THE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AUTHORITY

PRAGMATIC MARKETER

SUMMER 2014

POWER UP

PRODUCT AND DEVELOPMENT TEAMS UNITE!

PRODUCT TEAMS VS. DEVELOPMENT

AGILE ISN'T JUST FOR DEVELOPMENT

7 KEYS FOR REQUIREMENTS MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

CHALLENGES OF AGILE

PRODUCT AND DEVELOPMENT TEAMS UNITE!

In politics, nothing halts progress like a divided constituency. Red states vs. blue states. Liberals vs. conservatives. Athens vs. Sparta. Each side is focused not on moving forward or finding compromise, but on placing blame.

Unfortunately, this same type of divide exists in many technology companies between the product and the development teams.

But this divide cannot stand. Because, as Mark Lawler says in his article, only by working together can we "deliver great products that delight those who are the most important: your customers."

Working together effectively means understanding each other's points of views and goals. This summer's issue helps you do just that, as contributors who have sat on both sides of the technology aisle weigh in on everything from methodologies to prioritization to the key artifacts required for interdepartmental communication.

So grab a cup of coffee, pull up a chair and dive into the latest issue of *The Pragmatic Marketer*. And when you're done, share the issue with your partner across the aisle and start uniting your efforts for the common good.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kalogeris
Editorial Director

PRAGMATIC MARKETER

THE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING AUTHORITY

The Pragmatic Marketer™
8910 E. Raintree Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85260

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ISSN 1938-9752 (Print) ISSN 1938-9760 (Online)

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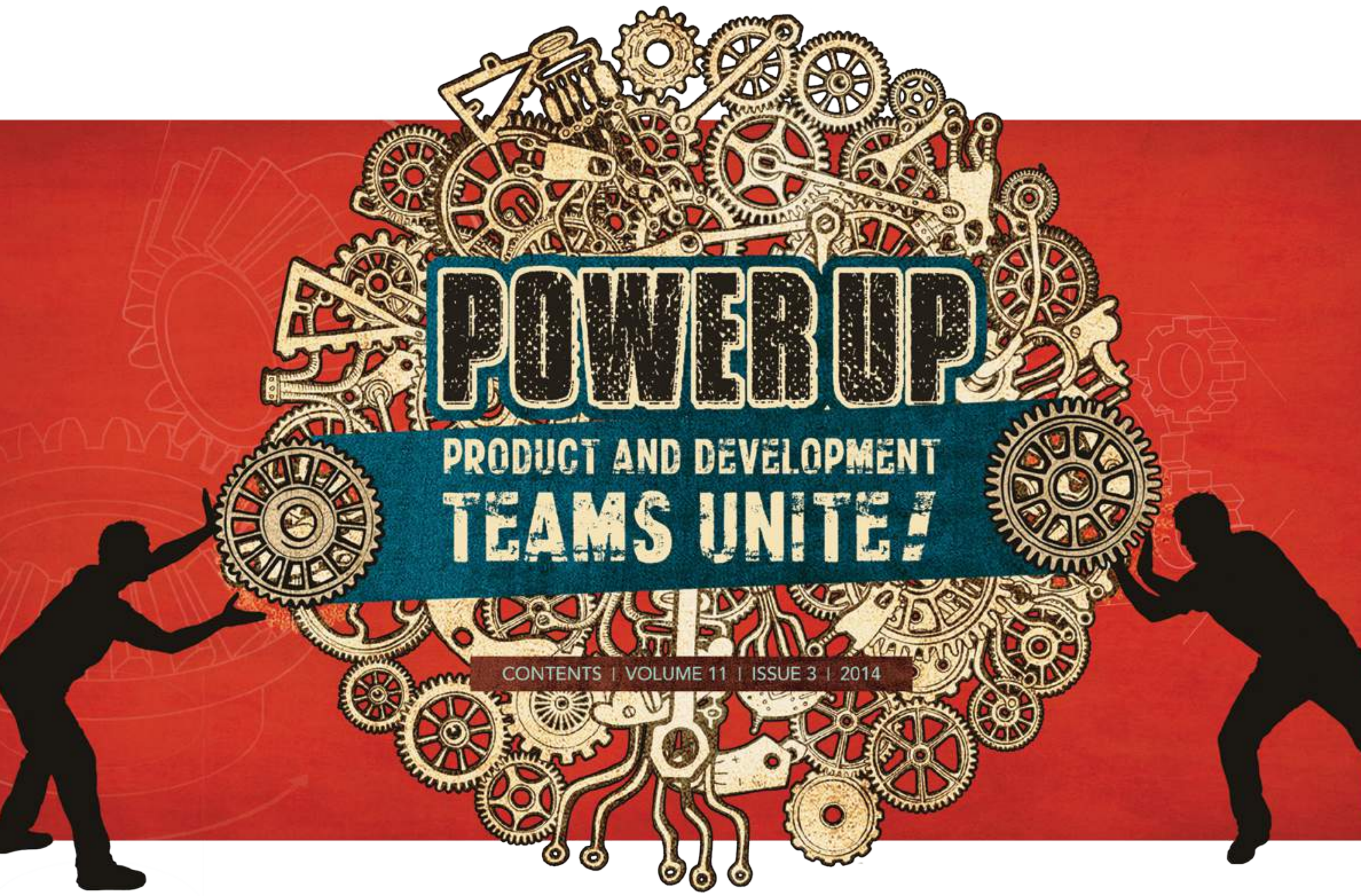

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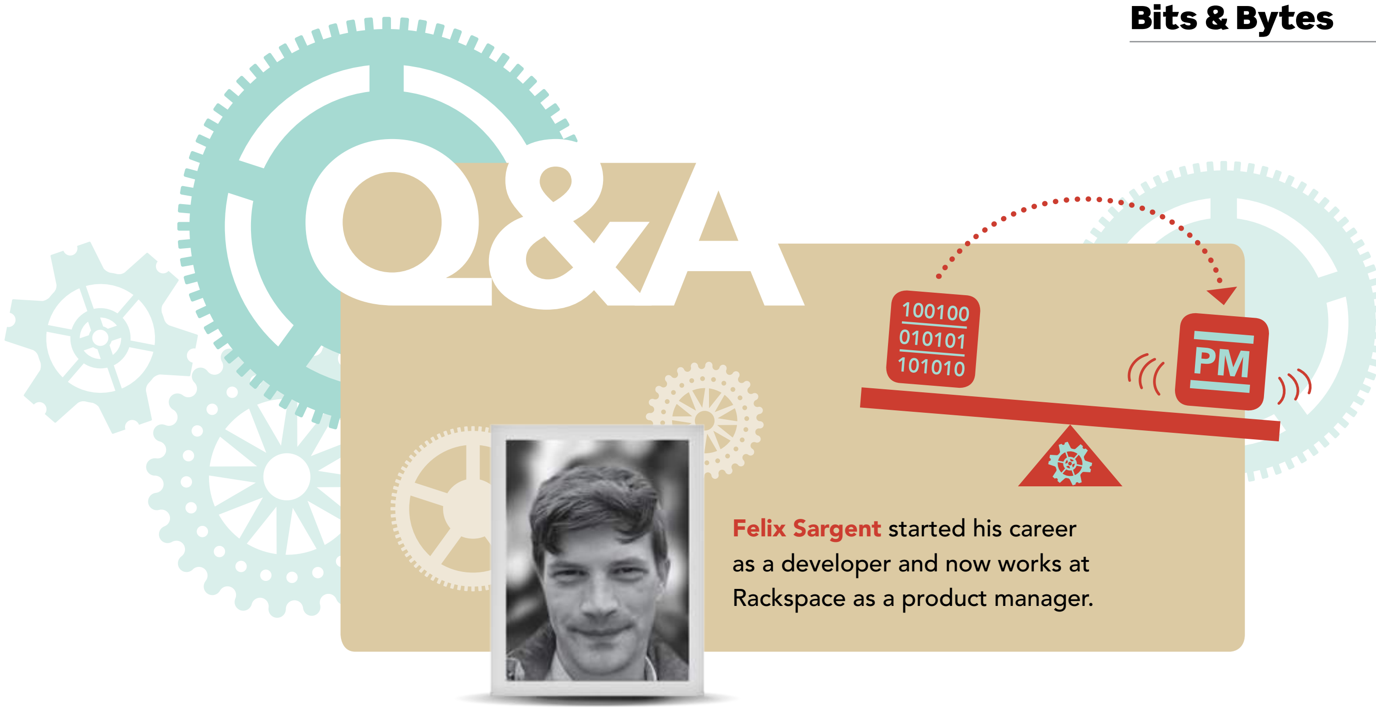


Felix Sargent started his career as a developer and now works at Rackspace as a product manager.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A PRODUCT MANAGER?

During one development project, I was the person who ended up facilitating the discussions about what to build and the kind of work that entailed. I worked to create consensus and made sure everyone's opinions were heard. Afterward, my manager asked me if I wanted to be the product manager.

Strangely, I wanted to be a product manager since I was young. My brother, who is 11 years older, moved from England to America to be a software engineer when he was 21. I grew up listening to his horror stories: "I built out this new feature that allows them to release new updates without ever having any downtime and nobody really noticed." I wanted to be the product manager he never had. That's molded my personality as I've worked.

DO YOU FILL THE ROLE THE WAY YOU DREAMED ABOUT BACK THEN?

I love my job and have a passion for doing it, but you would have to ask my teammates what they think about working with me. I think my experience as a developer is really useful, because I can communicate and speak that language.

Part of my philosophy as a product manager is that I don't believe in strict adherence to process, except to provide stability so people know what to do next. When I read the "top 10 ways to organize your backlog," I think the author is missing the point by not talking to the people and finding out what's driving them crazy—and then figuring out ways to address those issues.

DO YOU AND YOUR BROTHER TALK SHOP WHEN YOU GET TOGETHER?

We wouldn't work together, because we'd kill each other. But it's always nice to both complain and learn from each other. He allows me to hear things from a different perspective, and it's nice to bounce things off each other for feedback.

> Many product managers become incredibly overworked, because they aim for perfection and don't know where to stop.

DO YOU EVER MISS BEING A DEVELOPER?

The nice thing about being a developer is that you know when you're done. As a software engineer, you just get into a state where you know you're going to squash a bug and fix things and they're going to be more perfect. I've seen many of my product-management peers become incredibly overworked, because they aim for perfection and don't know where to stop. There is no such thing as perfection when you're looking through the backlog. Figuring out what to work on and what not to work on is always a challenging task. It's impossible to perfect a plan before things change.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO MOVE FROM DEVELOPMENT TO PRODUCT MANAGEMENT?

You should prepare for "being busy" to be different. As a software developer, it means you're always developing. Being busy as a product manager is like being busy as a parent. It comes down to being ready, not about fighting fires.

Instead of setting the direction, being a good product manager is really about listening to the direction as others perceive it—and then putting that into a document that can be shared to create a touchstone. You're codifying the zeitgeist of what the team is doing and what the team needs to work on in the future. In order to do that, you need to be listening.

I think the best place to start is to know what a bad product manager is. It's much easier to define than a good one. A bad product manager says, "Do this." A good product manager says, "What do you need me to do?"

Managing well is like dancing well. There isn't a series of steps you follow and then you're done. You need to interact and relate to your partner and environment.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR A NEW PRODUCT MANAGER?

Put the kettle on and have some tea. Meetings are often painful, forced, time-boxed, stressful and aggravating. At first, my team and I were doing agile standup meetings, where there's a time limit, which makes people feel too uncomfortable to discuss much. Developers are only talking about what they're doing next so that people are on the same page. But being on the same page doesn't always help. You also need to have a forum where people are relaxed and safe, so they can say if they don't like something—and see if others are feeling the same way.

One afternoon, after a morning full of handling my team's issues, one of my engineers came to me with yet another request. Admittedly, my brain was fried at the time and I needed a reset.

I'm English, so 3 p.m. is tea time for me and I find good tea to be both calming and invigorating. It helps clear my mind and set me on a productive path for the rest of the afternoon. I invited my engineer to join me for a pot of tea, and we started discussing the issue he'd brought to my attention.

We moved from our company kitchen to a set of comfortable couches and talked candidly about the issues. Others wandered over, listened in, aired their own opinions and started solving problems themselves. I poured more tea and put on another pot. As they talked, I found myself hearing them in a new light and finding opportunities where I could make their work easier for them. Sometimes, it was as simple as clarifying priorities and helping them understand deadlines. Other times, it meant working with others in our organization to better use APIs or integrate code. For us, the key to a good standup meeting was sitting down.

I find good tea to be both calming and invigorating. It helps clear my mind and set me on a productive path.

Travel Tips for Road Warriors

Insights on India

Over the last 20 years, India has earned a reputation as a technology hub. But it also has continually been celebrated for its beautiful scenery, storied history, exquisite fabrics and foods rich in flavor. Here are just some of the sights this diverse country has to offer.

Wildlife Tours

www.thewildlifeofindia.com

Take a walk on the wild side with a wildlife adventure. People travel from all over the world to catch a glimpse of the majestic Bengal tiger in its natural habitat—and if you're lucky, you could also see langur monkeys, peacocks, elephants and one-horned rhinos.

Spice Farm

www.sahakarifarms.com

Some of the spices you will see on this 60-acre farm include vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, pepper, cloves, chili, curry leaves, turmeric and ginger. Visitors also learn about the different uses of spices in cooking and in the treatment of common diseases.

The Bangala

www.thebangala.com

Be sure to bring your appetite. Lunch here is touted as being more elaborate than a seven-course wedding feast. Authentic Chettinad cuisine, considered among the spiciest and most aromatic in the country, is served up in plentiful portions on banana leaves. You can even request a cooking demo or kitchen tour.

Tea Gardens

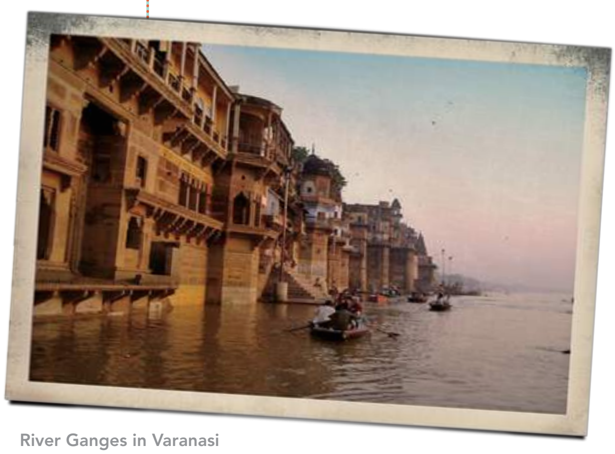
www.darjeeling-tourism.com

If tea is more your thing, Darjeeling offers up more than 80 operational tea gardens. Watch tea pluckers in action, stroll through the beautiful gardens and learn about tea processing in the factories where some of the best teas in the world are withered, rolled, dried, sorted and packaged.

Konkan Railway

www.konkanrailway.com

Building of this railway line, which runs from Mumbai to Mangalore, was considered a technological feat because of the formidable terrain and short construction period. But that terrain also means you can take in beautiful greenery, rivers and mountains on your journey. It is also an opportunity to get a sneak peek at how people in some of the smaller villages of India live.



River Ganges in Varanasi

Varanasi

www.varanasicity.com

Set on the banks of the Ganges River, this lively, colorful city is one of India's oldest and most spiritual. It features beautiful temples at every turn, soothing boat rides and elaborate alleyways filled with shops and local delicacies. Attend a puja, a prayer ceremony, which takes place every evening and features cymbals, bells, drums and the casting of tea lights into the Ganges.

Bollywood

www.bollywoodtourism.com

See the vibrantly colorful sets, locations and studios that Bollywood is so well known for. You might even meet a local celebrity or be asked to be an extra in the latest hit.

Wagah Border Ceremony

www.punjabtourism.gov.in

This ceremony at the border between India and Pakistan has occurred every night before sunset since 1959. A parade of soldiers from both sides kicks off the ceremony, and it ends with the pomp and ceremony of the lowering of the flags from both nations.

Tawang Monastery

www.buddhist-tourism.com

At 10,000 feet above sea level, the largest monastery in India features majestic panoramic views and peaceful serenity. The monastery houses more than 300 monks, and is known for its thangka, a painting on cotton or silk applique, called *Ja-Droi Ma* that was painted with blood drawn from the fifth Dalai Lama's nose.

Fabric Tours

www.indiaquiltingandtextiletours.com

See, feel and buy beautiful fabrics; talk to quilt-making artisans; and have clothing custom made just for you. You can even participate in workshops with local master artisans and learn ancient Indian textile arts like embroidery, bandhani tye dye, pit-loom weaving, block printing and batik.

JUST FOR FUN

Product Puzzle

Q	Y	K	T	D	Q	G	Q	E	T
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Agile
Backlog
Bug
Chicken
Launch
Pig
Release
Reqs
Specs
Sprint
Testing
User Story

Binary Brainteaser

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Ask the Experts:

Who owns design?

THIS IS ONE OF THE QUESTIONS I RECEIVE MOST FREQUENTLY. Should designers report to development, engineering product management, marketing or someone else? Or should design be its own group?

To answer the question, we must first define "design." Even that has been heavily debated, but for now, let's use my definition of design:

Design is the role in a team that understands a market problem, and comes up with a solution to that problem.

At a minimum, there are two flavors of design:

Paul Young, Instructor
Pragmatic Marketing

Front-end design. This is what most people mean when they say "design." The titles found in front-end design include user interface, user experience, human/computer interface and human factors designers. These are all titles found predominantly in software projects, but front-end design is not limited to software.

Front-end designers in hardware applications are concerned with ergonomic design, user fatigue, eye level, placement of power cables and interfacing to larger systems. In services, a front-end designer might think about how many key presses a user makes on their phone when calling into an interactive voice-response system before they can talk to a human.

Back-end design. Those involved in the back end are often called "architects." In software, they are typically concerned with items like codebase choice, code reuse, library selection, building scalable and secure systems and whether to use Amazon EC2 or another cloud provider. In hardware, they might choose the processor's clock speed or determine how much memory overhead would accommodate future upgrades.

In both cases, design is measured differently than product management and development. We teach that members of the product team should be measured on their effectiveness at bringing accurate market data into the business to feed better decision making. Meanwhile, development is often measured on a combination of scope, time and quality.

But for design, measurement needs to answer several core questions:

- Does the design effectively solve the user's problem?
- Does the design fit into the user's daily life or workflow?
- Does the design act in a way the user expects it to act?

The bottom line is: Design is a huge role, encompassing a wide variety of areas. It's very rare that one person is highly skilled at both front-end and back-end design.

In my experience, back-end design almost always reports to development because of the intertwining technical nature of the decisions these architects make every day.

Meanwhile, front-end design has migrated in the past decade, reporting to development, then to marketing, then to product management. It eventually became its own group in some companies, and is also sometimes a contracted resource that reports to the hiring party.

Like product management, there's a natural tension between front-end design and development (and marketing) teams. This tension arises from differing (sometimes competing) goals and measurements of success. Typically, this tension is a good thing, but when we shove front-end design under development or marketing, the tension resolves in favor of whoever owns that team. For instance, a development team who owns design and is measured on hitting the date will naturally pressure designers to create designs that achieve that goal—not necessarily conducive to good designs for the user.

So who owns design? The designers, of course. And who owns the designers? The goals of product management are highly aligned with design, so I can easily see reporting up the same structure. I can also see success as an independent part of the product team.

But wherever you place design in your organization, have an honest conversation about how designers are measured. If you measure design like development or marketing, the results will be suboptimal—and understanding that is more important than where they sit. PM

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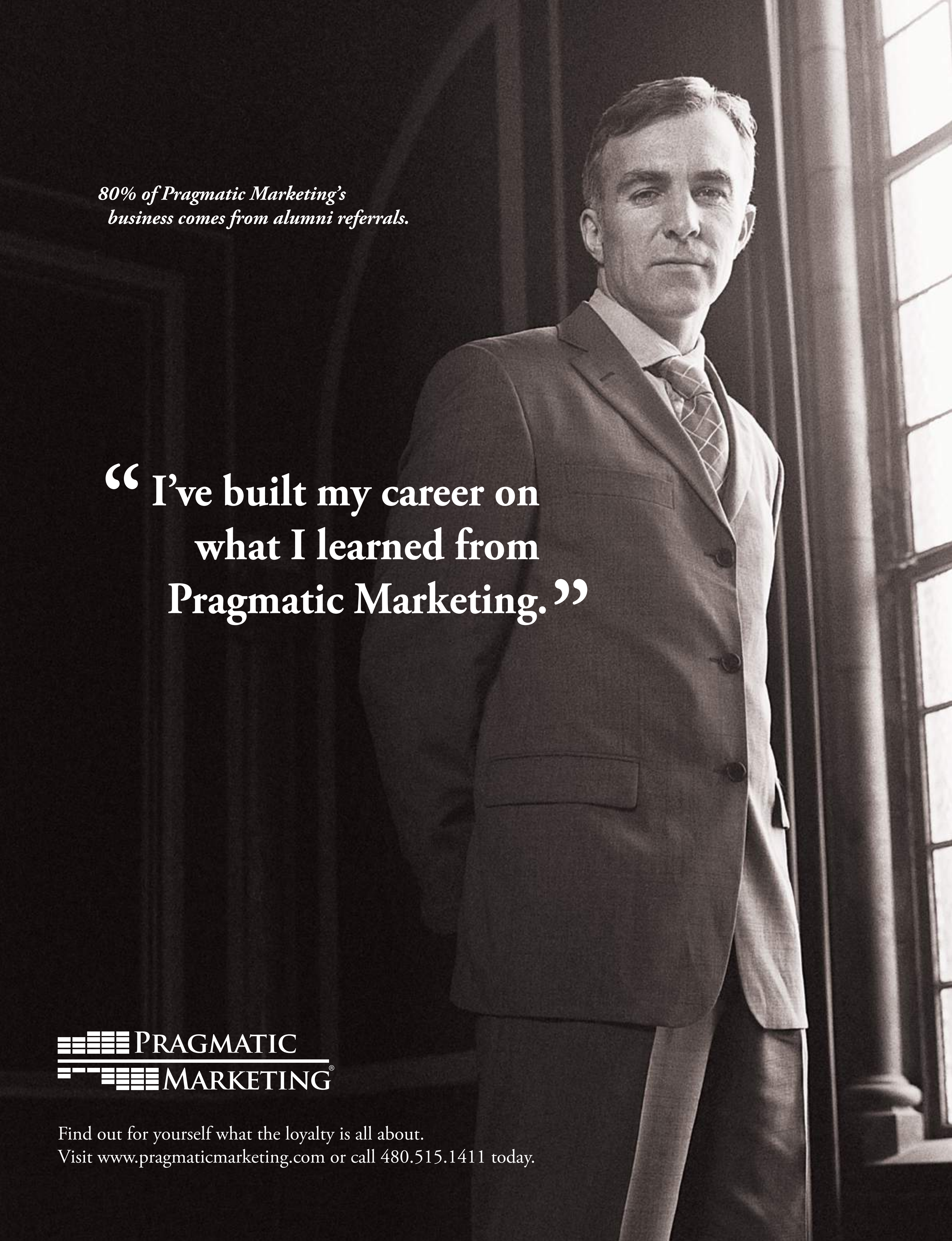
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POWER UP
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PRODUCT MANAGEMENT VERSUS DEVELOPMENT: ONE BAG AND A CARRY-ON

BY MIKE HUGHES

I HATE THE UNNECESSARY INCLUSION OF "VERSUS" in titles and headings, because it often implies an adversarial relationship where one does not—or at least should not—exist. But while product management is often the greatest ally developers can have, there is some inherent tension between the two. Product management usually wants as many features in a product as possible, while developers and UX designers typically don't want to be held accountable for fulfilling unrealistic expectations of what we can accomplish in a single product release. Figure 1 illustrates this conflict.

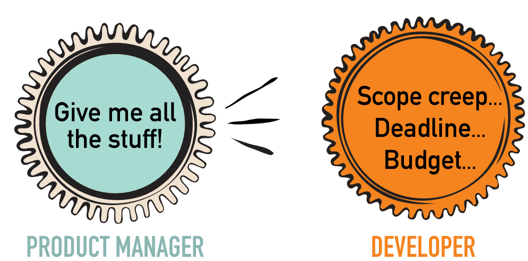
In my current role, I do a lot of negotiating back and forth between product management, their stakeholders and my product-development team trying to refine a set of requirements for a given product release or a roadmap of releases. This reminds me of a study I did back in my doctoral days, when I observed the differences between product management and development during a particular product's development cycle. I summarized my observations using the metaphor of a couple packing to go on vacation.

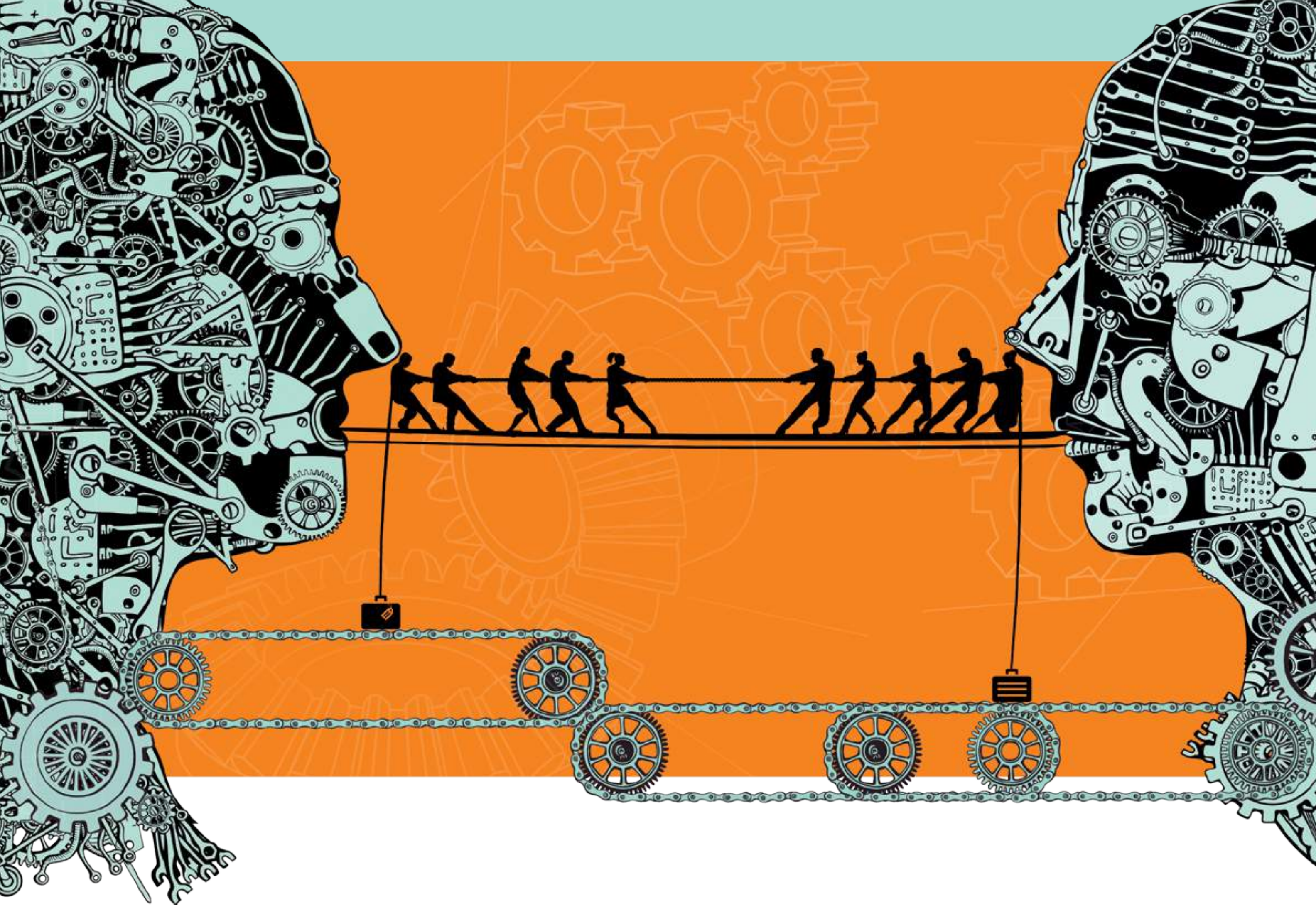
Product management is the visionary, the one who imagines how great it will be when we get there and identifies all the things we'll need to make it an enjoyable experience. They have an extensive list of things to pack—and frequently change or add things to the list up to the last minute. "Certainly, we'll need flip flops for the beach, but we might go hiking on trails, so we should bring our tennis shoes too. Oh, and let's bring some dress shoes for going out to dinner."

The other, development, is thinking about getting there and is focusing on getting everything into one bag and a carry-on. Every time the former makes a change, the latter sighs deeply and unpacks everything, making room to add the new item. In some cases, this forces a swap with something already packed. Every accomplished packer knows the code: One does not simply throw a pair of flip-flops into a packed bag.

So to sum up, the product manager is the visionary, the one who imagines how great it will be when we get there and identifies all the things we'll need to make it an enjoyable experience. The developer plays the role of the packer, the one who must fit all of that stuff into the constraints of reality.

FIGURE 1





RESOLVING THE TENSION

The obvious question is: How does one eliminate the tension between the two? I, for one, don't think we should. I think the essence of design is to resolve tensions, not eliminate them. Some classic UX design tensions include convention versus innovation and control versus freedom. In these cases, the conflicting poles are not binary choices of this or that; rather, they are like the opposite ends of a speaker balance knob. More of this gives you less of that. The designer's question is: What is the correct blend, given the problem I am trying to solve?

So, from the developer's point of view, the first step is to recognize the validity of the product-management perspective and the value it brings. Remember that the trip to the airport and then to the vacation resort takes just a few hours. After that, you'll be at the resort for an entire week. The benefits of packing lightly start to fade as you go horseback riding in flip flops. Similarly, the appeal of an efficient set of requirements that you can easily meet within the time and technology constraints can quickly wane, as a thin set of features struggles to succeed in a competitive marketplace. And in spite of your best intentions to expand upon the current release in the next one, the newest bright and shiny thing may have emerged. It is likely that the thin release will have to sustain your business presence in that marketplace, because there may be no reinforcements on the way.

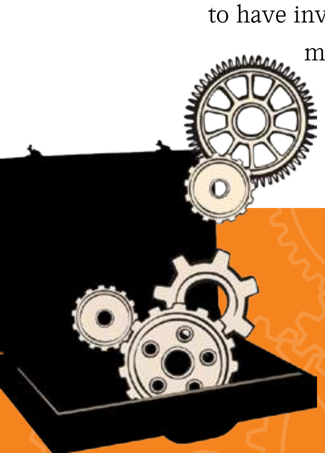
The second step, from the developer's point of view, is to recognize the validity of his or her perspective and recognize the value of constraint. There's no need to be apologetic or shy about this. As the old project-management chestnut says: Better is the enemy of done. Your vacation ceases to be any fun at all if the airline doesn't allow your luggage onto the plane. You can't enjoy being there if you can't find your way to get there.

SOME PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

Here are two simple techniques that help me to manage this productive tension between me and product management. One consists of making all of the hard requirements decisions before making any development investment; the other describes a useful yardstick with which to make such decisions.

Negotiation through artifacts. Every good packer knows the secret to packing is to stage everything before you begin. For example, if I am packing a suitcase, I lay out all of the clothes on the bed first. Similarly, if I am packing my car, I put all the luggage and stuff we need to take with us on the driveway first. Then I can make better decisions about what should go where and when I should put it there.

As a UX designer, I do the equivalent of staging when I create scenarios and wireframes, essentially laying out and agreeing on the user experience before we start investing significant development time and resources. The fight over what is in and what is out is a good fight; a fight that needs to happen. It's just not a fight you want to have when the product is already in the middle of quality assurance. When you inevitably start throwing things away, you won't want to have invested a lot of value into what you now must discard. I think one of the greatest values that user experience brings to the table is our ability to moderate



The fight over what is in and what is out is a good fight; a fight that needs to happen.

these fights and negotiations by leveraging artifacts in which we've made little development investment.

Minimum viable product. Eric Reis, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, popularized the concept of a minimum viable product, and agile developers have adopted this approach as a way of deflating large sets of requirements into manageable, independent chunks of development work. Essentially, an agile team asks: What is the least amount of functionality our product has to have before users would find themselves compelled to buy the product? This establishes the minimal target: the point below which you would have wasted all of your time and effort, because you would have nothing to show for it that anyone would buy. For example, Notepad or a similar text editor probably represents the minimum viable product for a word processor. If you couldn't do at least that, you'd have nothing to take to market. Or stated in the converse, if you could do at least that, you'd have something someone would buy.

The nice thing about the concept of a minimum viable product is that everyone on a product team can pretty easily agree on the feature set that it represents. Establishing this baseline clears the landscape for the stickier rounds of negotiations, when you go through similar iterations of finding the next group of features that represent the next most important level of viability. For example, a next logical step for Notepad would be to introduce more sophisticated text formatting and allow rich text format (RTF) output. Adding features that got you just halfway there would provide no additional value. In short, you need to apply a sort of quantum theory to feature sets, such as "anything that doesn't jump a gap that's this big brings no value at all."

When does this stop? When you run out of allocated development resources.

I once worked for an online bill payment company that wanted to design a financial planning application. To do this, we wanted to know how people went about paying their bills, so we did focus groups. Overwhelmingly, the most common technique was to save one's bills until payday, then sit down and stack them in a priority order such as rent, car payment and so on. Participants then started paying bills from the top of the stack and continued writing checks until they ran out of either bills or money.

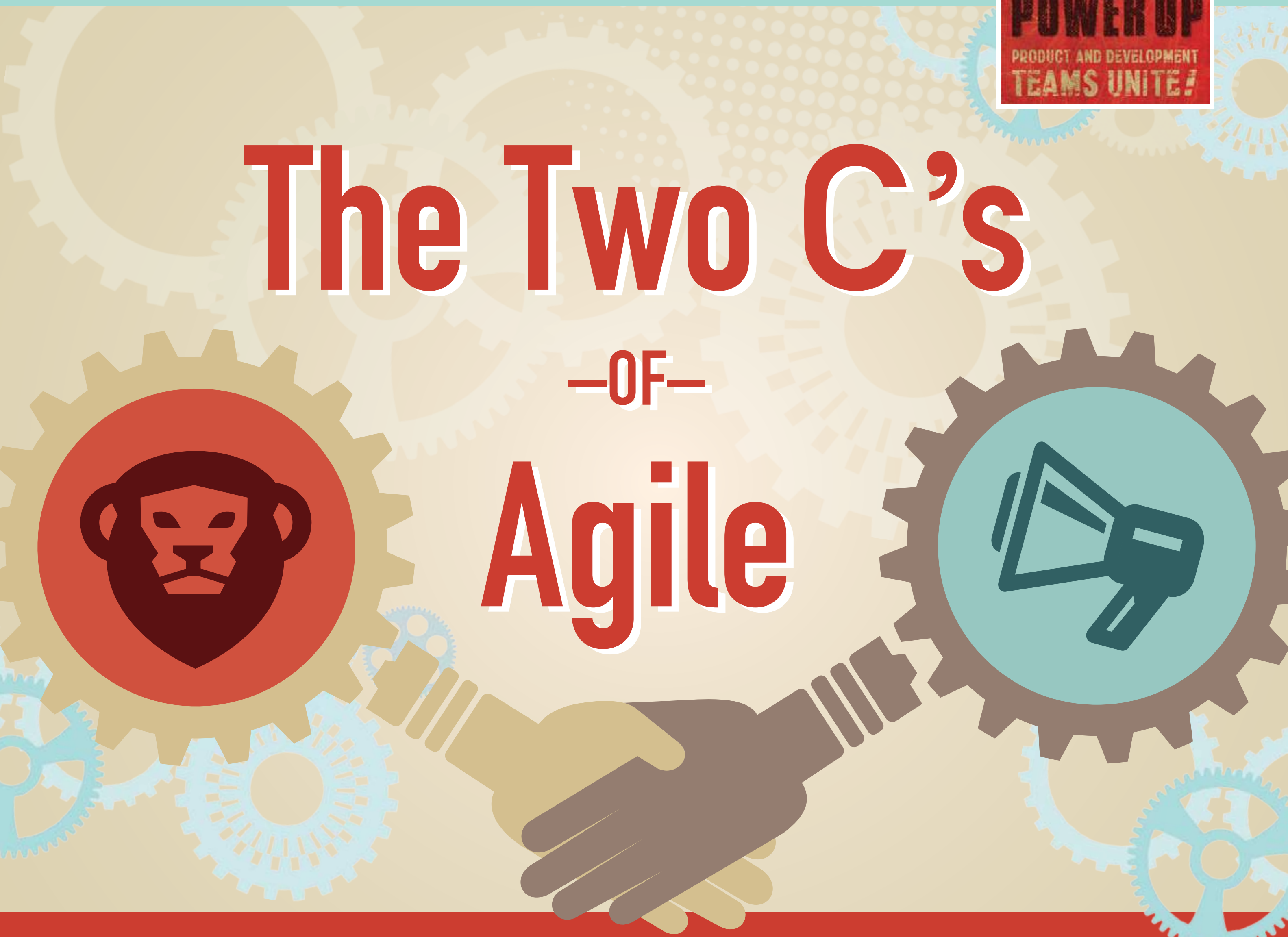
That's pretty much how we decide what goes into a release, too. If we've run out of resources, but product management thinks there are essential features that are still on the table, they must reduce the requirements for other projects.

The end result of all this is that we have a reliable release roadmap in which product management and sales have confidence, because the packers keep the visionaries honest. And we have releases that offer true customer value, because the visionaries make sure the most valuable things get packed into a release. At the heart of this are the UX artifacts—like scenarios and wireframes—that facilitate productive discussions without a lot of development investment. PM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Hughes is a user experience designer for TSYS, focusing on applying user-centered design practices in agile development teams. Before that, he was a user-experience architect for IBM Security. He was formerly lead UX designer for CheckFree Corporation, where he instituted their User Experience Research and Design Center. Mike has a PhD in instructional technology from the University of Georgia and a master's in technical and professional communication from Southern Polytechnic State University. He is a fellow with the Society for Technical Communication and a Certified Performance Technologist through the International Society for Performance Improvement. He can be reached at michaelhughesua@gmail.com.

The Two C's —of— Agile



Going agile requires that product management have courage and be the voice of the customer.

BY MARK LAWLER

ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING THINGS I'VE HEARD over my career is that "agile is something that software developers do." It is said dismissively by those who are happy with how things are today and see no reason for changing how they operate. It ignores all the success agile teams have had in software the past decade and in other industries including architecture, marketing, video production and even the auto industry.

I've had the pain and pleasure of running both software-development and product-management teams for well over two decades—sometimes both at the same time. After being involved in the agile transformation of almost a hundred teams during this time, I can attest that agile truly works and I can't imagine ever going back to traditional waterfall. But for agile to work, product management must focus on these two key C's: courage and customers.

C IS FOR COURAGE

You have to have the courage to make hard decisions, especially when prioritizing the features within a release and defining the minimum viable product.

Before agile, this was very difficult. We had our list of features, and we made them fit perfectly into the appropriate swim lanes of our PowerPoint presentations. It took quite a large chunk of our time to lay it out in a way that was

compelling and showed the promise of a coherent strategy.

After creating a product roadmap, which clearly showed the priority and features for each major release, why would research and development (R&D) need product management to waste time on the prioritization of the features within a release? The list is the list, right?

The ugly truth, and we all know it, is that R&D under waterfall was rarely able to complete a release as defined by the roadmap.

I once took over an organization where every release was a battle, with tons of infighting. Why? There were always serious tradeoffs that had to be made once the software-development teams came nearer to the scheduled ship date. R&D managers became the captains of "we can't." And that forced their product-management partners to ruthlessly decide which partially completed or not-even-started features to cut to meet even some of the major commitments that had been made. It was always at the end of the release, and product management often felt as though they had a proverbial gun held to their heads by R&D.

At the end of the day, product management believed it was settling and that R&D was driving what features made it into the release. In this organization, product management had courage, but it was courage in battle and in finger pointing versus courage in planning and execution.

To attempt an armistice, the R&D teams held out an olive branch: Prioritize your features, and we'll ensure they are completed in that order—sparing you those last-minute hard decisions of which features to keep or jettison as we rush to complete the release. But product management simply refused to prioritize their features. They dug their heels in, sending their software-development manager a spreadsheet that had everything marked as "high" or, my personal favorite, "must have" in the priority column. The response from the software-development organization to their unprioritized list came across as Draconian:

> *"Spreadsheets have rows and, unless you explicitly state the priorities without any ties, we are using the row numbers as the priority. When capacity runs out, that is the cut-off line. If you want to change your mind and add a new requirement to the release midstream, it will insert a new row in to the list and all those rows below it get pushed down on the list. This will cause one or more items you thought you might get below the cut line as the team runs out of capacity. It is what it is. Deal [with it]."*

R&D saw product management as lacking the courage to prioritize and absconding responsibility. And R&D, lacking courage to work with product management in true partnership, chose instead to let the rows of a spreadsheet step in as the proxy priority. As with most dysfunctional teams, each side continued to play the victim and with less than spectacular results. There were incremental improvements, but only in that it became much more visible what capabilities would be delivered in what order.

After introducing agile into the organization, things took a great turn for the better, albeit after a very rocky start. Agile forced the priority discussion with each and every sprint or iteration versus only at the beginning or end of a traditional release cycle. As part of sprint planning, the product owner and scrum master work in partnership to prioritize which user stories are to be worked on in the next iteration. The goal of this new approach is that the highest priority items are worked on first. And at the end of every iteration, one can ask, "Do we have a shippable or demonstrable product? Have we reached minimum viable product?"

This organization, as I mentioned, had a rocky start. Product management initially viewed agile as "a development thing" and refused to play the role of product owner on all the teams but one. "We've handed the development team the list of features we need to include in the release, why would we spend time prioritizing not only the features within a release, but now for each and every 3-4 week iteration? Scheduling how they do work should be their job."

The unfortunate result was that for those teams, R&D invoked their own C—the C found in "cherry picking." Without real guidance as to the priorities, the individual R&D teams simply picked and chose what user stories they worked on and why. Some were selected because they were the easiest, while others were chosen because they contained the most interesting work.

Unfortunately, the end result for these first agile teams was a cacophony of capabilities, spread like a wide shotgun pattern across the feature list. When schedule pressures forced product management to become involved to triage, the mess they found seemed worse off with agile than it had been with waterfall. At least in waterfall they had a glimmer of what R&D was working on as there was a schedule that showed tasks. With agile, they had what appeared to be random tasks completed without care as to how everything fit together. How were they going to tell a story to customers or management about the major themes and value behind the releases, when what they had now looked like a patchwork quilt? "Down with agile" was being shouted from the rooftops; all that was missing were the pitchforks and spires.

With each iteration, she was able to demonstrate to management a product that was evolving during its development cycle.

One team, however, had gotten agile right and it showed the others the best path. On this team, a technical product manager had shown the courage to embrace this new methodology and became the product owner. She quit writing market requirements documents (MRDs) that resembled tomes and manifestos, choosing instead to embrace the much easier user stories. She also became an active participant in iteration planning, prioritizing user stories in the backlog and partnering with the scrum master to assign them to the next iteration.

With each iteration, she was able to demonstrate to management a product that was evolving during its development cycle. And she was able to get feedback early and often from her customers and even incorporate that feedback into future iterations—sometimes even in the very next one. She discovered that the R&D team still never made it through the entire list that was initially planned for the release, but there were no more last-minute hard decisions about which partially completed features to rush to completion or to mothball. She knew with confidence when she had a minimum viable product and it was easy for her to tell the R&D team: "Halt the presses, lock this thing down and clean up the rough edges I've laid out in user stories in the next iteration—and let's get it out to our customers."

Other product-management teams saw this as an anomaly vs. a true testimonial to how great agile could be. After all, a single data point doesn't make a trend.

The good news is the product manager of this newly successful team became quite vocal in terms of

> **One of the best aspects of product management is bringing the voice of the customer to product delivery teams.**

how her R&D teams were no better or worse than the other teams. She openly shared that the key difference was that she had the courage to jump in with both feet and to follow the best practices of hundreds of other software development agile teams across many industries. She surveyed where the practices had worked and where they hadn't, went to agile user groups and then had courage to take the plunge. The other product managers eventually came around, albeit slowly at first.

As each team started to kick in and make the transition to what management considered to be high-performing teams, it became harder and harder for the laggers to hold on to their old ways since their teams were not getting any better while the others' clearly were.

In a nutshell, having the courage to fully embrace agile allows you to:

- Force prioritization at every sprint to avoid last-minute difficult decisions
- Get feedback early and often from customers—and incorporate that feedback into future iterations
- Be vocal and lead by example to get the whole organization on board

C IS FOR CUSTOMER

One of the best aspects of being in product management is bringing the voice of the customer to your product delivery teams. Although we have a plethora of boxes to cover in the Pragmatic Marketing Framework, being that customer voice is one of the keystones to ensuring success at any and all of them. And as a proxy for the customer, we are expected to travel at least 25 percent to 50 percent of the time in order to stay in contact with all customer contingencies (sales, marketing, professional services, partners, customer support—and yes, customers, both current and future). Some people I've met along the way have never understood this and they can be the death of their agile teams.

Being agile helps facilitate incorporating the voice of the customer by eliminating MRDs as thick as a New York phone book. You know the documents I'm talking about: Those that describe everything a product was to do in excruciating detail, but are rarely read, understood or executed on.

Instead, agile allows teams to focus on "user stories," requirements that are "fit for purpose" and scaled down into bite-sized chunks. These stories follow a format that looks something akin to:

> ***I, as a*** **<user role>**
>
> ***Want to*** **<goal or outcome user is to accomplish>**
>
> ***Because*** **<the reasons why a user in that role would want to do that>**
>
> ***Acceptance criteria:*** **<list of criteria by which a product owner would call that story done or completed>**

A process called "backlog grooming" takes place next. When a user story is too big for an R&D team to accomplish during an iteration, it is broken down into smaller stories that point to its parent story (often called an epic or a feature in agile-speak). Where the story isn't clear or lacks acceptance criteria, the product owner uses the voice of the customer to make it even clearer. Here is a golden opportunity for the product owner to express everything that R&D is to work on and to clearly tell them both the "what" and the "why" for each and every requirement. Because the product owner is supposed to be the proxy for customers and their voice in all product discussions and decisions, product management often plays this role.

That leads me to what I believe are two poor choices for product owners:

Proxy product owners. While it's true we no longer need huge MRDs, for some this has morphed into writing no documentation at all for the R&D team. In these organizations, the R&D team has no choice but to play the role of product owner, which further helps perpetuate the "agile is a development thing" belief. In those organizations, I call the folks who step up "proxy product owners." It isn't out of disrespect for what they are doing. In fact, it is the exact opposite: It is acknowledging that they are playing a role outside of their organization and taking on extra work that is very important to the success of the product. It is also an acknowledgement that they are indeed acting as a fully empowered proxy.

Some view this as software-development organizations not focusing on the "how" and wandering dangerously into the "what" and "why" that product management is supposed to own. My answer is simple: Have the courage to play that role and be that voice of the customer; R&D shouldn't do it, nor does it want to.

Those who don't believe in visiting customers. This is an even worse type of product owner on an agile team. All too often they are subject matter experts (SMEs) who believe that they know all of the answers based on their vast years of experience—that they, due to their personal previous work experience, know much more than the customers they are supposed to serve. Now don't get me wrong, not all SMEs are this way. But in my career, I've run into a number of them, especially in specialized industries such as healthcare where subject matter expertise is held out as being more important than actual product-management expertise.

One product-management organization I had the pleasure of taking over after an acquisition was loaded with SMEs who served as product owners, but never spent any time on the road talking with customers. They did so only at yearly user conferences or when there was an escalation and they were forced to deal with an angry customer. When I drilled down and probed on why each of them didn't visit customers, the answers that I received were:

- I've worked in this industry for years before becoming a product manager.
- I know this industry like the back of my hand, and I know what is best for our customers.
- Our customers don't know what is best for them, and as an expert in this field, it is my job to come up with those things that make life easier for them.

Wow! Really? If a product owner on an agile team is supposed to be the proxy for the actual customer, wouldn't actually talking with customers be a critical part of the job? I would contend that if they are basing everything they do on their own personal experiences, being hunkered in their bunkers versus out there in the real world, then their agile teams are simply building solutions for one and only one set of customers: themselves.

In this organization, I had no choice: I put SMEs on the road to actually meet and talk with customers. In their requirements and user stories, I had to advocate that the voice of the customer always be incorporated. Those who couldn't get beyond their own greatness as SMEs and still refused to talk with customers were given other assignments where their knowledge could be tapped and leveraged. These holdouts, however, no longer had the role of making everyday decisions regarding the course of what had once been their products.

Incorporating the customer in agile allows you to:

- Drill down to the basics in short user stories versus long MRDs
- Communicate both the "what" and the "why" for each requirement
- Have customer conversations before it escalates into angry confrontations at yearly conferences

TAKE AGILE ACTION

Over the years, I've seen two types of product-management organizations:

1. Those who embrace agile and cherish the glory of how much they can accomplish in partnership with development.
2. Those who do not embrace agile and sit on the sidelines, sniping at the teams that can never give them what they want, when they need it.

To create the first type of organization, you need to have the courage to jump in and be that voice of the customer in a way that helps your development teams deliver great products that delight those who are the most important in your world: your customers. PM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Lawler has been working in the computer industry for more than 20 years, focusing on the successful development of commercial software applications. He has been directly involved with and a strong driving force behind many well-known commercially successful products and companies. His goal is to provide the very best in executive managerial and technical leadership, empowering managers and teams to deliver great products that are on time, delight customers and bankrupt competitors. He can be reached at mark.lawler@comcast.net.

WHY MARKETING SHOULD GO AGILE

Marketers should take a cue from software development to become more adaptable.

BY JIM EWEL

MARKETING HAS CHANGED MORE IN THE LAST FIVE TO SEVEN YEARS than at any other time during my career. The pace of change has quickened, there is more direct pressure for marketing to demonstrate its contribution to the bottom line, many more channels of communication are available to reach increasingly fragmented audiences, and all of this must be done with scarce and expensive talent and resources.

Despite all this change, many of the core processes of marketing remain unchanged. We still spend time writing thick marketing plans, constructing yearly budgets, launching big-bang ad campaigns and targeting broad audiences (instead of having conversations with people).

Some marketers, including myself, are taking a different approach—one based on agile development. Software developers faced a similar crisis in 2001. They were pressured to get more done with scarce resources, and to adapt rapidly to change. They responded with a set of principles and a methodology called agile development, and it has transformed software programming. I believe that we can apply many of the same principles and methods to marketing and transform our discipline.

WHAT IS AGILE MARKETING?

Agile marketing is an iterative and experimental approach to marketing that values adaptability and responsiveness to change over long-term planning. It also values individuals and two-way marketing interactions, as well as collaboration among the various marketing disciplines. There are six core values of agile marketing.

Responding to change over following a plan. It's not that agile marketers don't do any planning; they do. However, they put a premium on adapting and responding to the marketplace through constant adjustments to their plans and priorities on a weekly or biweekly basis—rather than an annual or semiannual planning cycle.

Rapid iterations over big-bang campaigns. Few marketing campaigns can get it exactly right the first time, and there is also value in speed to market. Agile marketing recognizes this and values an iterative approach. It encourages marketers to try something out quickly and fine-tune it as they go, rather than putting all of their energies and dollars behind a big-bang campaign.

Testing and data over opinions. If you're iterating, how do you know something is working or not working? Data makes the difference.

Individuals and interactions over one-size-fits-all. Agile marketers realize that there isn't just a market for a product, but many individuals who make individual buying decisions. Buyers make their decisions as the result of conversations, not through traditional one-way advertising. Agile marketers seek to foster those conversations, and provide an individualized buying experience. Think of how Amazon customizes its recommendations to your unique purchase history; this is an example of individuals and interactions.

Collaboration over silos and hierarchy. In this era of specialization, it is tempting to organize marketing departments around skill sets: PR, advertising, social media, etc. But to the buyer, the product or the company is the product or the company, regardless of the medium used for communication. Collaboration is necessary to ensure not only consistency of message, but also a user experience that is consistent and pleasing. Teams that collaborate also get more done.

Agile marketing is a mindset: Marketers who practice agile marketing put the customer experience at the center of everything they do. They focus on solving buyer problems and the buyer's journey, not on selling and the sales cycle.

Lastly, agile marketing is about aligning marketing with the business and sales goals of the organization, getting stuff done quickly and documenting the results with transparency and accountability.

PLANNING FOR CHANGE

How do you "plan for change"? How do you organize your marketing team to respond to new demands when you don't know what those demands might be, or how you'll address them?

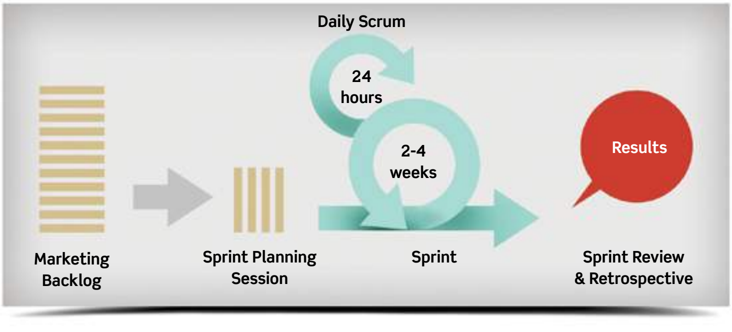
The first step is to admit that your priorities will be in a state of constant change and to throw out those tools that give a false sense of security about the amount of control you have over that change. Throw out yearly marketing plans, yearly marketing budgets and rigid organizational charts. Instead, revise your priorities, including how you spend both your time and your budget, on a regular, frequent schedule: at least once per month, and if you're really ambitious, once every two weeks.

Second, make it someone's job to rapidly respond to changes and opportunities in the market. Depending on the size of your organization, create a team, assign a person or make it 50 percent of someone's job to respond in real time (somewhere less than 24 hours, perhaps less than 4 hours) to particular kinds of opportunities such as competitive threats, newsjacking and brand-damaging events.

SCRUM

Scrum is a formal methodology that can help you revise your priorities. Agile marketers use it to manage their work, just as agile development teams use scrum to manage software development. It's beyond the scope of this article to cover everything you need to know about scrum, and many of the readers of *Pragmatic Marketer* are very familiar with both agile and scrum. Instead, let me outline the basics of scrum, and discuss how scrum for marketing is somewhat different than scrum for software development.

SCRUM PROCESS



Scrum starts with the marketing backlog, which is basically the list of all the potential activities that marketing could do. The marketing backlog can be seen as the "wish list," although it should be cleaned up and prioritized over time.

Unlike scrum for agile software development, most marketers do not write user stories. Instead, they break

THE SPRINT REVIEW PROVIDES A DEGREE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY THAT IS SOMETIMES LACKING IN MARKETING.

tasks down into manageable chunks that are typically half a day to 1 week in size, describing what's to be done, who the audience is, what the desired outcome is and how success will be measured.

At the sprint planning session, the marketing team meets with executive management and sales for 30-60 minutes to hear about the current business and sales priorities, adding any new items that come up into the marketing backlog. The team then prioritizes work off the marketing backlog, accepting enough work to fill the length of the sprint (usually 2-4 weeks of work).

Although scrum as practiced by developers requires assigning each item story points (a measure of the complexity of the task), I find that marketing teams tend to keep it simple, deciding for each task whether it is a half-day, full-day, half-week or full-week task. Anything that is bigger or longer than a week's worth of work should be broken down into smaller tasks.

Once the team has 2-4 weeks' worth of prioritized activities, they go to work. This 2-4 week period of getting things done is known as the sprint.

One of the most important rituals of scrum is known as the daily standup. Every day, or at least 3 times per week, the team meets for no more than 15 minutes. Each person on the team answers three questions:

- What work did I complete yesterday?
- What am I working on today?
- What issues, if any, are blocking me and preventing me from moving forward?

When the sprint is finished, the sprint review is held. Executive management and sales are invited, and the marketing team reviews the results of the sprint. For software developers, the sprint review is a time to demo working software. For marketers, new marketing materials are handed out or shown, new websites are demonstrated and the results of any mini-campaigns are shared. The sprint review provides a degree of accountability and transparency that is sometimes lacking in marketing. It answers the question, "What do you guys in marketing do anyway?"

The sprint retrospective is a short internal meeting of the marketing team to talk about what worked and what didn't work during the last sprint. It allows for adjustments to the process and methodologies used by the team over time.

WHO IS PRACTICING AGILE MARKETING?

Jascha Kaykas-Wolff is one of the early adopters of agile marketing. He has used the methodology at companies as diverse as Webtrends, Involver, MindJet and his current company, BitTorrents, where he is chief marketing officer. You can read some of his posts on agile marketing at marketingiteration.com. Jascha credits agile marketing with helping him to create an agile culture:

> *Agile processes and tools are actually install mechanisms for culture. By requesting people to work together in certain ways, track specific metrics and check in with each other at specified intervals, companies can put in place the building blocks for people to interact in positive, productive ways.*

EMC is also an early adopter of agile marketing. You can read about their success with agile marketing at Scott Brinker's Chief Marketing Technologist blog, www.chiefmartec.com as well as watch a video of David Quinn, EMC's senior director of corporate marketing, presenting to the Agile Marketing Meetup group in Boston on YouTube.

Quinn credits agile marketing with changing how EMC launches new products and interacts with the business groups. It not only has helped the marketing team with time management (and eliminated those long "coordination" meetings), but also provided greater accountability and transparency.

Lastly, I should mention Frank Days, whose blog Tangyslice.com has been a source of inspiration for me. He has implemented agile marketing at Novell and Correlsense, and his approach to agile marketing is refreshingly pragmatic. He likes agile marketing because it helps him get better results, plain and simple. PM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Ewel is a startup CEO and blogger on the topic of agile marketing. He is currently the CEO of InDemand Interpreting, which provides language-interpreting services to hospitals, clinics and physician practices nationwide. Previously, he was the CEO of Adometry and GoAhead Software. Earlier in his career, he was a VP of server marketing at Microsoft. You can read more about agile marketing at his blog, AgileMarketing.net.

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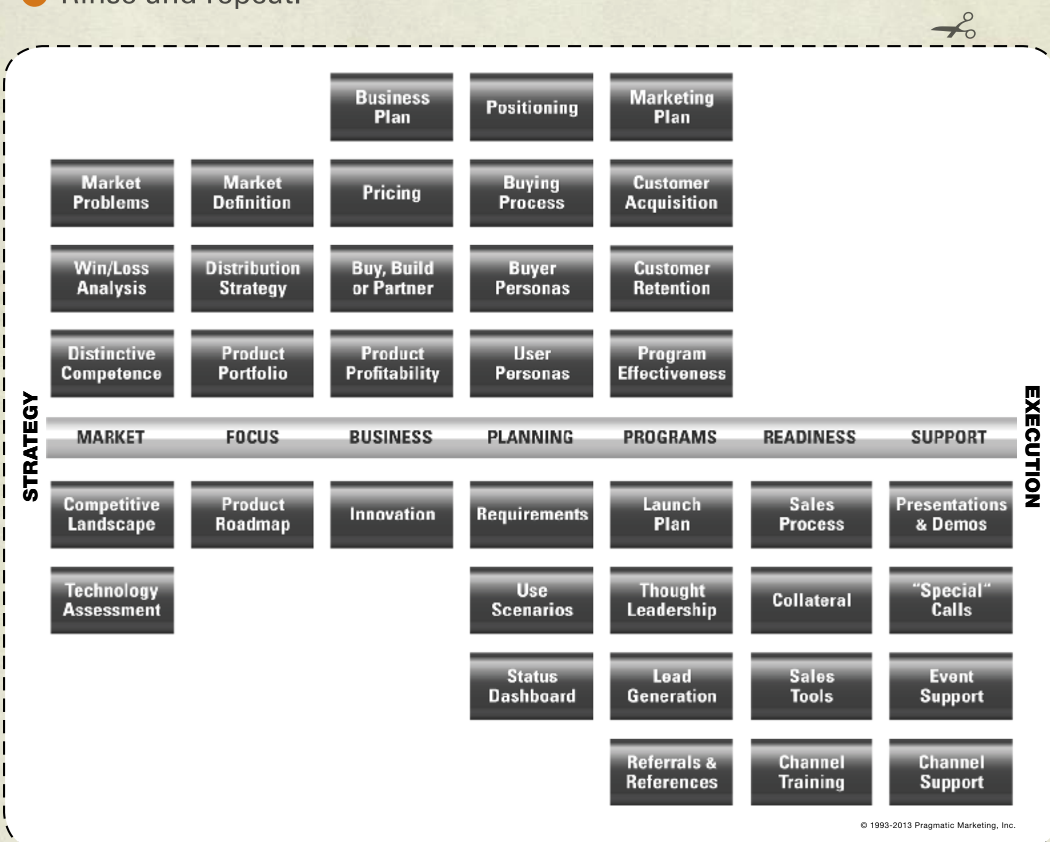

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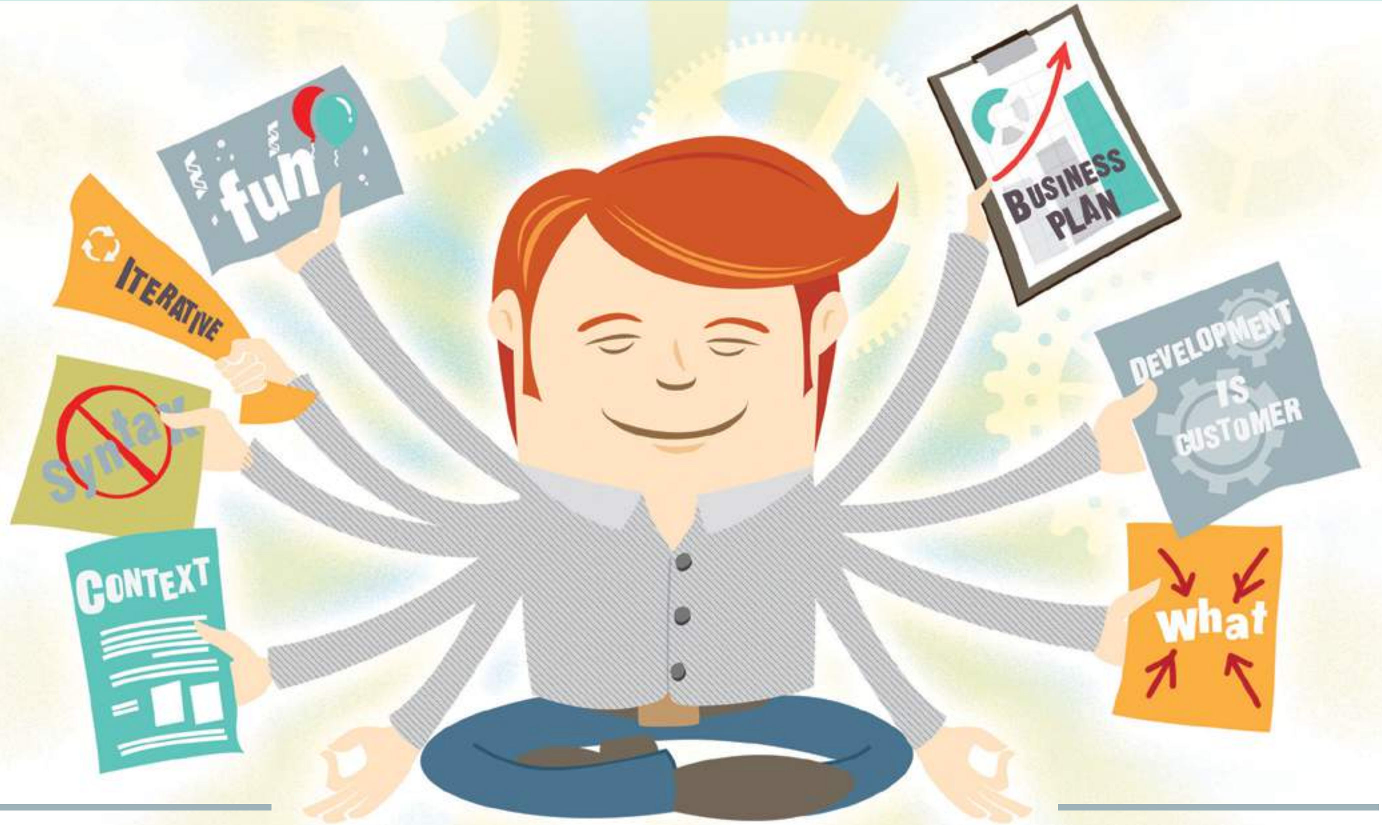


7 TIPS FOR HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL REQUIREMENTS MANAGEMENT

Escape the legacy of blame that often happens with requirements.

BY JOHN MILBURN

OVER THE YEARS, I'VE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF working with product and development professionals from around the globe. All have been highly motivated to succeed—and to have their company be successful and profitable. However, there is a critical juncture in every product-development process where many stumble: the handoff of the requirements to the development team. Here are seven tips to help make your next project more successful.

1. BUILD A BUSINESS PLAN AND KEEP IT UP TO DATE

As companies move to new development methods, they often feel that a detailed business plan is no longer necessary or as important. But "we'll be done when we're done" will not usually pass muster with leadership or get the funding your project requires. Yes, you should encourage flexibility to roll out products without constraining creativity. But you need to articulate the business goals of every project based on some initial expectations (date, cost, revenue, etc.).

Be mindful that priorities and market conditions will change mid-project, budgets will get cut, key people may leave the project and development may over- or under-commit. The initial business plan will justify the investment at the start of the project. However, you should also keep it updated throughout the project, including the latest internal and external changes, and communicate the business impacts to management.

There are cases where the project no longer makes business sense to complete. For example, if you missed the market window or the competition just made the entire project irrelevant. If you don't have an up-to-date business plan, how do you make that call?

2. GIVE DESIGNERS WHAT THEY NEED: CONTEXT ABOUT THE MARKET

To do their jobs and apply their innovative talents, designers need context around the description of the problem. When shifting from a traditional requirements approach ("The product shall …") to a market- or user-based approach, many think that requirements are supposed to be written at a very high level. "The network operator has a problem if the network is overloaded." But how does he get notified or want to be notified? How quickly does he need to be notified? Why does he need to be notified? What does it mean that the “network is overloaded”? Why does he care? How often does this occur? It’s not about writing requirements at a higher level; it’s about providing more context about the problem. Then the designer can own defining high-performing, well-architected solutions that provide a pleasing customer experience.

3. REMEMBER THAT DEVELOPMENT IS THE CUSTOMER FOR REQUIREMENTS

I once worked with a company that was debating whether their market requirements document (MRD) was to be written in Word or PowerPoint. I asked them, “How does development want to receive it?” Their answer: “We haven’t asked.” A requirement, or a group of them delivered as an MRD, is intended to build a bridge for communicating with your development team. They are the customer for the artifact. How do they want to receive them? In what syntax? What tools will they use? The product team owns the overall success of the product in the market, but the development team provides the technology solution to make that happen. Provide context, problems to solve and the acceptance criteria in the way that they can best receive and use them.

4. DELIVER REQUIREMENTS IN AN ITERATIVE FASHION; DON’T JUST THROW OVER THE WALL

Continually communicate the requirements with the team that will be defining and delivering the product. Don’t assume that the development team will read and understand a requirements document or list. Though this takes time, it will save huge effort in the long run. There are so many variables involved that product management must provide a forum for all to discuss them. What about this? And that? Who? How often? Why is this higher priority? What if we don’t do this one? Do you really mean that? What about all of our technical debt? These discussions need to be had at the beginning and throughout the project. Having the right people hashing through the detailed requirements, posing and discussing questions and getting a common understanding of the problems will not only encourage better teaming, but also allow you to deliver more innovative products in a shorter amount of time.

5. WRITE AS CONTENT, NOT SYNTAX

A regular syntax today for requirements is the user story format. This has become very popular with the movement to iterative (Agile, Scrum, XP, etc.) development techniques. Generally, user stories come in the following form: “As a role, I want to do something, so that I can accomplish a goal or objective.” In many cases, the user story syntax may be used to express a market-based requirement. But just because the requirement is written using the syntax doesn’t mean it’s a well-written requirement. “As a lab technician, I want to have a red ‘trouble’ button on my screen, so that I can do my job” is a poorly written requirement—yet it conforms to the user story syntax.

6. FOCUS ON WHAT, NOT HOW

Requirements are “market requirements” not “product requirements.” The product team’s primary responsibility with development is to provide problems to be solved in the market—not product specifications. Too often, either out of ignorance or the desire to impose one’s technical opinion, requirements are written that prescribe how to build the product and not what the market problem is. For every requirement, ask yourself: Have I stepped over the line and given development a how instead of a what?

Requirements are “market requirements” not “product requirements.”

7. HAVE SOME FUN AND MAKE IT A TEAM SPORT

Lastly, defining and delivering products is what technology companies do. It should not be drudgery or viewed as a battle between the product team and development. Encourage some creativity in the process and have a little fun.

Just because companies have done away with sponsored beer blasts doesn’t mean we can’t go to a park or bar and have a weekly group happy hour. Give out awards for the most creative solutions to gnarly problems. Celebrate a release with music and cake.

Incorporate these seven tips in your next and all future projects, and you will find that your projects will run much more smoothly and deliver better outcomes overall. PM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Milburn is a Pragmatic Marketing instructor who has “walked the walk” in technology product management. Throughout his 20+ year career, he has managed or delivered more than 40 hardware and software products and implemented the Pragmatic Marketing Framework at many companies. John has served on the planning team for Austin ProductCamp and helps groups around the United States create and run their own ProductCamps. He can be reached at jmilburn@pragmaticmarketing.com.

departments ›

How a Tech Background Empowers Product Professionals

Technological knowledge isn't a requirement, but it is beneficial.

BY SCOTT SEHLHORST

I've been asked repeatedly over the last decade if having a technical background is required to be successful as a product manager. The answer is no. But it has certainly helped me to be more effective. This is a personal and situational question which has no crisp answer—but sharing some of my experiences may help you to work more effectively with, or as, a product manager with a technical background.

Internal Wiring

I don't know if I went to school for engineering because of how my brain was wired, or if Carnegie Mellon rewired my brain for me—but I always say it is where I "learned how to learn." How I approach learning, and how I apply different analytical techniques to synthesis, situational analysis and development of insights is driven by how my brain is wired. In product-management speak, the way I learn things is a distinctive competence, and it makes me objectively *better* as a product manager. I would argue that this is because of my technical background. I would expect people with similar backgrounds to have similar advantages.

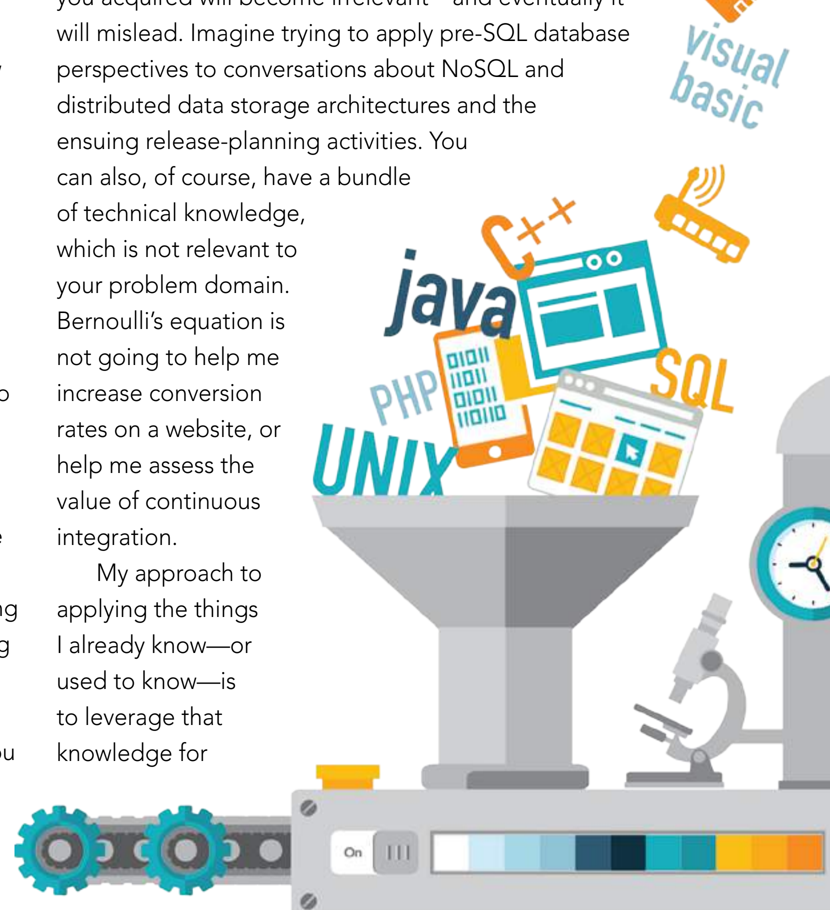
The Inside Track

I tend to work most frequently with businesses that incorporate software development into developing solutions for their customers. I happen to have also spent several years developing software—and eventually leading teams which were developing software. This arcane knowledge of the secret handshake has helped me develop effective working relationships with the team members who are actually creating the product. When you do something, you learn it more viscerally than if you only read about it. Building on this deeper level of insight, which only comes from doing, is one way to develop camaraderie with the team of people creating your product.

The Temporary Crutch

In terms of what you already know, a technical background only helps for a short while. Eventually, the information you acquired will become irrelevant—and eventually it will mislead. Imagine trying to apply pre-SQL database perspectives to conversations about NoSQL and distributed data storage architectures and the ensuing release-planning activities. You can also, of course, have a bundle of technical knowledge, which is not relevant to your problem domain. Bernoulli's equation is not going to help me increase conversion rates on a website, or help me assess the value of continuous integration.

My approach to applying the things I already know—or used to know—is to leverage that knowledge for



shared context in conversation, pattern recognition when being exposed to new-to-me information and generally applying the principles of learning to whatever is in front of me. I do not try to apply the knowledge to solutioning, beyond using it to guide some directed questioning or to help with hypothesis formulation.

One of the phrases I remember from Pragmatic Marketing's training was a question from my instructor: "If you are going to do *their* job, who is going to do *your* job?" That very question helps me walk away when I start to get too far down into the weeds in discussing how we're going to solve the problems. It is a slippery slope, especially when you really enjoy technology and secretly wish you could be coding away (or designing or testing) with the rest of the team.

Helpful, with a Twist

The crux of it is that the benefit of having a technical background does not come from participating in the technical work, but from how it helps you collaborate with the technical team. Collaboration is a soft skill, and it is the one that is broadly helped by having technical wiring.

Sometimes, we work on products that are helping our customers to solve problems in a technical domain. In these cases, being technical can help quite a bit—and may even be genuinely required—in developing an understanding of your market.

Consider, for example, developing the staffing schedule for a large hospital. You need to be able to synthesize technical problems, combining the abstract mathematical problem (the nurse-rostering problem is a classic computational conundrum) with the business appreciation for defining the "good enough" solution. In my opinion, developing insights about how to compete in this market requires you to be able to appreciate the mathematical complexity of the value proposition, so that you neither assume it is trivial nor intractable. This is a problem that people will pay to solve. It is also a problem that requires a combination of technical solution and business perspective.

At the end of the day, if you're developing a product that is addressing a particularly technical problem, I don't believe you can be effective without sufficient "technical wiring" in your brain to be able to fully appreciate the challenges (and opportunities) in play. One of the better (and very technical) product managers I have worked with happens to have a degree in history, but his brain was absolutely wired to be able to think technically. Demonstrated success in a technical role (or education) is a likely indicator, but an imperfect filter.

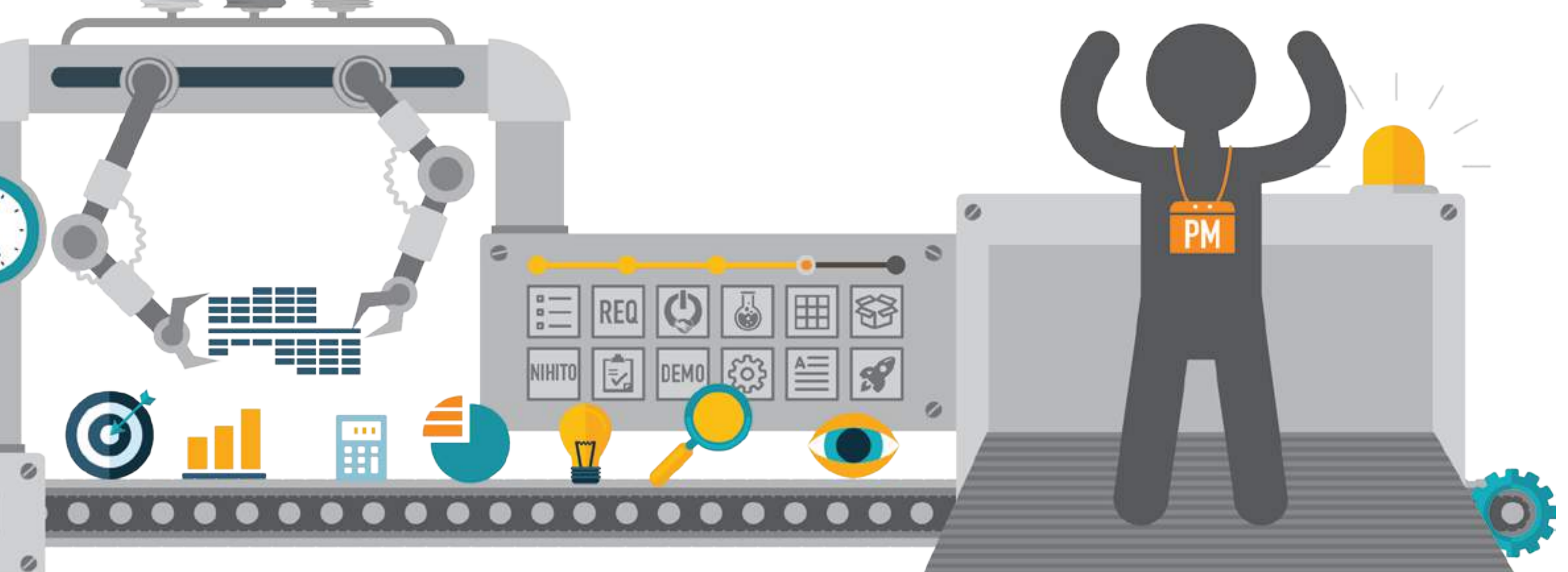
In a Nutshell

Having an existing body of technical knowledge in your head is of limited and suspect utility. Limited because it is more useful in application than in collaboration, and suspect because it will become irrelevant or even wrong faster than you will expect. I think of this as a circumstantial outcome of having a technical background—not an asset that can be directly leveraged.

But even when you're creating products that are not "technical," having a technical perspective can help you significantly in the process of creating those products. And that's not because it helps you do any of the technical heavy lifting, but because it helps you work more effectively with the people who are doing the technical work. PM

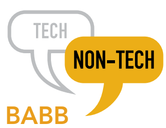
About the Author

Scott Sehlhorst has been helping companies achieve software product success since 1997, and started Tyner Blain in 2005. He is a product management and strategy consultant, and a visiting lecturer for the Dublin Institute of Technology's Product Management program. Scott has managed teams from 5 to 50, and delivered millions of dollars in value to his customers. You can reach him at scott@tynerblain.com, or join in the conversation on the Tyner Blain blog.



Confessions of a Nontechnical Product Manager

Tips for turning a nontechnical background into a winning opportunity

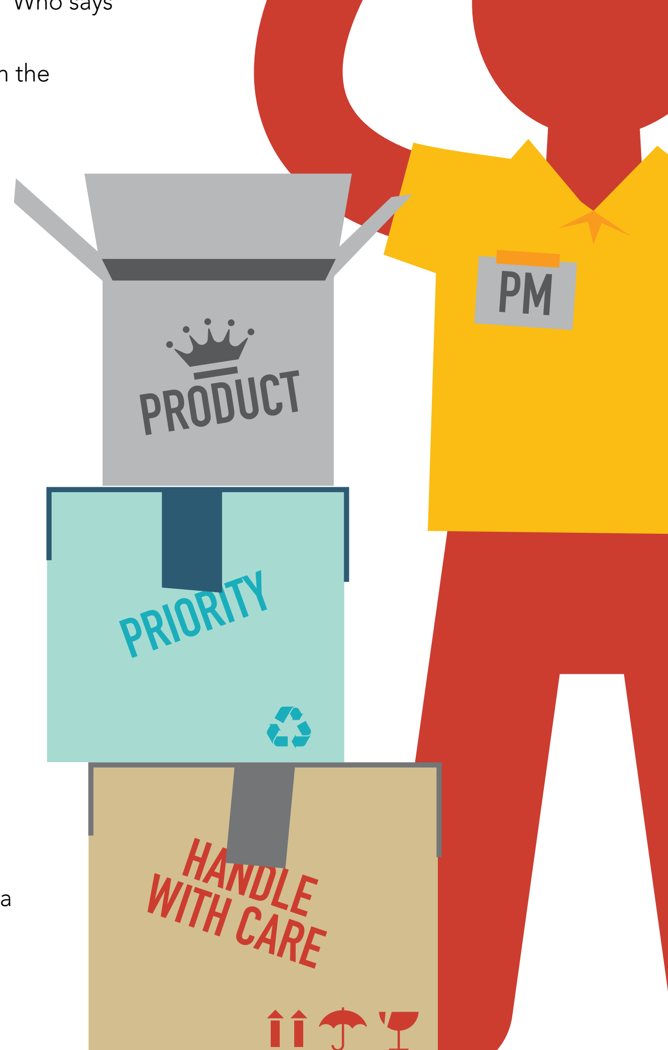


BY JULIE BABB

My friend Matt was helping a client adopt a more Agile software product development process. His first question to me was: "How do we test a product manager applicant's computer science chops?" To which I replied, "Who says your PM has to code?"

As a "nontechnical" product manager and entrepreneur who has overseen the development of many projects from mobile games to multiplatform marketing campaigns, I get variations on this question a lot. Some employers and clients fear that product professionals who don't code won't be able to communicate properly with their development team.

Of course, every project is different but the two roles require very different skill sets. Personally, my lack of formal computer science training has never held me back, and can often be an asset. Here's six tips for current and aspiring product professionals who don't code:



1. The Product Is the Boss

A good product professional is a leader, but is not a boss. The product is the boss. Now here comes the corny business-book truism: Your top priority at work is to make your boss look good. Your job in a product role is not to bark orders at designers and developers, nor is it to be subservient to them. Rather, you are there to communicate effectively with the entire team including executives, marketers and salespeople, to make sure the product is great. A truly great product professional keeps the team focused on that common goal and helps determine the best path to get there.

2. Tell a Great Story

In user-focused design and development, we can think of each feature as a "story." When we describe each development task, we are essentially writing a story that will lay out the scenarios and requirements that allow the developer to dive in and formulate a solution. It's important to remember that although we must define success, we don't need to know the exact path to get there. In fact, good story writing is not technical at all. It is a unique language that bridges user needs with desired outcome; developing this skill requires empathy, attention to detail and systematic thinking. Tell your team a great story and they will come back with the technical requirements and functions that bring it to life.

3. Be Available

Writing a good story is an important first step, but your job doesn't end there. You are an integral member of the team, and you must be available to facilitate, translate and communicate. Need a better feature description? Rewrite it and make sure everybody is on board. Having a communication problem with a team member? Fix it ASAP. Don't hide behind Gannt charts or shift the blame when challenges arise. Tackle things head on with your team, and listen to them.

4. Ask Questions

I've never worked with a developer who wasn't able to easily diagram a stack for me or describe how an important subsystem works. Most of the time, developers are excited to share their knowledge. You just have to ask. This understanding is an advantage that product professionals with a computer science background bring to the table, but it's a skill that a nontechnical PM can easily develop. The more of this knowledge you accumulate, the better you'll be at predicting how long things will take—and this will help you and your management team prioritize. In the meantime, you have options. Bring a developer into planning meetings to contribute, or avoid committing to timelines without consulting the team.

If you walk away from a technical conversation a bit confused, jot down the bits you understood and the things you didn't and research it on your own later. It's probably not imperative that you understand a complex development system now, but a better understanding may help inform a conversation or decision in the future.

5. Speak Up!

You may not know the ins and outs of C++ or how to whip up a web app in a couple of hours using Ruby on Rails, but don't underestimate the value of your own experience and common sense. Even the best developers need help sometimes. And a good product professional can be a trusted collaborator to bounce ideas off of.

When a developer asks me to help with a technical problem, I start by discussing the feature from the user's perspective. Then I transition to the developer's point of view. Is the basic logic sound or are there holes in it? Is there a more simple way to get the same results? Is it built on, pulling from or sending out to other parts of the application? You'd be surprised how valuable your new perspective can be. Sometimes just identifying the trade-offs with technical decisions can help your developer choose a direction to best move forward. Code isn't the only language developers know. Every feature is a series of rules that follow a system of logic that can be discussed in plain old English—or in diagrams, visuals and even emoticons if your coder doesn't speak English (which I've also experienced).

6. Listen

Just as you may be able to inspire a coding solution for your developer, every team member can inspire product solutions. Encourage the entire team to volunteer feature ideas, share cool new capabilities, voice insights from data that may have been missed and find easy wins.

Being a good listener and making sure everybody is comfortable sharing their ideas will ultimately be a huge benefit to the product. And you definitely don't need technical training for this skill—which may be the most important one. PM

About the Author

Julie Babb is a product manager at Pivotal Labs, the agile development services unit of Pivotal. She works with clients to wrangle digital teams, obsess over process and create momentum. She also shares insights on making things for partners like Game Developers Conference, New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program and Tribeca Film Festival. She can be reached via Twitter @awkward_hug.

Engage Your Audience with Google Hangouts

BY BRANDEE SWEESY

AS DESCRIBED BY GOOGLE, Hangouts are a unification of video, voice and chat. But there can also be a psychological impact to your audience: the humanization of your brand through authentic conversations.

Authentic conversations really began with blogging several years ago. From there, we went to teleseminars where you could actually hear people's voices, followed by the combination of voice and visual that webinars offered. Now video marketing is big, but has gotten so elaborate with intros, outros and jump cuts that they seem less authentic. They have basically broadened the empathy gap—and Hangouts can help you close that gap with your audiences.

During one Hangout that I hosted, a backdrop fell on my head—and I actually got hired by a big client right after it. There are no guarantees that things won't go wrong in Hangouts, but that's the beauty of them. It allows you to be more real and more connected with your audience.

Don't treat Hangouts like a webinar replacement and rely on slides. Use the opportunity to actually hang out with your people, engage with them, have a good time, answer questions and give value. And if the value is good, people will buy your product or service.

There are many other benefits of Hangouts as a platform too:

- They are free, regardless of the number of viewers.
- They are multipurpose, allowing you to build authority and engagement with regularly scheduled web shows, product announcements, one-on-one video conferencing and panels.
- They are multifaceted, streaming live to your YouTube channel, linking to your Google+ page and offering embed codes that you can use on a Facebook tab, website or blog post.
- They have long shelf lives. When the broadcast is finished, the video is available within minutes in your YouTube video manager for you to edit as you like.
- They outrank other content in searches, because videos rank higher—but they will also outrank a standard YouTube video because Google ranks on what is current and relevant.

Getting Started

I'm a firm believer in driving everything to your website, rather than sending people to your Google+ and YouTube page. Your content will be available at those other locations for people to come across. But if we're actually sending people in all those directions, they won't know where to engage with you. It gets confusing, and we all know that the confused mind never buys. Sending everyone to one location also improves search rankings and is easier to manage.

I have a threefold process for setting up Hangouts that are embedded on my website:

1. Send teasers using my website domain and a "watchlive" extension followed by a number of the episode (for example, www.hangoutsforbusiness.com/watchlive-2).
2. Add the embed link Google Hangouts provides after hitting "Broadcast Now" to the website.

3. Include a commenting system to enable interaction. I use a Facebook plug-in, because everyone knows how to interact with it.

Once you are up and running, remember that Hangouts are about the humanization of your brand, engaging with your audience and providing value. Here are some best practices to ensure both you and your audience get that value:

Practice makes perfect. Hangouts are not entirely intuitive, so get in there and play around. You can always delete the video.

Customize. The Hangout Toolbox allows you to brand your Hangouts with custom overlays. I include my hashtag and my trademark. You can also include pattern interrupts (a pop-up slide), such as "brought to you by" if you have a sponsor or "go buy my stuff here" to inspire people to take action. I usually do five or six of those.

Remember to engage. I let my audience know they can start posting any questions they might have right at the beginning, and it doesn't have to be driven by what I'm saying. (There's actually a 45 second to one-minute delay between what you're saying and what your audience is hearing, and I also inform them of that.) People love to be included in a Hangout, and I say their first name and actually read their questions out loud before answering.

It's in the name. Be aware of how you name your Hangout, because your audience can come across your Hangout several different ways. Something like "Episode 37" won't make sense without context. You want to title it so they know what to expect and then include branding.

Don't get discouraged by smaller live audiences. A big thing to remember, since we are so programmed for instant gratification, is not to be discouraged if you only have three live viewers. I know of one Hangout that had 400 live viewers, but then had 40,000 views within four days. So keep on pumping out that content.

Make the most of marketing. I love the humanization of the brand and the live interaction that Hangouts provide, but it's also what I call "marketing on nitrous." It's basically rocket fuel for your brand because they are easy to promote and there are many ways to repurpose the content afterward to continue to spread the word.

Start promoting your live event four days in advance. I send them to a landing page, capturing their first name and email before sending them to the "watchlive" page. I keep promoting over the next few days through my other channels, and do one last promotional push on Facebook five minutes before the Hangout starts.

After the Hangout, it's really important not to just end the broadcast and call it done. Optimize the YouTube video afterward, using keywords to tag it and include in your title and descriptions. (Another tip: Identify the keywords before your Hangout, and mention them several times to get search credit for closed captioning and transcriptions of the video.) Also, include calls to action above the "show more."

Take the content and repurpose it like crazy. I take two compelling minutes out of the video, sometimes adding an intro and outro, and promote it separately with an external annotation taking them to the longer version. (If my Hangout is on the longer side, 30 minutes to an hour, I'd pop out four or five of those to get traction on YouTube.) You can also transcribe the video and make it a blog post, strip the visual portion and make it a podcast.

If you are strategic with your optimization, you can skyrocket to the first page of Google searches on a topic. So Hangouts not only portray your brand in a very human light with your current audience, they give you the opportunity to spread that light over new audiences. PM

About the Author

Brandee Sweesy has been dubbed the "Hangout Marketing Expert" by some of the top names in the industry. Her passion and 20 years of experience in marketing, branding, strategy and most of all engagement with communities has led her to help people with live video and Google Hangouts. She can be reached at Brandee@BrandeeSweesy.com.

A FEW THINGS YOU'LL NEED TO GET STARTED WITH HANGOUTS:

1. A Google+ account with at least a profile picture, since that picture will show on your screen if your camera stops working
2. A linked YouTube channel that has been verified (otherwise it can't allow uploads that are longer than 15 minutes)
3. Webcam (many people just use their laptop camera)
4. Headset (to avoid feedback)
5. Hard wiring (versus over Wi-Fi) for improved quality
6. Good lighting
7. Google Chrome browser, since Google tends to play better with Google

Take the Guesswork Out of Content Creation

A content standards guide is the key to optimal content.

BY SANDRA JEAN-LOUIS

There's no doubt about it, we're in a content race. And compared to B2C businesses—the original content pushers—B2B organizations are struggling to keep up. In particular, technology companies are realizing the need to stand out in a commoditized industry where churning out high-quality content is a daily challenge.

While the quantity of content a marketer produces can boost traffic, they sometimes forget that quality is equally important. And in an environment where prospects are bombarded with messages, they also need to hit the mark with every piece of content they create.

This is no easy task. B2B companies still cite the top three content marketing challenges as lack of time (69 percent), producing enough content (55 percent) and producing the kind of content that engages (47 percent), according to research from the Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs.

With so much time and resources needed to meet the demand, can technology marketers reduce their content-generation time and still maintain their market position?

Enter the content standards guide, a stylebook that ensures consistency across your content. Whether you're launching new products, redesigning web pages, promoting your proprietary solution or revamping your newsletter, a content standards guide is a key element to producing high-quality and relevant content faster.

Its benefits are twofold:

1. As a reference guide for internal and external writers, it helps keep your messaging, tone and voice consistent across all media. When these elements are aligned, marketers can produce content faster because they know exactly how to address their audience. With clear standards, they eliminate doubt and create content with greater efficiency.

2. A content standards guide encourages leakage at the top of the funnel. Why is this a good thing? Speaking in a consistent tone and with consistent keywords and terminology helps eliminate unsuitable prospects from your funnel and retain those who are a perfect fit. It leaves no room for misinterpretation of who you are as an organization, what you do and for whom. When you speak to prospects in a consistent manner, you constantly restate your value proposition and retain your market position.

A content standards guide is a living, breathing document that is updated as your business changes. Its benefits go well beyond time savings and positioning support. A well-defined guide can:

- Protect your brand and messaging
- Bring consistency to blog posts, articles, case studies, white papers and all marketing collateral
- Cut onboarding time for new employees, including writers or marketing staff
- Set standards internally for delivering consistent messaging to prospects and customers
- Set your organization apart in a commoditized link-building world

A content standards guide is more than a repository of standard verbiage and mission statements. It's how you present your content to the world. It encapsulates what you stand for in a readable, friendly and non-corporate-speak format.

Create Your Guide

It takes some effort, but you can capture the essence of your organization in a single document.

You'll want to start by assigning a writer who can steer, manage and track the project—then set a timeline and stick to your deadline.

Next, bring sales, marketing, customer service, PR and your web team into the discussion. Anyone who actively deals with customers can offer valuable insight. Get them involved and enthusiastic about the process by bringing everyone together—either in one big session or a series of smaller ones—to cover the following:

- Outline what you do, for whom and how.
- Describe the personality or brand of your company.
- Define your unique selling proposition (USP) or value proposition.
- Describe your buyer personas, demographics and firmographics. What are their concerns, needs and interests? What keeps them up at night, and how do your solutions help them?
- Who's the competition? List your top two to four major competitors and how they excel.
- What do you do better than the competition?
- Include any brand conventions currently in use and standard translations for your tagline, brand names, category names, etc.
- Include search-engine optimization (SEO) guidelines: What keywords does your target audience use to find you?

Many businesses fail to integrate their value proposition into their content. This means they miss countless opportunities to connect and engage prospects. Tying your proposition and buyer personas into your guide will help its users stay focused as they craft new messages. And with all the elements listed in one document, it will streamline overall efforts and produce laser-focused content that speaks directly to your ideal prospect.

You can also create standards for landing pages, services pages, product pages and blog posts. And don't forget to jazz things up with slides, screenshots and hyperlinks to help illustrate a point.

Once you've finalized your guide, distribute it throughout the entire organization and start planting the seeds to better, faster content.

Apply Your New Guide

Start with your website and look for SEO revision opportunities. Describe the purpose of your website: Is it to capture leads via a sign-up offer? To get prospects to call your toll-free hotline? To get them to directly contact a sales executive?

Are your calls to action in the same vein? Do your products or solutions use consistent naming conventions across the site? Do you call someone a sales executive on your home page and a sales rep three clicks later?

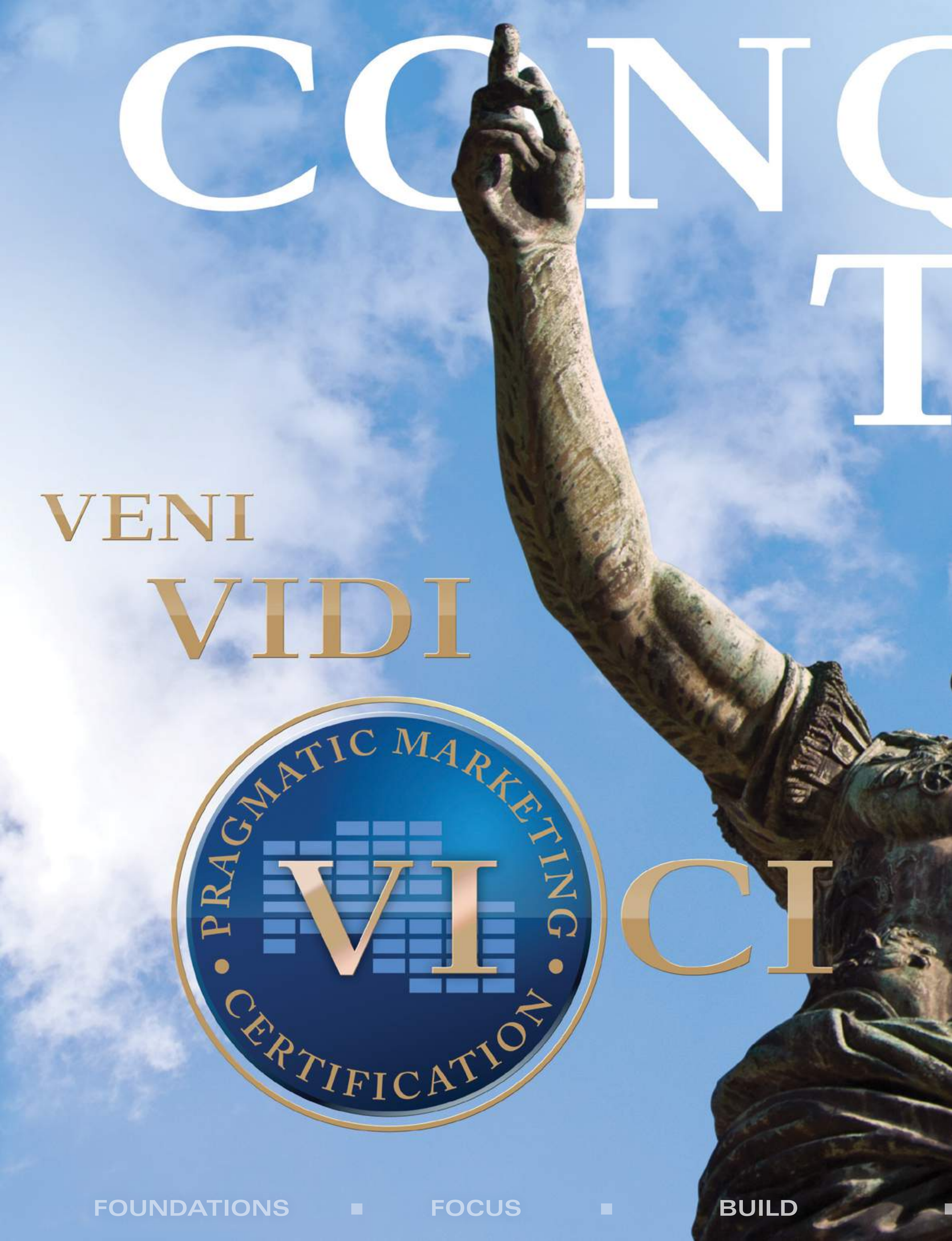
Once you've revised your website, start applying the standards to new content, social media posts, newsletters and marketing collateral. Over time, your fresh, consistent messages will attract search engines and improve your content performance.

By keeping standards and aligning your messages, you'll substantially decrease the amount of time it takes to create high-quality and relevant content. What's more, your content will rise above that of your competitors, as it will appeal to your prospects' interests and help keep your organization top of mind.

A content standards guide is your arsenal for better, faster and focused content generation. And the more focused you are, the more revenue you'll drive. PM

About the Author

Sandra Jean-Louis is a B2B and Certified SEO Copywriter at Word Central. She's a seasoned online marketer who helps information technology, software and professional service firms generate more leads and sales with targeted content and marketing copy. Connect with Sandra on LinkedIn or contact her at Sandra@WordCentral.ca.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Speaking the Same Language

How Sabre Airline Solutions is leveraging Pragmatic Marketing best practices to transform and scale its business

BY DANA JONES

GROWTH AND MARKET DEMAND for products and services is a positive experience at any company, but it can also lead to challenges in maintaining consistent practices and making informed decisions. At Sabre Airline Solutions, we provide enterprise software and services for the airline industry. Over the years, we've grown our portfolio of products with in-house development, acquisitions and strategic partnerships. Given this growth, thinking about how we continue to invest and operate became more important.

When I came to work here in January 2012 as chief marketing officer, one of the first assessments I conducted was a gap analysis relative to the Pragmatic Marketing Framework. I have experience in both small start-ups and enterprise software companies, and this is the only way I knew how to operate. I walked my management team box by box through the framework, and we collectively agreed on our areas of weakness. This formed the basis for targeted initiatives that solve for these gaps and serve as foundational elements as we begin to manage our business differently.

In 2013, we decided to have Pragmatic Marketing's *Executive Briefing* onsite with a broad cross-executive leadership team. Leadership buy-in and alignment is critical toward transforming a business. We've since followed that up with three sessions of the *Foundations* and *Focus* courses, each with about 60 to 70 attendees from the product management and marketing organization. The goal was to ensure the team was on the same page as it related to best practices, and to have a framework and tools to leverage. The training, in conjunction with implementation of standard product life-cycle management practices, was the basis for evolving to a market-driven organization.

Defining Roles

With the training, we were able to bring clarity relative to the strategic and tactical parts of the Pragmatic Marketing Framework. This included product management, product marketing, marketing communications and our interactions with technology and sales. This clarity meant everyone could focus on the jobs that needed to be done for their roles. Like all businesses, we have to manage through resource constraints—so while it's not perfect, we are making progress.

Focusing on the Building Blocks

How we were producing solution strategies and business cases was not comprehensive or consistent. And where we spent our investment dollars was based on historical trends versus long-term strategies. If you think about a product manager running his own business, long-term views of the market problems, the competitive landscape, investment and ROI, and target customers are a few key components to

> **Pragmatic Marketing gave us tools to put portfolio management disciplines in place.**

consider. Pragmatic Marketing gave us tools to put portfolio management disciplines in place and make optimized decisions based on clear strategies and business cases.

We also identified a gap in our ability to enable our field force through positioning and messaging documentation. We weren't arming them to have strategic customer conversations and show up as thought leaders. We are now working through a comprehensive sales-enablement program, including training and certification, self-study materials and key sales tools, such as customer testimonials and solution demos. To arm a global sales force will take time, but we are making huge strides.

Pricing is another key area that needed attention. Solution owners or the field team weren't armed with the right tools to make strategic pricing decisions. We needed to institute value-based pricing practices. This includes an understanding of market dynamics to set list pricing, governance councils and packaging. A lot of work commenced last year to establish this discipline.

Another example of our improvement since taking the courses is our roadmaps. We've become much more disciplined in what they should look like and have implemented that across our portfolio. Now every area uses a consistent roadmap template—something we didn't have before. More importantly, they are tied to long-term solution strategies and investment decisions. We have a quarterly cadence on roadmap approvals and will begin to proactively share the content of the roadmaps with the field-facing teams. The goal is to communicate key changes and business rationale since the prior quarter and help them have strategic customer conversations. Roadmaps are also a key input into the development process. This process, along with artifacts like a release scope document, is helping us manage and measure our releases relative to schedule, scope and quality.

Shaking up the Culture

All of these examples are driving a culture shift from a behavioral perspective. People are asking different questions and being more proactive, because they know they have a checkpoint or a governance review coming up. We have brought in talent with needed skills and competencies such as product marketing. We are making better investment decisions to accelerate growth, gain portfolio leverage and ultimately be more competitive. All of this is leading to more collaboration across functional teams.

We're working to grow the language of Pragmatic Marketing within the organization. Getting ourselves thinking the same way was a big feat. Terms like "NIHITO" (nothing important happens in the office), "roadmap," "solution strategies" and "buyer personas" are now becoming part of our basic dialogue.

The Future Looks Bright

Transformation doesn't happen overnight and there is still work to do. What we are applying from Pragmatic Marketing is foundational to our long-term growth, and best practices are being leveraged across other business units. Our customers are starting to see the differences in the way we show up in the market and engage the community. That is the ultimate test of success—being a thought partner and driving value for our customers. After all, it does start with an understanding of the market problem! PM

About the Author

Dana Jones is senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Sabre Airline Solutions. A seasoned product, marketing and operations software executive with over 17 years of experience building successful technology businesses, Dana joined Airline Solutions in 2012 and leads the Marketing and Solutions Management organization.

Four Power Cues for Leaders

In the age of information overload, ensure your communication hits the mark.

BY NICK MORGAN

WHEN I WAS 17, THREE EVENTS LED TO MY LIFELONG INTEREST in body language and communication.

The Dalai Lama became a hero to me. I read a book about the Dalai Lama, whose escape from Tibet under threat from the Chinese was both terrifying and heroic. The fact that he could then become an apostle of peace and brotherhood in the world made him a hero of mine.

Six years later, I went to hear him speak. He was an hour late, but we all waited. When he arrived, he walked to the middle of the stage and sat down on the floor—and then he didn't say anything. He just looked at us for about four minutes, and it felt like an eternity.

Then he let out this unearthly laugh and said, "I better say something really intelligent, because I kept you waiting for so long." He gave a fine speech on Buddhism, but the real power of that experience was in those four minutes of silence. As he looked at us, it felt like he made a connection with each person in the audience. I wondered: "How did he do that? What did he share with us silently that was so powerful?"

He gave a fine speech on Buddhism, but the real power of that experience was in those four minutes of silence.

I learned my father was gay. At Christmas, I bought my dad a book I found in the bookstore by E.M. Forster, "Maurice." The book wasn't published until about 50 years after Forster's death, because of its homosexual theme. I had been dimly aware of the back story, but I just thought "great writer" and wrapped it up to give to my dad.

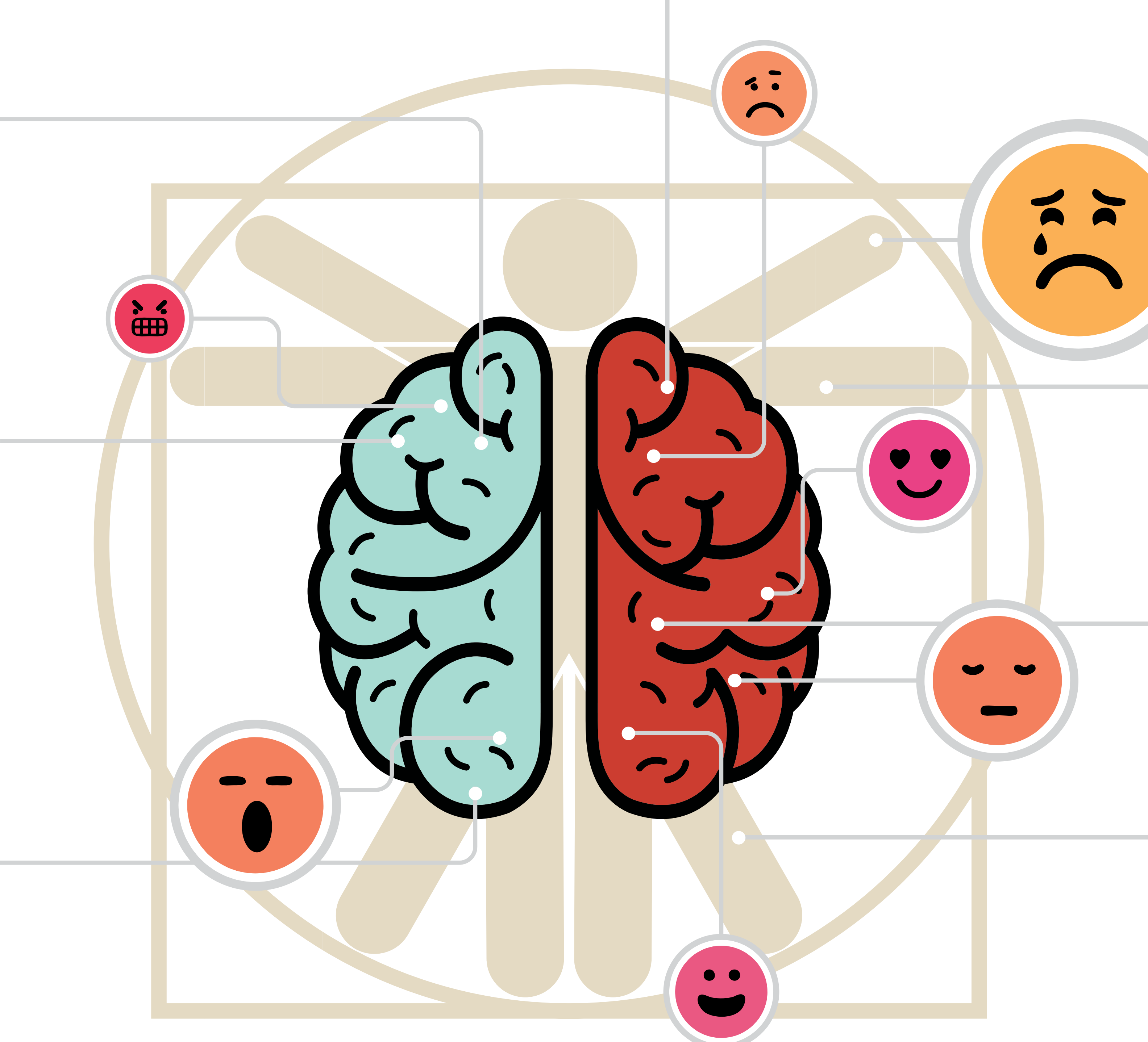
When he opened it, he gave me this funny look. It was just a brief glance, but something about it made a wheel turn in my head and I just knew my dad was gay. When he really came out to me 10 years later, he hemmed and hawed—and I finally told him that I already knew based on that look at Christmas.

He didn't remember the moment, and I thought, "Extraordinary, how can somebody reveal a lifetime of secrecy in a glance and not be aware of it? What is going on there in terms of the body language—signals sent, signals received—that the sender isn't even aware of?"

I died. I went tobogganing just after that Christmas, and my friends challenged the daredevil in me to go down by myself. I didn't even make it around the second turn. I crashed into a tree head first and fractured my skull.

I was in a coma for about a week, and I even flatlined for about 15 minutes. After surgery, I came to and passed the basic tests they give you for neurological events. But I didn't know how to vocalize something that had changed: I could no longer read people's body language in the way everybody else could. You know how you can walk into a room of colleagues or family and can get a read on whether people are happy or sad without anything being said? That was gone for me. Also, while I could hear the words people were saying, I couldn't hear any of the emotion behind it, such as sarcasm or irony. For a 17-year-old, that's really important because you are often mostly humorous, ironic or sarcastic. (I've since been told that what I was experiencing is similar to some forms of autism.)

I started studying people's body language very closely to try to figure out what was going on. I spent many months



retraining myself, and it eventually came back.

Together those three events taught me about aspects of body language and communication—and specifically how we create meaning, make decisions and express emotion through communication. We've evolved so that all of those things are expressed largely unconsciously and they are out of our conscious control.

The Vast Unconscious

Your unconscious mind can handle somewhere near 11 million bits of information in a second. It's always scanning the surroundings, reading the intent and emotions of the people around us and seeing whether they present a danger or not. Our conscious minds, by contrast, can only handle about 40 bits of information per second.

When we were largely reactive cave people, it made a lot of sense to have feelings like uneasiness be unconscious. If you're being chased by a woolly mammoth, you don't want to spend a lot of time thinking consciously about it, you just want your unconscious mind to get you the heck out of there.

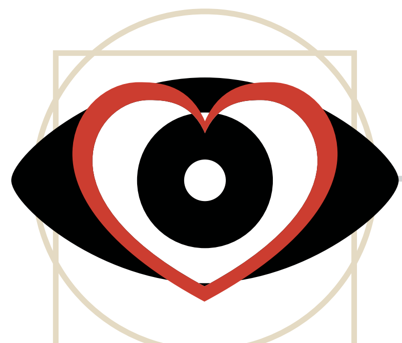
But in the modern era, there is a lot that it would be better to be more consciously aware of. Wouldn't it be better to be able to consciously control our emotions? Or the meaning we interpret or present when people talk to us?

I worked with an executive who was cool in crisis and was therefore promoted throughout his career in the utility industry—a good place to be cool in crisis. But then he was promoted to a very high level that reported to the board, and the board said, "We no longer want you to be cool in crisis. We want you to be more motivational, emotional and supportive of your team." So he suddenly had to learn to take conscious control of his emotions and express them better than he had before.

In another instance of trying to become conscious of what is mostly an unconscious act, I did some work with the U.S. Air Force Special Ops a few years ago. A team was being trained to go into an undisclosed foreign country and set up infrastructure like airfields and even a small town. They had to work with the local population, and so they wanted to know how to read the intent of the population before action was taken. Basically, if someone in this country is coming toward me, I want to know if this person intends to shoot me or shake my hand.

Again, that's largely conveyed by unconscious body language. And as adults, we learn to disguise that body language to a certain extent. We learn to compose our faces.

You can change and control charisma by focusing your emotions.



So if we're sitting in a meeting and the meeting is boring, we don't make the kind of faces that children do when they get bored—because we've learned to be polite. But our bodies still tend to give us away, largely unconsciously.

I'm going to share four power cues that can help you to control the elements of communication.

1. Become Aware of Your Own Body Language

When I talk about this in a presentation, I ask the audience to freeze in place. I then ask them to notice how they are standing or sitting, if their shoulders are slumped, if their backs are straight and if their heads are pitched forward. (Of course, sometimes people move and adopt better posture.)

The point is to become more aware of your posture, because that's the first way you signal your intent and your emotions to people. We each have "mirror neurons" in our heads: When we see somebody else experience an emotion, we fire that same emotion in our head. We're empaths, picking up each other's emotions and leaking emotions to each other.

For an important meeting, you need to think about your emotional state; otherwise you're leaving it to chance. Maybe you're nervous about the meeting—then you're going to leak that mishmash to the other attendees. It's not charismatic, and it doesn't set you up to be a leader.

Being aware of my own body language helped me land a job a few years ago.

I met the executive at a midscale seafood restaurant here in Boston—and he ordered the biggest lobster on the menu for me.

I didn't know that in the few years since I'd last eaten lobster, I had become allergic to it. So I started eating the lobster and my throat started to close and I began to choke and turn red. But I really wanted the job, so I excused myself and got sick in the bathroom—and then continued the interview.

I was determined to get the job. I began mirroring the interviewer's behavior across the table to gain his trust. (You have to do this subtly, because if you do it too obviously you'll look odd and the other person will catch on to what you're doing.)

When we see someone mirroring our behavior, we don't think about it consciously—only unconsciously. Then what happens is you start to trust that person, because when two bodies move in the same way, they are saying, "We are in agreement; we're in sync here." You see this with two people who trust each other completely. They make the same gesture virtually at the same instant. It's very hard to tell who leads and who follows. It's really a beautiful sort of synchrony to watch.

So that's what I was doing with my interviewer, mirroring him until he began to feel that he could trust me and that I was in agreement with him—which meant I would be a good hire.

2. Focus Your Emotions

People often ask me what charisma is and if it's something only a few lucky people, like movie stars, are born with. The answer is no. We are all occasionally charismatic.

Look back to when you were a child at school and something wonderful or terrible happened. You came home and you were full of that emotion, whether it was joy or sadness.

Because you were so focused and so completely engulfed in that emotion, your parents probably looked at you and asked you what happened. They wanted to know what was going on. They could tell you had experienced something because you were radiating a strong emotion. That's charisma; it is focused emotion.

Once you become more aware of how you show up, you can start to change and control charisma by focusing your emotions before important meetings, speeches, big negotiations or conversations with higher ups—anything that you feel is important where you want to show up with a powerful, strong presence. The work involved is focusing your emotion beforehand.

I often ask people about their presentations, because most people in the business world have to do those at one time or another: "How much time in preparing for a presentation do you spend thinking about the content and how much time do you spend thinking about the body language?" The real, honest answer is always 100 percent on content, 0 percent on body language. But when those two things are aligned, the body language will always trump the content if you don't focus your emotions.

3. Learn to Read Other People

You also need to notice the unconscious signals that other people are sending. You'll begin to be able to recognize and understand what others are thinking before they even know it. That's because emotional attitudes and decisions are made unconsciously at first, then gestured about and then brought to the conscious mind. You'll learn to see the attitude or decision at the gesture stage, before the other person is aware.

This helped me quite literally survive my interview at the lobster restaurant. After mirroring my interviewer's gestures for a while, I eventually started making new gestures—and he started mirroring mine. As soon as he did that, I knew I could stop eating that lobster and relax, because he was going to give me the job. Sure enough, he called me the next morning with the offer.

This is not manipulation in that you can't make people do something they don't want to do. It was within that man's power to offer me the job. And by mirroring his behavior and making him feel like he could trust me, I greatly accelerated that process and enabled him to come to a decision. Had I been nervous and twitchy and not given attention to body language, I might not have built up that trust or gotten the offer. You can actually read people's minds and know what they're thinking—and you can use that knowledge to build agreement and alignment with them.

4. Put It All Together with Powerful Stories

Uri Hasson at Princeton University found that when we tell each other stories, our brains match each other, looking exactly the same on a brain scan. And so as a leader, if you tell somebody a good, strong story to get them enthusiastic about a job you want them to do or a product you want them to help develop, then you can make them think the way you think. It's a literal, actual version of that Jedi mind control trick.

Hasson's research also shows that if you tell somebody a good story, the listeners are actually a nanosecond or two ahead of the storyteller. Not only do you have them lined up with you, but they're pulling you along at that point. It's like a kid who knows you're heading toward the ice cream store and they're tugging you along, saying, "Hurry up!" You're not only making them think in a certain way, but they are doing a lot of the work for you.

> **If leaders tell compelling stories aligned with their body language, they would be much more successful.**

The whole point of power cues is really to enable us to become aware of the unconscious signals we're sending out so that we can control them and put them in service of powerful storytelling.

Once you've got the steps that have to do with body language mastered, you can be an effective storyteller and leader by aligning your body language so that it is in service to that content.

There are five basic powerful stories we tell each other that are buried so deep in our psyches, because we've heard them in one form or another so often, that they affect the way we see reality. We have no actual control over reality, but these stories give us an illusion of control. We tell ourselves these stories to help us structure reality, to help make sense of it.

If you tell one of these five types of stories and tell it well, then as a leader or as anyone trying to get something done in an organization, you're much more likely to have the effect that you want.

The quest. This is the story that's familiar from so many Hollywood movies. A hero goes out to try to achieve a specific goal that we find alluring. When we tell a quest story, we know that the journey is going to have lots of ups and downs along the way. But we believe that the harder we work to reach the goal, the more likely we are to achieve it. Now that's not strictly, logically true. A student who heads off to college with good intentions and works really hard could still have plenty of things go wrong. But we don't include that in our thinking about it. We tell ourselves quest stories because they are what enable us to have a belief that hard work pays off in reaching a desirable goal. And it's important to believe, otherwise we wouldn't try, work hard and keep persevering.

So it's a story, but it's also part of a deeper belief system—and that's why it's so powerful. When you tell a good quest story, people love it, listen and want to get involved.

Stranger in a strange land. In this type of story, there isn't a particular goal at the end. Some kind of change is foisted upon the hero and the rules are changed. The classic example of this in the business world is 2008, when the economy melted down. Suddenly, everybody was wondering if there was a new normal. Do the old economic rules no longer apply? Are we going to have to learn new ways of doing business?

The stranger in a strange land is thrown into a new situation or a new terrain and has to learn a new way of coping and a new set of rules to become a master in this new landscape. Sometimes a mentor comes along to help us, and sometimes we must do it on our own. And so the stranger-in-a-strange land story helps us cope with change.

Rags to riches. This is the type of story the networks tell every time the Olympics come around. Every single one of those athlete stories is a rags-to-riches story because the

riches aren't necessarily just money. They can be celebrity status, honors or gold medals. And the difference between a quest and a rags-to-riches story is the plucky hero that achieves the status by hard work and a little bit of luck. And so that's why the Olympic stories all focus on the time and practice the athletes put in, not on some unique inborn physical attribute that might give them the right physique for a particular event.

If we believe that a gymnast was so talented because her genetic makeup was just suited to gymnastics, we wouldn't identify as much. We'd think that talent was unattainable to us no matter how hard we worked.

The important thing about the rags-to-riches story is that every man or woman could achieve the same result, provided they put in all the time and had a little luck. We tell our rags-to-riches stories to say that even people born without silver spoons in their mouths can get ahead. It's a story that isn't told as much now, because it's been brought powerfully into question. We're asking these days if the American dream is still viable, because the times have been hard for many years. Can ordinary people still achieve that kind of wealth? That's the interesting tension right now in the rags-to-riches story. Does it still work?

Revenge. This is a powerful one right now, because we have a sense that there's a lot of wickedness in the world between chaotic, random shootings and the digital world's representation of war and injustices. We're keenly aware of the need for justice, so the revenge story has power for us.

In the revenge story, the hero sets out to right some wrong. Sometimes it's a specific villain, but sometimes it's an institutional villain like a war. And then justice is done. It's a very important story to us. We need to believe that justice is possible, otherwise we wouldn't all behave. Why would we play by the rules?

Love story. This is my personal favorite. Hollywood calls it a romantic comedy, and it is considered one of lower movie genres. But it is really important, because at its base, a love story tells us that community is still possible (since the smallest form of human community is two people).

In the traditionally told love story, a boy meets a girl, the boy falls in love with the girl and then the boy does something stupid and they fall out of love. Later, the girl forgives the boy. They now know each other as real, flawed human beings and not just that initial fantasy that they fell in love with. So the girl forgiving the boy is a powerful statement of the possibility of human community. If they can still fall in love again or stay in love despite their flaws, then forgiveness and community is possible. If we didn't have that story, then perhaps we wouldn't believe that we humans could remain in a community with one another.

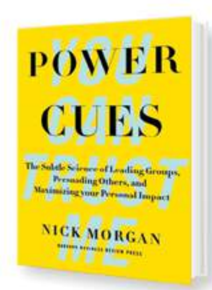
We live in an information-saturated age. We have 24/7 access to enormous amounts of data at our fingertips. We're completely overloaded with it and our minds are not constructed to remember that stuff.

The mistake that leaders make all the time is they try to give their employees or their people to-do lists: Here are the things we have to do to succeed.

Steve Jobs of Apple was so successful because he didn't say, "Here are the cool features of the Apple computer." What he said was, "We can strike a blow against conformism, against Big Brother. We can do something cool and neat. We can create computers that will set you free."

If leaders tell compelling stories aligned with their body language, they would be much more successful. That communication attaches emotions to events and make them much more memorable. PM

About the Author



Nick Morgan is a top communication theorist and coach, who is committed to helping people find clarity in their thinking and ideas—and then deliver them with panache. He served as editor of the *Harvard Management Communication Letter* from 1998 – 2003. He is a former fellow at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. After earning his PhD in literature and rhetoric, Nick spent a number of years teaching Shakespeare and public speaking at the University of Virginia, Lehigh University, and Princeton University. He first started writing speeches for Virginia Governor Charles S. Robb and went on to found his own communications consulting organization, Public Words, in 1997. He is the author of "Working the Room: How to Move People to Action through Audience-Centered Speaking" (Harvard Business Review, 2003) and "Trust Me" (Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Editor's Note: For more about Power Cues, read Nick Morgan's book, "Power Cues: The Subtle Science of Leading Groups, Persuading Others, and Maximizing Your Personal Impact" (Harvard Business Review, 2014).

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Put this issue's ideas into action.

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Establishing the minimum viable product as a baseline clears the landscape for stickier rounds of negotiations.

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POWER UP
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