market-expertise lies. And don't take Sales with you. This is not a lead generation or selling activity. It is a market research function and a listening exercise, not a talking exercise. Your objective is not to drum up new business by talking about how great your products are, but to learn about the problems in the market and how your products fit in the landscape. Here are 10 tips on listening to potentials:

1. Observe them doing their job in their natural habitat.

2. Spend a "day in the life" with the potential. Follow him or her around doing the job.

3. Ask questions—"Why did you do that? Who needs that information and why? What purpose does that function serve?"

4. Keep the questions open-ended. This kind of market research is qualitative, not quantitative and should not be conducted like a formal survey.

5. Don't interrupt—let the subject finish a thought. You might be thinking, "Our product will solve their problems!" Save that for later. You will probably still learn something by letting them talk.

6. Don't talk about your product. At the very end of the interview, if it turns out that your product is a perfect fit, you might say, "We actually have a product that might fit your needs. Are you interested in learning more?" If the person says, "No," you need to respect that. The problem is probably not urgent enough if this is the answer (which tells you a lot).

7. Get the tour. Many companies offer a formal tour of their facilities. If so, take it. It can be very enlightening about their business, about what they are proud of, about how they do things.

8. Go with a buddy. Whenever possible, do these interviews in pairs. What you don't see, your partner might. One person can take notes while the other observes and asks questions. Perhaps you should pair up a senior product manager with a less experienced one, a product manager with marketing manager, or the product manager with a development lead.

9. Document the interview in a call report right away. You won't remember details from one visit to another unless you do. This will become a body of knowledge you can share with others on your team.

10. Debrief with someone on your team right after your interview. This helps you remember, analyze, and share the information you have learned.

This activity takes self-discipline to make it a part of your everyday routine. It is so easy to slide back into tactical, urgent activities, but becoming expert on the market is very strategic, and the future of your company depends on it. It helps you figure out what you need to build 12-18 months from now.

Out of the three groups you should listen to in your market, potentials are the hardest to engage. Why? Because it require you to get outside your comfort zone.

However, becoming a potential expert can be the most valuable of all activities you can do as a product manager. Only you can make it happen!

Stay tuned for Part 2 about Listening to Evaluators.

Barbara Nelson is an instructor for Pragmatic Marketing. She has 21 years in the software industry, including vice president of product marketing for a leading provider of business and accounting applications for the middle market. Before her decade of product marketing experience, she worked closely with customers in several capacities, which taught her the importance of listening to the customer and to solving critical business issues.

High-Tech Product Marketing Training

Requirements That Work™

Create executable Market Requirements Documents that result in product solutions your potentials want

Requirements That Work is an intensive one-day course that introduces a straight forward, repeatable method for creating easy to understand product plans that win.

This course teaches product managers how to write a Market Requirements Document that developers will read, understand and readily embrace. The result? Feature/benefits solutions your market will want to buy.

This training establishes clear roles for team members, teaches a process that creates an executable plan–and delivers solutions that sell.

Course designed for:

Product managers and lead product developers. You should attend if you are responsible for defining and delivering high-tech products. Product managers get more from this course when trained simultaneously with their counterparts in Product Development.

I. Defining Roles and Methodology

- Understand the source of conflict between Development and Marketing
- Define clear roles and responsibilities
- Introduce a product planning methodology

II. Gathering Input

- Channels of input to product planning
- Organizing product ideas
- Quantifying market needs

III. Building the Market Requirements Document

- Writing requirements
- Implementing use-case scenarios
- Programming for the "persona"
- Determining product feature sets
- Creating the Market Requirements Document (MRD)

IV. Analyzing Business and Technology Drivers

- Reviewing specifications
- Prioritizing the product feature set
- Creating the Business Case

V. Getting (and Keeping) Commitments

- Product contract
- Getting the product team in sync
- Getting executive support
- Communicating the plan in the company and in the market

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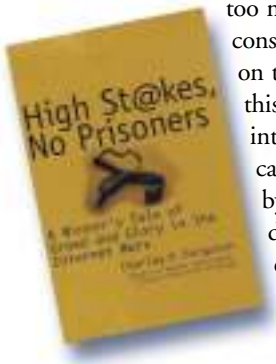
Book Reviews

High Stakes, No Prisoners

A Winner's Tale of Greed and Glory in the Internet Wars

by Charles H. Ferguson

High Stakes, No Prisoners tells the story of FrontPage, its creation, growth, and ultimately, sale to Microsoft. It serves as an excellent history of the internet boom, exploring the startup company's decisions and mistakes with great candor, sometimes too much candor. Anyone considering venturing out on their own should read this cautionary tale of interference by venture capitalists and misdeeds by potential partners, despite the technical excellence by the people who do the work.



The Deadline

By Tom DeMarcos

What a fun book! It's a delightful novel about Product Management and a massive project. Our hero, Mr. Thomkins, is kidnapped by the despot of a new country who wants to create a thriving software industry. (The benevolent despot sounds remarkably like a guy we know from Redmond—he wants to be the first entrepreneur to take a country public.) After getting over the initial shock of being drugged and kidnapped, he takes on the project as a challenge to create the perfect software project.

As the plot thickens, the project is faced with familiar obstacles. Thomkins writes a journal about what works and what doesn't work and we learn techniques and rules for effective product and project management. Unlike most business books, this instructive novel is both entertaining and humorous.

If you've ever been told to "just add resources", or "work harder, on nights and weekends", or "skip design—we don't have time" to meet an impossible deadline, read *The Deadline* and send a copy to management. Even if it doesn't change anything, at least you'll be entertained.

Software Product Management Essentials

by Alyssa Dver

Software Product Management Essentials is a hands-on guide to help new product managers sift through the numerous tasks and responsibilities involved in this pinnacle job. The book is loaded with tips and example best practices to help even experienced product managers optimize their time and effectiveness. Based on proven methods and state-of-the-art processes, the book helps product managers prioritize the many tasks and issues that they confront.

Ask the Expert

I am a new product manager and I'm trying to learn about my market. I know I'm supposed to go on onsite customer and prospect visits but my schedule is filling up with product meetings and demos. Instead of doing onsite visits, can I do phone interviews?

About getting market information by phone, there are really two answers to your question: "No," and "I suppose phone is better than nothing."

Onsite visits are the best way to learn about your market—in your prospects' and customers' natural habitats. Make this happen by combining this with other out-of-town activities such as sales calls, trade shows and conferences.That said, phone interviews are better than nothing.

Try something like this: "Hello, [Ms. Smith]. My name is [your name] and I'm a product manager from [your company]. We help companies in [industry they are in] to do [what you help them do]. I am setting up a research project to learn more about what [job title you are calling] in [industry they are in] are facing in today's economy. I have a few questions — can we set up a phone interview of about 10-15 minutes at a time convenient for you?" Start with open-ended questions. This is all about listening — it isn't the time to try to sell them anything. You're trying to get them to articulate issues, objections, concerns, problems—listen, listen, listen. Don't try to talk them out of anything they say, or talk them into anything your company sells.

At the end of the call:

"Thank you so much for your time and thoughts. This has been very helpful. Would you mind if I called you again sometime in the future to learn more about your situation?" (This opens the door for future conversations, and perhaps an onsite visit when you're in their town.)

Finally, start with some existing customers to build your confidence. They are usually eager to talk to product managers. Once you've visited a few customers, you'll find interviewing the rest of the market is a breeze.

Barbara Nelson is an instructor for Pragmatic Marketing. She has 21 years in the software industry, including vice president of product marketing for a leading provider of business and accounting applications for the middle market. Before her decade of product marketing experience, she worked closely with customers in several capacities, which taught her the importance of listening to the customer and to solving critical business issues.

email your questions to ask@productmarketing.com

Ryma Technology Automates Product Management Process

> "FeaturePlan is freeing up product managers to actually think and analyze and weigh the decisions that need to be made."
>
> *-Robin Lowry*

A team of Canadian entrepreneurs has been listening to the software development market for years, and their experience told them that product managers are bogged down by routine tasks that are laborious, time consuming, and often counter-productive. Caught between their primary tasks of designing products and communicating with customers, Sales, R&D, Marketing, and senior management, product managers inevitably face major distractions as they plod through the entire product development cycle. With these issues in mind, the entrepreneurs formed Ryma Technology Solutions Inc., spent considerable time researching the market, and built FeaturePlan™, a powerful software solution that helps IT companies streamline product management.

According to Andre Levesque, President of Ryma, "Our research showed that it's becoming more and more difficult for product managers to work in an environment where they are swamped with tactical issues. And the demands on their time are phenomenal. Faced with deep budget cuts, they often must manage multiple products. They have to bring products out faster and better meet market requirements. Gathering and managing information is one of their biggest challenges. Most product managers are using Microsoft® Excel and PowerPoint® to manage and report requirements. And they just can't do it anymore. The organization and sharing of information is nearly impossible. Simply put, the product management workload has outstripped the ability of the tools to keep pace."

That's where FeaturePlan comes in. FeaturePlan automates the product manager's most tedious tasks—collecting, organizing, tracking and distributing detailed product planning documents. With FeaturePlan, product managers can more easily determine product features based on market demand, competitive positioning, customer impact, and required development time and effort. At a glance, they can also see the status of all projects—including features, planned delivery date, and deviation from plan—and instantly generate the Market Requirements Document (MRD).

Built by Product Managers for Product Managers

How does the team at Ryma know so much about the challenges that high-tech product managers face? They've done the job themselves. In the course of their careers, they went in search of techniques and tools to support and strengthen product management. Most of the methodologies they found were geared toward manufacturers of hard goods, as opposed to software. Then they discovered Pragmatic Marketing®, which offers product management seminars designed specifically for high-tech.

"While working for a software company, we attended Pragmatic's Practical Product Management™ class in order to obtain the industry's leading product management blueprint and learn best practices," says Robin Lowry, Product Manager at Ryma. "We found Pragmatic presented a sound methodology for streamlining our product management processes, making better use of our people, and understanding and evaluating market requirements."

Levesque agrees, "Pragmatic offers a down-to-earth approach to strategic marketing that gets straight to the point. The years of experience of the

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instructors really comes across. Plus Pragmatic's methodology is geared specifically for the software industry. In a very short time, you can master their teachings and begin to see the value. It took me only about a week to empower my product managers to use the methodology. Then everybody was in sync. It just makes perfect sense."

But Levesque realized there was something that could add even more value to this practical methodology for product management: a software solution with which to implement the process. "At the end of the class, I asked about available tools to automate everything we had learned about strategic marketing," he remembers. "Turns out, there was nothing viable on the market. So we founded Ryma and set out to automate the Pragmatic Marketing processes—what would become FeaturePlan. And we never looked back."

Using FeaturePlan to Build FeaturePlan

The Ryma team realized the Pragmatic methodology was built on years of experience and best practices, so they followed the teachings to ensure that the product they were building was grounded in actual market requirements. With the Pragmatic course as the foundation, Ryma designed a product interface and coded a prototype. Then they set to work using the early version of FeaturePlan to test and build the solution itself. First stop: the Pragmatic instructors.

"They've been product managers themselves and worked with hundreds more," says Lowry. "Their insights and advice about the product have been invaluable. Next, we took FeaturePlan to product managers in the field, using it to test the market, find out what they liked, what they wanted in a product to simplify and strengthen their ability to do their jobs."

"The first release we came out with was an exercise in the methodology," says Levesque. "We used FeaturePlan to conduct our own information gathering, organize market demands, and plan desired features. We used those requirements to revamp the solution. And we recently released FeaturePlan 2.0—a powerful Windows application with intuitive navigation and loads of forms—with ten months of market feedback rolled into the product."

The Complete Solution for Product Management

Today, product managers attend the Pragmatic seminars to learn the best way to enable strategic product marketing, enhance their jobs, and communicate with target market segments in order to address high-value prospect problems. Then they can go back to the office and deploy an easy-to-use tool that was developed to help them implement that methodology—quickly and efficiently.

"FeaturePlan reinforces and adds value to a customer's investment in Pragmatic Marketing training," emphasizes Lowry. "After you take a class and come back with all these great ideas, you can actually apply them immediately with the software. The seminar and software work hand in hand, one optimizing the other. Now product managers have both the methodology and the implementation tools to make best practices pervasive throughout their organization."

"Our customers like having a tool to help gather input, create market driven requirements, and roadmap releases," she notes. "They like the reports they can create at a touch of a button, especially the MRD. They like the traceability from input through to problem statements to requirements. They like the calendar function that lets them see all of the products they are responsible for at a glance, with milestones and target dates. By automating the manual tasks of collecting and managing data, FeaturePlan is freeing up product managers to actually think and analyze and weigh the decisions that need to be made."

Levesque adds, "Without tools such as this, product managers end up being very tactical. They simply can't find time to do the strategic work, like analyzing volumes of data in order to design strong products that meet real market requirements. With the Pragmatic methodology and FeaturePlan, product managers have everything they need to make better decisions that are based on market facts, not opinions. They can create reports that demonstrate market demand and ROI in black and white."

What's Next?

Ryma has recently developed tools to make sharing information between product managers and collaborators even easier. A new server version of the product enables various departments within a company to provide feedback, gain access to vital market data, and see the status of projects. At the same time, Ryma is working to integrate FeaturePlan with market-leading software development and requirements definition tools to make the hand-off to developers seamless.

Most importantly, Ryma continues to work closely with Pragmatic to ensure that its software solution implements all facets of Pragmatic's teachings—from product management to launching and marketing a product. Concludes Levesque, "We are big believers in the Pragmatic approach to product management. And we successfully used that methodology to build and expand our own business."

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To feature the product management success at your company, contact editor@productmarketing.com

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- Attributes of successful messages
- What the sales channel really needs

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- Eliminate the "list" of activities
- Optimize program assets
- Achieve results stakeholders truly value

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- Build consistent management support

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- Manage endless requests for new tools
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- Measure program results without CRM

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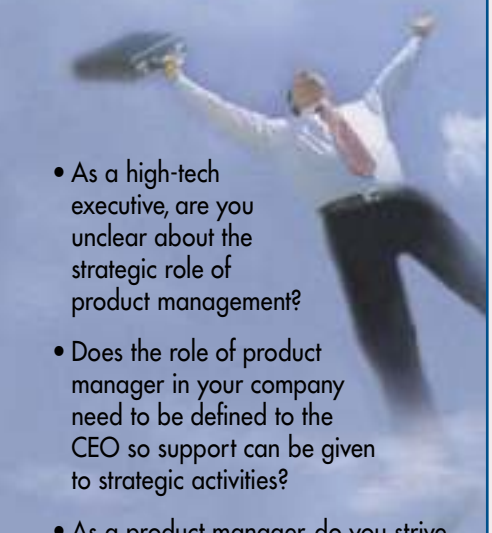
Free seminar

The Strategic Role of Product Management



- As a high-tech executive, are you unclear about the strategic role of product management?
- Does the role of product manager in your company need to be defined to the CEO so support can be given to strategic activities?
- As a product manager, do you strive to lead the organization rather than react to it?

This half-day session introduces the industry standard for high-tech marketing, the Pragmatic Marketing Process. Refined over ten years and implemented by hundreds of technology companies, this process shows how Product Management and Marketing personnel can move from tactical activities to quantifiable, strategic actions that deliver tremendous value to the company.

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The seminar is open to anyone currently employed in high-tech marketing including senior management, product marketing managers, and product managers. There is no fee to attend, but registration is required via our website:

www.PragmaticMarketing.com

Seats are limited, so early registration is recommended.

See available dates on calendar.

PRAGMATIC MARKETING®

Calendar of 2003 Pragmatic Marketing Seminars

Practical Product Management™

July 14 – 15 .....San Francisco, CA
July 21 – 22 .....Boston, MA
July 28 – 30* .....Toronto, Ontario, Canada
August 4 – 6* .....San Francisco, CA
August 12 – 14* .....Fairfax, VA
August 18 – 20* .....Boston, MA
August 25 – 26 .....San Francisco, CA
September 15 – 17* .....San Francisco, CA
September 22 – 23.....Atlanta, GA
September 29 – 30 .....Pittsburgh, PA
October 6 – 8* .....Boston, MA
October 14 – 15 .....San Francisco, CA

** Requirements That Work, Day 3*

Requirements That Work™

July 30.....Toronto, Ontario, Canada
August 6 .....San Francisco, CA
August 14.....Fairfax, VA
August 20 .....Boston, MA
September 17 .....San Francisco, CA
October 8 .....Boston, MA

Analyzing Market Opportunities™

August 6 – 7 .....San Francisco, CA
October 8 – 9 .....Boston, MA

Effective Marketing Programs™

July 16 – 17 .....San Francisco, CA
September 24 – 25 .....Atlanta, GA
October 8 – 9 .....Boston, MA
October 16 – 17 .....San Francisco, CA

Strategic Role of Product Marketing™

September 5 .....Vienna, VA
September 12.....Santa Clara, CA
8:00 am – 12:00 pm

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July

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** Requirements, Day 3*

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