

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

PRODUCT MARKETING

DATA SCIENCE

# the Pragmatic

SUMMER 2019



*AN INSIDE LOOK AT PRODUCT:*

**SECRETS OF THE  
PROFESSION**

**REVEALED**

*ALSO IN THE 'SECRETS' ISSUE:*

*UNMASKING THE  
PRODUCT/DATA CONNECTION*

*WHO ARE TODAY'S PRODUCT  
PROFESSIONALS?*

*CONFESSIONS FROM THE  
FRONT LINES*

# WELCOME

## “What’s your secret?”

**WE LOVE ASKING THAT QUESTION** when someone’s had a recent success, whether it’s a noticeable weight loss or a product that overachieved against goal.

The truth is, what makes something successful is rarely an actual *secret*.

At its essence, weight loss is a calories in–calories out numbers game. When it comes to products and careers, there are some simple truths that—if we follow them—will help make us (and our products) more successful. And that’s exactly what we dig into in this issue of *The Pragmatic*.

Our own Amy Graham and Michael Li talk about the relationship between products and data science which, until now, may have seemed like strange bedfellows. And, based on interviews with thought-leading women in product, Trisha Howard wrote a great article that exposes keys to success that will help in your own career (spoiler alert: their secrets apply to ALL product professionals). We also have a sneak peek at the results of this year’s *Annual Product Management and Product Marketing Survey*.

So, go grab an iced coffee, kick on the A/C, put up your feet and dig into this summer’s issue of *The Pragmatic*.

Happy reading,



Rebecca Kalogeris, PMC-VII  
Editorial Director

Got a secret (or a topic) you want to share with our team? Reach out to [editor@pragmaticinstitute.com](mailto:editor@pragmaticinstitute.com).

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Pragmatic Institute is the world’s leading authority on product management, product marketing and data science. Founded in 1993, the company’s courses—taught by accomplished product professionals with real-world experience—are based on a proven framework for creating market- and data-driven products people want to buy. With more than 150,000 alumni around the world, Pragmatic Institute has created one of the largest and most prestigious product communities in the world.

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PRODUCT  
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CONTENTS | VOLUME 15 | ISSUE 3 | 2019



## FEATURES

6

Unveiling the Relationship Between Successful Products and Data

BY AMY GRAHAM, PMC-VI, AND  
MICHAEL LI, PHD, PMC-I

10

Keeping Your Secrets Responsible Counterintelligence in Action

BY MARC LIMACHER AND  
KATHLEEN DEAN

13

'Nevertheless, She Persisted' Secrets of Successful Women

BY TRISHA L. HOWARD

17

Behind the Numbers Who Today's Product Professionals Are

BY JIM FICKESS

## DEPARTMENTS

### BITS & PIECES

- 2 A PRAGMATIC PEEK  
News and insights to inform your thinking
- 4 ASK THE EXPERTS  
How can I get execs on board with the Pragmatic Framework?
- 47 COLLECTIVE THINKING  
True Confessions from the Front Lines By *Mike Belsito*

### BUILD BETTER PRODUCTS

- 22 Beating Disruption: How to Win in the Fight to Be First  
By *Andrea Ozias*
- 26 Staying Ahead of the Competition with Predictive Analytics  
By *Sriram Parthasarathy*
- 28 Predictive Analytics in Action: Using Insights to Drive Success  
By *Harish Krishnamurthy*

### SELL MORE STUFF

- 32 Competitive Intelligence Revisited  
By *Alok Vasudeva*
- 36 Sharks vs. Balloons: Leveraging Customer Bias for Better Marketing  
By *Rod Griffith*

### LEAD STRATEGICALLY

- 40 Strengthen Your Strategic Smarts  
By *Art Petty*
- 43 4 Shifts to Put Your Next Presentation into High Gear  
By *Candianne Haacke*

### A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

- 46 Put this issue's ideas into action



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# A Pragmatic Peek

News and insights to inform your thinking

## A Reminder About the Importance of Personas

More than 90% of organizations already use technology to automate business processes, and most businesses (88%) believe that automation will accelerate human achievement, according to survey results from UiPath, a robotic process automation (RPA) software company.

While automation is helping businesses in every industry create efficiencies by replacing manual tasks with machine-operated ones, many companies are aiming even higher by setting their sights on adopting technology like AI for business growth. And that's why it's important that tech companies specializing in these types of offerings have a solid handle on their customer personas.

Eighty-four percent of survey respondents said the C-suite drives automation initiatives for the business, with automation responsibility rolling up to the CTO (29%), CEO (22%) and CIO (17%). More than 70% of C-suite respondents reported that RPA and AI are a high or essential priority to meet strategic objectives, mainly because they think it will make them more competitive.

Additionally, it's worth noting that business process automation has advanced the furthest in manufacturing: 61% of respondents in the industry cited extensive use, whereas government and public-sector institutions have made the least headway among surveyed sectors, with only 35% using it extensively.

► **Pragmatic Take:** AI works best when you understand your personas.



More than  
**90%**  
of organizations  
use technology  
to automate  
business.

## Consumers Say 'No, Thanks' to Shopping While Driving

Whether they're in the United States, Western Europe or China, the most important connected-app use cases are the ones that are immediately relevant to the task of driving.

Apps that alert drivers to blockages, predict upcoming traffic or help find parking are highest in demand, according to the findings of a report from the in-vehicle user group (IVX) at Strategy Analytics. Meanwhile, some of the least-preferred app use cases are for restaurant reviews or reservations—but these are the services that original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) often attempt to enable for in-vehicle commerce.

"Despite automakers' fervent attempts at buy-in for restaurant and quick-food partnerships and surging interest in streaming or customized media and radio, the top in-car app use cases remain a three-phrase mantra: traffic/satnav, parking and weather," said Chris Schreiner, director of syndicated research for UXIP.

► **Pragmatic Take:**  
Make sure your products deliver at the point of need.

## An Inside Look at the Tactics of Product Management

From basic principles to managing products at scale, you can get an inside look at some of the highlights from the 2019 European edition of INDUSTRY: The Product Conference in a recently released e-book.

Published through a partnership between Product Collective and Pragmatic Institute, *Product Management TACTICS* dissects the most critical points from the event and includes links to the live presentations. Featured presenters in the e-book include product leaders from companies like Intuit, Mozilla, *Financial Times* and ProdUX Labs, and they're covering topics from optimizing products with analytics to managing a product after it's reached major scale. Accelerate Product CEO Supriya Uchil's presentation also is highlighted; Uchil is featured in "Nevertheless, She Persisted: Secrets of Successful Women," on page 13 of this month's issue of *The Pragmatic*.

You can download this publication by providing your email address at [producttactics.com](http://producttactics.com).

► **Pragmatic Take:** Take advantage of opportunities to increase your learning and understanding.





Everyone is listening to audio, spending an average of **17.2** hours per week



### Target Audiences May Be Listening More, Watching Less

If your target audience falls between the ages of 13 and 64 (so, everyone), it may be worth it for product marketers to consider reaching customers through audio outlets.

The past two years have seen huge growth across various audio categories, including a 2,500% growth in smart speaker ownership and a more than 48% increase in podcast listening, according to the Edison Infinite Dial 2019 study. And, according to research released by Ipsos and commissioned by iHeartMedia, consumer interest in audio is at an all-time high.

Listeners are consuming more audio content across an array of platforms, including broadcast radio, digital streaming, podcasts and smart speakers.

Though all ages are listening to audio and spending an average of 17.2 hours per week with their favorite streaming music service, podcasts, broadcast radio stations and others, Millennials and Gen Z listen the most.

► **Pragmatic Take: Meet your customers where they are.**

### For Future Success, Businesses Eye the Customer Experience

U.S. businesses are putting a focus on customer experience to clinch future success. In fact, 57% of U.S. businesses plan to increase their investment in customer experience in the next one to two years, compared with 52% of firms outside of the United States.

These are the findings revealed in “Navigator: Made for the Future,” a survey of more than 2,500 companies in 14 countries and territories, conducted by HSBC.

“Customers’ expectations are evolving and the urgency to meet and exceed those expectations is rising,” said EJ Ahtner, U.S. head of digital banking and strategic change at HSBC commercial banking. “U.S. businesses are more focused than ever on delivering a better customer experience and plan to leverage innovative technologies and digital platforms to improve ease of doing business and open the door to new opportunities.”

Additional findings from the report:

- U.S. businesses identified industry regulations (22%), cybersecurity (20%) and competition—including from disruptors—as primary threats
- More than half of U.S. businesses (59%) regard innovation as a growth engine, compared with 28% who see it as a key to survival
- The Internet of Things (IoT) (73%), 5G technology (67%) and AI (59%) are viewed as the biggest near-term opportunities in the United States, as they are expected to improve customer experiences, productivity and product/service delivery

► **Pragmatic Take: Invest in your customers before they invest elsewhere.**

### Target Audiences May Also Be Speaking More

More than half (58%) of consumers used voice search to find local business information in 2018, according to data gathered by SCORE. Nearly half (46%) of voice-search users searched for a local business daily, while another 28% searched about once a week.

“Right now, more than half of consumers—and three-quarters of Millennials—are using voice search to connect with local businesses, and the number is steadily growing,” said Bridget Weston Pollack, vice president of marketing and strategy at SCORE, a provider of free small-business mentoring sessions, workshops and educational services. “Given this strong consumer demand, we would recommend that businesses consider incorporating voice search into their marketing plans, or risk missing out on customers.”

The top ways to optimize a business website for voice search include:

- Using natural language and multiple-word keywords
- Adding questions and answers
- Making sure the business’s location, hours and phone number are correct on its website and search-engine directories

► **Pragmatic Take: Make sure your website talks to Alexa and Siri in their native tongues.**

More than half of consumers use voice search to find local business information.



# How can I get execs on board with the Pragmatic Framework?

**P**RODUCT MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN around in one form or another for over a century, but many companies—and most executives—still aren't clear on what product management or product marketing does or how they directly benefit the company.

I'll never forget a student who sat in class with his arms crossed, saying, "I can't do any of this. Management won't let me." Talk about a victim mindset. Many of our techniques can be used without permission—but getting management on board definitely makes change easier.

"Managing up" is a business skill that takes time and finesse to learn, but it's possible when you're willing to put in the time and effort. There are three key steps to effect change when you're tackling the task of transforming an organization, whether tactically or philosophically.



Steve Johnson, PMC-VII,  
Vice President of Product,  
Pragmatic Institute

### Step 1: Find Your Champions

For senior leadership to buy into any idea, it's critical that people they respect support the change. And while it can be hard for product managers to push change up to the highest levels, it's a lot easier when the vice president of product or the chief product officer leads the charge and pulls the leadership team along.

If your company paid for your training, then your vice president or CPO should understand the value of what you've learned. It's their job to be your No. 1 advocate and tell leadership, "Listen, there's an enormous scope of activities we're expecting from our product people, and they need your support to get everything done."

### Step 2: Explain the 'Why'

I frequently and increasingly hear that companies want to be *product-led* rather than *project-led*. The days of implementing "one and done" products are waning, and there's a new era of looking at both internal projects and external products through the lens of the entire product life cycle rather than as a single release.

Part of getting senior leadership to buy into a new way of structuring and executing work is explaining why change is critical. Things like improved efficiency, higher productivity, better output and increased revenue speak for themselves. Paint a clear and understandable picture.

### Step 3: Provide the Tools to Make the Change

To paraphrase a quote often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, "I can't hear your words over the thunder of your actions." Regardless of whether it's a change in process, workflow or reporting structure, ensure leadership sees headway as incremental improvements are made. Conversely, if leadership's support turns out to merely be lip service, point out the missed opportunities that are a result of things staying the same as they've always been.

For example, how frequently have you been sent on a sales call to serve as the product expert even though your role is to research and develop the product pipeline? If your company truly wants new products grounded in the needs of the market, you know you need firsthand experience—and going on sales calls won't get you that. But when your bonus is tied to the financial performance of existing products, which choice do you make? Go on a customer discovery call? Or go on the sales call and get more money? Leadership needs to ensure that your expertise as a highly skilled (and hopefully well-paid) professional isn't squandered on these types of tactics.

Bringing these insights to your management requires time and finesse, and it doesn't happen overnight. But by taking a few steps in the right direction, you might find you've changed the trajectory of your company—not to mention your career. **IP**



If leadership's support turns out to merely be lip service, point out the missed opportunities.



Do you have a question for our experts?  
Send us an email at [experts@pragmaticinstitute.com](mailto:experts@pragmaticinstitute.com).



# Product Usage Analytics for Smarter, Faster Roadmap Decisions



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REVEALED



UNVEILING THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN  
SUCCESS

DATA

ILLUSTRATION BY  
EDDIE GORDON

**T**ARGET AND SPRING BREAK. A SUNNY, 75-DEGREE DAY and Walmart's berry display. Disney's MyMagic and a churro stand. At first glance, the correlation of these seemingly disparate items is unclear. But look a little closer—as any good product professional will—and the relationships become crystal clear.

These giants of industry represent just three examples of companies that are successfully leveraging data to make better decisions. And, ultimately, these decisions result in better products, better customer experiences and—perhaps most important—better revenue.

Early adopters of big-data analytics have proven the benefits of leveraging information. Companies with the most advanced analytics capabilities outperform their competitors by wide margins and are twice as likely to be in the top quartile of financial performance within their industries, according to survey results from management consulting firm Bain & Company. They're also five times as likely to make decisions faster than market peers and three times as likely to execute decisions as intended.

NSHIP BETWEEN

# SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTS AND DATA

BY AMY GRAHAM AND MICHAEL LI

“For companies that do it right, data is a way to learn who customers are, what they want and what motivates them to either stick around or go to a competitor,” said Philip Alexander, PMC-IV, CEO of Pragmatic Institute. “Insights-driven companies are using this constant feedback to build better products—and it’s giving them a competitive edge.”

The flourishing relationship between data and product development and delivery is the reason why Pragmatic Institute (formerly Pragmatic Marketing) acquired The Data Incubator (TDI) in early 2019, Alexander said.

“Here’s the reality: 80% of all customer data is wasted. It’s completely unused,” he said. “We made the decision to get into the data business to help product leaders get a better understanding of the rich repository of information available to them—and show them how to use that information to deliver better business results. But achieving this requires a fundamental shift in how product managers relate to and interact with data.”

## PULLING BACK THE LAYERS

Ninety percent of the world’s data was created in the past two years, and that pace is accelerating. Gone are the days when gigabytes were enough to measure information. Today, we are creating zettabytes of data.

Consider that:

- On average, people send about 500 million tweets per day
- Walmart processes 1 million customer transactions per hour
- Amazon sells 600 items per second—and in fractions of a second makes recommendations based on these purchases

All of this is behavioral data that reveals what consumers want. It represents a shift away from products that drive user behavior to user behavior that

drives products, and it falls in line with Pragmatic Rule No. 1: An outside-in approach increases the likelihood of product success. It also offers new avenues for gathering information apart from traditional customer surveys.

To make this shift, everyone in the company—not just data scientists—must dig into and leverage behavioral data to answer key questions, make better decisions and build products that consumers love. Data delivers new value by delivering deeper insights into customers, partners and the business overall.

To see this value in action, dive into the Target, Disney and Walmart scenarios. For many years, Target launched its swimwear collection in late spring and early summer. Then the retailer looked at the data and realized it was missing a key piece of insight: College kids plan and get ready for spring break in late winter and early spring. To position itself as a leader for this market segment, Target started selling its swimwear collection online in February—just in time for spring break.

In the case of Disney, the mass media and entertainment conglomerate wanted to answer one simple question: What would make the park experience more enjoyable? A team of researchers, analysts and innovation

## How Much Is a Zettabyte?

1 kilobyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 megabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 gigabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 terabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 petabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 exabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000
1 zettabyte	= 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000



consultants worked to uncover a laundry list of friction points, and this, in turn, resulted in a five-year, \$1 billion undertaking. The result: the MyMagic program, which produced the iconic MagicBand wristband with RFID technology.

With the simple wave of a wrist, visitors can enter theme parks, unlock hotel-room doors, buy meals and merchandise, and skip the wait on rides. For its part, Disney has continued collecting data on visitors' behaviors, allowing the company to see patterns. For example, a churro stand across the theme park may be seeing increased traffic around 8 p.m. As a result, Disney may move that stand closer to where evening foot traffic flows, thus driving convenience—and sales.

And Walmart has learned that knowing when it's going to rain, snow or hail offers an opportunity to deliver hyper-focused advertising—but not just for obvious products like umbrellas or rain boots. Data patterns revealed something more inconspicuous: When the weather is clear and sunny with a high of around 75 degrees, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries tend

to sell well. But as the temperature creeps to 80 degrees, salads sell better.

“These companies are leveraging users' behavioral data as a direct line of communication to inform business decisions,” Alexander said.

### PEERING INTO THE FUTURE

Headline after headline tells us that technology is replacing jobs. And yes, while some jobs will go away, it's important to remember that new jobs will take their place. The challenge is acquiring the right skills to succeed in these new roles.

“AI can't create, conceptualize or manage complex strategic planning. It can't interact with

empathy and compassion,” said Steve Johnson, PMC-VII, vice president of product at Pragmatic Institute. “This is why product managers will continue to be pivotal. But, to be successful, product people need to become data-savvy leaders.”

Product managers need to think about how data and AI can change their approach to work, Johnson asserted.

“A new kind of product manager is evolving—the data product manager,” he said. “The availability of data is determining

how products behave and what new classes of products are available. Machine-learning models automatically adapt products to users' preferences, make recommendations for next steps and then suggest future features and products. Data product managers understand this and incorporate it into their products.”

However, Johnson said, working with data at the foundational level of product development requires an understanding of how to leverage data modeling, data infrastructure, and statistical and machine learning. Thus, if the traditional product manager operates at the intersection of business,

## **IF THE TRADITIONAL PRODUCT MANAGER OPERATES AT THE INTERSECTION OF BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY AND MARKET, THE DATA PRODUCT MANAGER MUST ADD DOMAIN KNOWLEDGE OF DATA AND DATA SCIENCE.**



## COMPANIES ARE LEVERAGING USERS' BEHAVIORAL DATA TO INFORM BUSINESS DECISIONS."

technology and market, the data product manager must add domain knowledge of data and data science.

"The data product manager understands that building products with data requires strategy," he said. "What is your plan for how data will be generated, collected and consumed? How does this uniquely position you to win in your market? It isn't enough to collect data and stash it in a data warehouse so you can analyze it later. If that's what you do, all of your efforts will have been nothing more than an academic exercise."

Along with an understanding of data and data science, data product managers:

- Have a plan for how data generated by a product will be used to improve that product—algorithmically or otherwise—over time, and why this creates a defensible moat to increase the product's chances of long-term success
- Understand the technological infrastructure involved in building products and know the type of infrastructure needed to support products
- Take on the role of translating requirements among data scientists, engineers, designers, marketers and other product managers
- Build product instrumentation and data storage into their acceptance criteria while collaborating with data scientists to ensure that data is accessible and usable for analysis and modeling

Finally, and perhaps most important, data product managers know that data and its models and outputs aren't enough—they still must be product managers who tie these components back to the business model and their organization's strategy.

"Machine-learning models that don't align with the business model not only waste time and money, they also undermine the organization's trust in machine learning," Alexander said. "This is especially true in companies that are late to

data science, are skeptical about the power of data science or have a very qualitative leadership approach."

### LOOKING PRODUCT IN THE EYE

Product managers sit on the front line in the battle to beat their industry competitors, and the battle is no different from a career perspective. It is crucial that tomorrow's product managers use metrics and analytics to influence new product development.

Innovative products come from finding gaps—this has been and will continue to be true. It's the "how" behind exposing those gaps that is changing, and that's where big data and metrics come into the picture for exploring new user behavior, forms of churn and triggers for bottom-line costs. All of this will reinforce the business' value proposition, gain traction with stakeholders and optimize existing products. Remember, though, to measure the right metrics. What you choose to measure and analyze depends on your company's size and industry—not to mention your product.

"Most successful products are built on a foundation of data," Alexander said. "And innovation isn't born from nothing; it's fueled by market insights and it's measurable. But understanding those insights goes beyond comprehending the results of experiments or reading dashboards. It requires a deep appreciation of what is possible and what will soon be possible by taking full advantage of the flow of data and applying it to our daily work." 

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SECRETS  
REVEALED

# KEEPING YOUR SECRETS



## Responsible Counterintelligence in Action

BY MARC LIMACHER AND KATHLEEN DEAN

**E**NGAGING WITH INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE OF your company is essential to product marketers and product managers. Representing your company at industry conferences, coordinating marketing webcasts, running customer or partner councils, engaging in professional networking events—the list of potential external-facing communications goes on.

Of course, not all your company knowledge is appropriate to make public. You're privy to proprietary information that you could unintentionally expose, compromising your company's work and eroding its competitive advantage. Are you mindful of the valuable information you give away?

Protecting your company's information—practicing counterintelligence—presents an increasing challenge.

Despite the opportunity cost, counterintelligence and data-leakage assessments remain inadequately addressed at many corporations. Further, most attention focuses on cybersecurity/digital threats, but analog/human data leakage is more widespread and harder to prevent. Most U.S. C-suite leaders (84%) identified employee negligence as their biggest information security risk, according to Shred-It's 2018 *State of the Industry: Information Security* report.

Competitive intelligence collection that targets your company can have real business consequences. To understand your role in protecting your company's information, consider the relationship among proprietary information, competitive intelligence and counterintelligence.

## PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

Proprietary information is material deemed sensitive to your organization or company. It's information that shouldn't be shared externally without a solid business reason—and only then when following company, legal and regulatory requirements. Examples include:

- Product roadmaps
- Organizational structure and headcount data
- Merger and acquisition plans
- Product supply-chain logistics
- Market and customer insights
- Internal KPIs and benchmarks

## COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Competitive intelligence is like assembling a puzzle that starts with seemingly unrelated puzzle pieces. As you slide more pieces into place, a cohesive picture emerges. More images emerge with each newly fitting piece, and you become confident that you're on the right track.

Similarly, skilled intelligence gatherers can amass many individual data points about a company like yours. They assemble and triangulate these points until an accurate understanding of nonpublic, often proprietary aspects of the company emerge. Each data point that better fills in a bigger picture can potentially harm your company. For instance, a colleague in a public coffee shop who comments on the details of an impending company downsizing may unknowingly be overheard by a competitor who combines it with other, related data. Now your competitor can better anticipate your company's confidential restructuring plans and related implications.

Companies that compete against yours seek a competitive edge. Building a deep enough understanding of your company can help them outperform you, preempt or neutralize your initiatives, emulate your successes and take advantage of your weaknesses. Your competitors can assemble this type of intelligence through activities such as:

- Passively monitoring public sources via your public company announcements and secondary sources (e.g., subscription databases and reports) for activity and changes
- Actively gathering and collating additional information by engaging third-party agencies, speaking with a wide range of sources (e.g., customers, partners, employees) familiar with your company and attending your company's events (e.g., annual user conferences)
- Possibly illegally (purposefully or not) receiving materials gathered by third parties that are comfortable breaking the law

Be aware that, while your own company likely follows strict standards of business conduct, some of your competitors may not. Some may illegally gather intelligence via pretexting, misrepresenting their identities, or practicing bribery, coercion or even theft.

## COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

Counterintelligence is the practice of managing the range of intelligence-gathering activities directed at your company. And the heavy external-communication nature of your role makes counterintelligence especially important. You undermine your company's success when you are unaware of the value of the proprietary information you possess and don't actively manage external access to it.

You and your peers can execute sound counterintelligence by knowing the signs of potential intelligence-targeting activity, becoming aware of risky situations and knowing the protective steps to take.

## KNOW THE SIGNS

Common signs can indicate someone is targeting your company for competitive-intelligence collection. Use caution with inquirers

### KNOW WHAT TO DO

Once you're aware of the risky signs and locations, you're ready to put your knowledge into action. Consider these two scenarios that provide opportunities to practice responsible counterintelligence.

#### SCENARIO 1: Unsolicited External Contact

When you receive unsolicited external contacts by phone or email (e.g., asking you to participate in a survey about a company-related topic), it's critical to authenticate the inquirer's identity and, in the case of surveys, demand the identity of the survey sponsor. Before responding, think through the information you can safely share. Next, you may need to take one of several precautionary measures, ranging from politely disengaging the caller to initiating an internal process that leads to a formal cease-and-desist notice from your company's legal team.

#### SCENARIO 2: External Meetings and Events

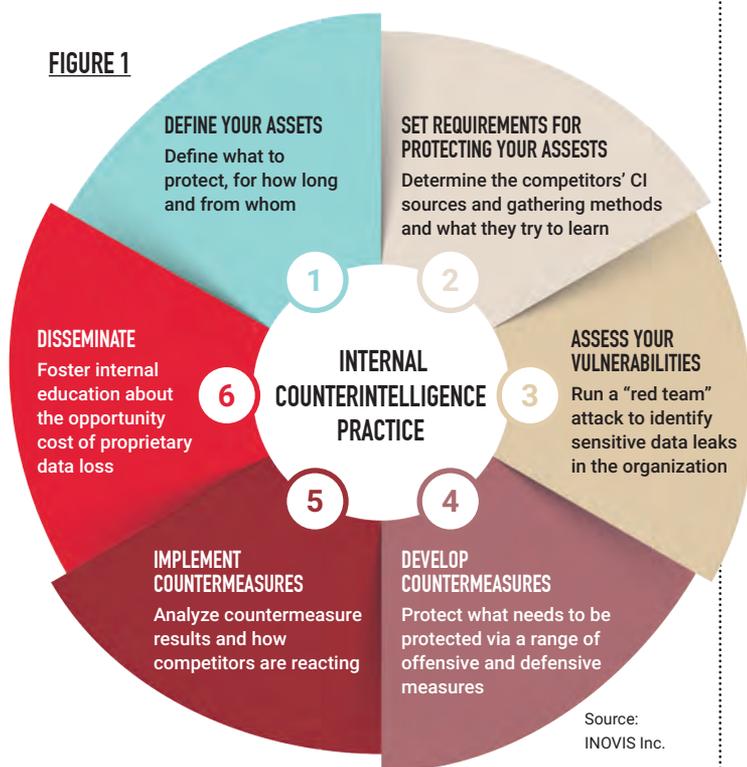
In intelligence gathering-rich environments like industry conferences, competitors come seeking information to fill in important puzzle pieces about your company. In these situations, you can take several precautions:

- ✓ Keep doors closed in rooms where proprietary information is discussed. Keep those discussions out of public spaces like coffee shops and hotel lounges.
- ✓ When you host key speakers with proprietary company knowledge, accompany them to and from speaking rooms. Be ready to diplomatically redirect them if they start conversations that have the potential to inappropriately disclose information.
- ✓ When conference attendees ask questions about your company, get their business cards and note the questions they've asked. If they don't have cards, find out where they work and what they do before you answer.
- ✓ Don't leave hard copies of your proprietary information behind—even in the trash.

conducting activities such as collecting information for a survey or undisclosed client, or fact-checking for a publication or presentation. In particular, watch for inquiries from people in roles such as:

- Market researcher or management consultant
- Recruitment specialists
- Students conducting research
- Potential job applicants
- Personal contacts (especially distant ones) who take a sudden interest in your work or company
- Prospective clients asking intrusive questions about your company

**FIGURE 1**



### THE KEYS TO RESPONSIBLE GATEKEEPING

Legal or otherwise, intelligence-gathering techniques continue to grow in sophistication and volume. In the end, the burden of proof lies on the responder (or the unaware leaker), not on the inquiring individual. Ultimately, it's your responsibility to protect your company's information and its competitive edge.

For example, you run a higher risk of exposing proprietary information in certain locations. Among others, be alert to places such as:

- Public transport to or from industry conferences and tradeshow venues
- Hotels, coffee shops and other public places near conferences and tradeshow venues
- Professional networking events

But you don't carry this responsibility alone. Counterintelligence requires support at the company level: A critical protective measure should be to have regular reminders from senior management or legal to reinforce what constitutes confidential, proprietary information that should never be shared. It's equally crucial to sensitize nonemployees (e.g., channel partners, solution providers) to the severe bottom-line consequences that leaking sensitive data can wreak.

Your company leadership also should initiate and maintain corporate expectations for awareness of signals that may constitute a potential attack—and direction about how to act on them. Figure 1 illustrates the best practices for fostering an internal culture of counterintelligence.

It also can be helpful to collaborate with a third-party partner to train cross-functional teams on counterintelligence-awareness programs, facilitate role-playing with data-elicitation techniques or stage a "red team" attack to identify areas of data leakage in your organization. Then, educate affected parties about how to prevent future leaks.

And remember: Balance is important. There's no need to go as far as former Intel CEO Andy Grove's famous corporate mantra, "Only the paranoid survive." But do advocate for making all cross-functional teams aware of intelligence-targeting risks and the means to defend against them. A robust awareness and training program across the organization coupled with a report and follow-up process for flagged counterintelligence events is mission-critical to protect your company's proprietary assets.

At its most effective, counterintelligence includes fostering a culture of mindfulness across your organization and company. It's true that your role as a product marketer or product manager gives you unique exposure to risky intelligence situations. But it also gives you an opportunity to protect your company—and remind your colleagues to do the same. Responsible gatekeeping of your company's proprietary information starts with you. Use your influence to ensure it doesn't stop there. **IP**

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'Nevertheless, She Persisted'

# SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN

BY TRISHA L. HOWARD

**W**ANT TO KNOW A SECRET? Successful women in product say—whether by nature or nurture—you probably possess many of the skills needed to build a great career. Supriya Uchil, whose career has included product management roles at Amazon, Zynga and BookingGo, believes women have “an innate talent to be natural collaborators and ask questions,” both key strengths for successful product managers, regardless of gender.

In practice, this means putting the customer at the center of the process and collaborating with a team to reach consensus about how to create the best product, said Uchil, who now heads her own digital product strategy consulting company, Accelerate Product, based in London with clients in the Middle East and Europe.

Still, success means navigating preconceptions—about your skills, your recommendations, your leadership style—in a field still largely dominated by men, particularly in the technology sector. Professional women, no matter their field of expertise, often find themselves walking the fine line of preconception between assertive and abrasive, critical and judgmental, and collaborative and accommodating.

Want to know another secret? You're not alone. Your fellow women in product management want you to succeed, and they're happy to share some secrets of their own.

“It’s being able to earn respect, and that respect is earned when all the parties trust that I have their best interests at heart.”  
 —PERNA SINGH



## JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

Perna Singh, co-founder of the New York City chapter of Women in Product, describes the role of product manager as “having influence without having authority.” Singh said that element of influence makes it critical for product managers to understand all points of view: the customer, the engineers, the designers, the sales team.

But the job is not about pleasing everyone—a cliché that Singh tries to avoid in her role as vice president of product for CoEdition, a fashion website.

“It’s being able to earn respect, and that respect is earned when all the parties trust that I have their best interests at heart,” Singh said. “You leverage your emotional intelligence to gain trust; to become a better, stronger product manager; to

“Women have an innate talent to be natural collaborators.”  
 —SUPRIYA UCHIL



make sure that everyone feels heard.”

The need to influence others also requires product managers to build credibility with the other members of their team, said Diane Pierson, PMC-VI, a Pragmatic Institute instructor with more than 20 years of experience in product management and marketing.

Pierson said women often are saddled with the stereotype of being too emotional or passionate about a product. But female product managers can sidestep the stereotype by becoming what Pierson calls “dispassionately passionate,” relying on facts about market trends and customer needs to shape decision making.

“If you bring the facts, you save your passion for the solutions to the problems,” Pierson said. “When we’re talking about how to serve the market, how to talk to the market, we can get passionate about it. Get the facts, go to the market, and cite your sources. Don’t bring opinion to the table. Bring knowledge to the table.”

“Don’t bring opinion to the table. Bring knowledge to the table.”

—DIANE PIERSON



Uchil agrees that the ability to analyze market data—and accept uncertainty—is essential to the role. That’s why facts and data play such a large role in decision making, she said.

“Nobody can tell you: This is what the customer wants,” Uchil said. “You have to cull the information necessary to find out. It’s about dealing with the unknown and making sense of the ambiguity.”

### SPEAK UP

Amy Graham, PMC-VI, credits her first classes with Pragmatic Institute for teaching her the industry’s best practices and gaining influence with her boss.

Graham now teaches Pragmatic classes and offers a simple motto to students who ask how to get started with their newfound knowledge: “Don’t boil the ocean.” Start with a smaller, focused initiative; build on that success; and find a champion who will vouch for your work.

But knowledge and expertise don’t matter if you don’t

have the confidence to share them, she said. In Graham’s case, she returned from her first Pragmatic training with multiple ways to implement what she had learned, and her boss was more than willing to use her new expertise.

“You might be incredibly smart, you might have a lot of talent and bring a lot of knowledge to the company, but if you don’t use your voice, it’s all for nothing,” Graham said. “Make sure that your voice is heard by colleagues and clients and customers. If you don’t have that voice, you’d better find one.”

Taking a role in the decision-making process also means knowing that decisions often are made before the official meeting and figuring out how to influence those decisions, said Deborah Clarke, director of product.

Clarke said she used to watch her male colleagues chatting over coffee and wonder, “Why am I working and they’re taking a break?”

Then her male boss shared this insight: Decisions aren’t made at meetings, they’re only formalized there.

The realization changed Clarke’s approach to meeting preparation. Now she spends more time away from her desk, discussing ideas with colleagues and understanding their motivations.

“Decisions get made before people even walk into the room,” Clarke said. “You’ve got to be doing all that background work, talking to people about what they care about and why, to understand what they

want to get out of it. At the meeting, you can exercise your leadership and show that you’re savvy about the topic and have a voice, but when you actually think about how the outcome is driven, it’s not going to happen at that time. It happened before you got there.”

### LEAVE THE PAST IN THE PAST

It sounded like a made-for-the-movies success story: The young woman who started her career in the mailroom and worked her way up to CEO through years of education, experience and commitment.

Also like a movie, this story had its pitfalls. The CEO couldn’t let go of the job where she first earned accolades. Rather than trusting her subordinates, she continued attending requirements meetings, flipping through binders of data to make suggestions about their work.

Pierson said that this boss’s example taught her the



“If you don’t use your voice, it’s all for nothing.”

—AMY GRAHAM



**“If you can take yourself outside of the immediate and think about the wider vision or decision, that’s where leadership comes into play.”**

**—DEBORAH CLARKE**

importance of letting go of a previous job’s duties to make way for new responsibilities.

That transition can prove emotionally challenging if the prior role was a major stepping-stone, the first place where a woman felt she proved her worth, Pierson said. But in the end, you must leave that place of safety behind in order to achieve new heights.

“One of the things that women have to get better at is understanding the concept of leverage: We hire people to leverage their talent in order to help us gain more influence,” Pierson said. “Sometimes we give too many technical directives because we feel our value is determined by the last job we had. And sometimes those hands-on jobs are so satisfying because you get stuff done, and I think we as women tend to hang on to that.”

That might mean sending a trusted delegate to a meeting that you used to attend yourself or making sure that you don’t end up with assignments that tend to be more administrative simply because women tend to be perceived as more organized, Clarke said.

She recommends thinking about the bigger picture for a project, instead of focusing on the smaller tasks that must be done to bring a project to life.

“Women tend to be organized, be prepared and show up on time,” Clarke said. “All of that is extremely important, but if you can take yourself outside of the immediate and think about the wider vision or decision, that’s where leadership comes into play.”

Pierson also said that studying the financial operations of the companies where she worked—and learning what actions could generate new revenue, whether by streamlining operations or increasing

customer renewals—helped her prioritize the time she spent on particular tasks.

“If you start to think about the effort you put forth versus the gain that you get, the question becomes, ‘How can I deploy myself to something that would more directly drive revenue?’” Pierson said. “If you start to think about the numbers, you start to act on them.”

### **KNOW YOUR WORTH**

Another number to pay attention to? The market rate for your job. There’s almost nothing worse than discovering you’re being underpaid for your work. Julee Everett, now the director of client success for CCG Analytics Solutions and Services,

recalled finding out from a male colleague at a previous employer that he was earning \$15,000 more than she was performing the same job.

Once she discovered the disparity, Everett asked her supervisor to bring her up to market rate for the role. But it took another cycle of raises for Everett to reach parity with her co-worker.

Everett cited this as a key moment in her professional development, because it inspired her not only to seek a new job—where the offer came in \$30,000 higher than her salary at her former company—but also to become a better negotiator on her own behalf.

“I knew in that moment that if I wanted the security that I craved for my family, it was up to me to be my own career advocate,” Everett said. “I’ve learned to talk about money with those that I trust, to research salaries, and to discuss this openly with other male and female peers. If you don’t know what you are worth in the marketplace, you can’t ask for it.”

Everett is not alone, according to results of the 2019 Pragmatic Institute *Annual Product Management and Product Marketing Survey*, which also included questions about compensation via both salary and bonus. (The full results of the survey will be

**“If you don’t know what you are worth in the marketplace, you can’t ask for it.”**

**—JULEE EVERETT**





**“You’re hiring my experience and my skill set, and this is what my research indicates those are worth.”**

**—ANGELA LONG**

available in September.) Overall, women product managers made an average of almost \$16,000 less than men. The compensation gap held true in almost every situation, regardless of education or department role.

The further up the ladder women moved, the larger the gap grew. For example, there was an average compensation difference of about \$20,000 for the 190 executives who participated in the survey. There was a \$14,000 average difference between women and men who had completed master’s degrees, and an almost \$10,000 difference between women and men with doctoral degrees.

Angela Long, PMC-V, incoming president of the American Marketing Association—Washington, D.C., said women need to hone their salary negotiating skills—and remember that they are selling their skills, not themselves. Long, who has also negotiated salary from a hiring perspective, said she has often seen women settle for the first offer rather than ask for the maximum amount in the range.

“You’re delivering your services to that company,” Long said. She suggests that women approach salary negotiations with the same mindset they would take if charging as a consultant: “You’re hiring my experience and my skill set, and this is what my research indicates those are worth. That makes the conversation easier from a negotiation perspective.”

## **BUILD COMMUNITY**

Networking, both within a company and with other product management professionals, offers an important way to discover who’s making what and which companies are hiring. But it can offer so much more: a place to learn from peers, an attentive audience for ideas, a way to seek guidance during career changes.

When the New York City chapter of Women in Product held its first event two years ago, Singh and her fellow

organizers hoped to fill at least half of the 200 seats for a training session about machine learning. Instead, they sold out. Today, the chapter holds monthly networking events and has more than 1,300 members.

Singh said the group’s rapid growth demonstrates that women in product management want to seek out their fellow professionals, to build both a professional network and a comfortable learning environment.

But the group also proves its worth by providing support for members who are struggling with their next career move, Singh said. Recently, a woman contacted Singh to thank the group for its support after she was laid off during a massive reorganization. After posting about her situation on the chapter’s website, five members reached out to her to set up coffee dates, and others sent job postings her way that led to two interviews. The woman said her experience connecting with others had lifted her spirits and stopped her from taking her layoff too personally.

“Women tend to own their failures more than their successes,” Singh said. “But you have to think about yourself as a whole person and be able to celebrate both the wins and the failures as learning opportunities.”

Uchil remembers her own feeling of “imposter syndrome” when she became a technical adviser to the senior vice president at Kindle, overseeing the rollout of Amazon’s electronic devices. She said her network of friends and colleagues carried her through times when she felt overwhelmed and inadequate for the task.

Now Uchil relishes the opportunity to provide that same sense of support to other women. She recalled one acquaintance who approached her about wanting to apply for a promotion, but she felt that she didn’t check off all the requirements on the application. In a similar vein, an internal report from Hewlett Packard several years ago found that female applicants feel the need to meet 100% of job qualifications, while male counterparts apply if they meet 60% or more.

Uchil encouraged her acquaintance to apply for the job anyway, if only for practice. She recently heard from the woman that she had, in fact, gotten the promotion.

“I want to support any woman who is going through this journey because I had the immense support of others to get me where I am today,” Uchil said. “These mentors and guides are my friends for life.” **■**

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## **About the Author**

**Trisha L. Howard** is a freelance writer in New York City. Her career has included being a reporter for *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *The Kansas City Star*. Send questions or comments to [editor@pragmaticinstitute.com](mailto:editor@pragmaticinstitute.com).

# BEHIND THE NUMBERS

BY JIM FICKESS

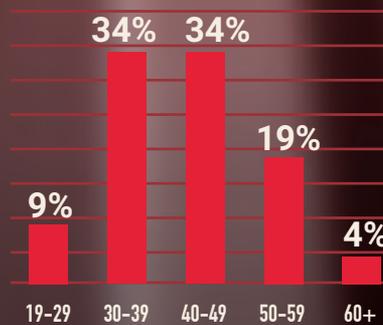
## Who Today's Product Professionals Are

THE 2019 PRAGMATIC INSTITUTE ANNUAL PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCT MARKETING SURVEY, the full results of which will be delivered in September, delivered great information about the numbers behind today's product teams, from salaries and age to experience and team size. But product professionals aren't just numbers; there are real people working in these roles. In fact, respondents to this year's survey reported 497 distinct job titles! To get a better view of who today's product professionals are, we asked a few respondents to describe themselves and the work they do. The next few pages deliver those insights.

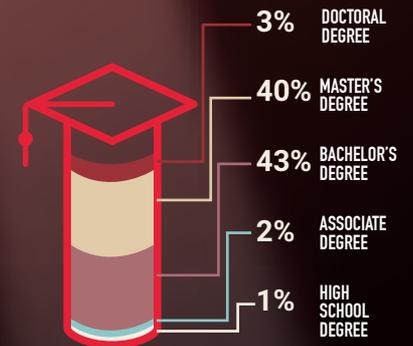
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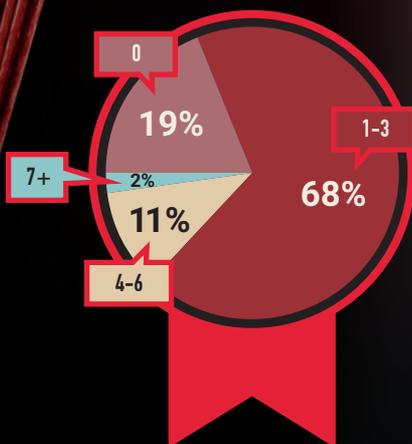
### AGE



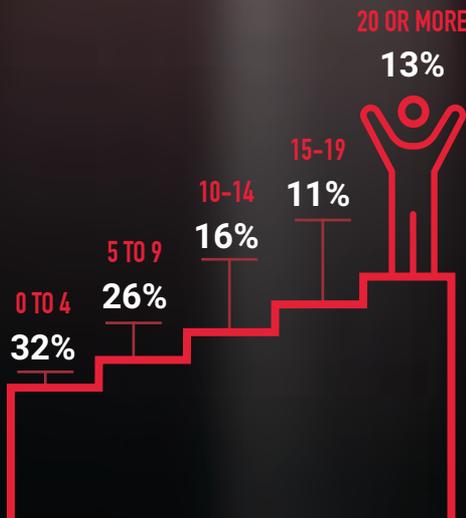
### EDUCATION



### PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS HELD



### YEARS OF PRODUCT EXPERIENCE



### MOST COMMON JOB TITLES



## A B2B FOCUS

“I have a B2B focus, especially product strategy at the market level. I ask questions such as:

- How do we compete and does what we have still work?
- What do we need to have—or need to do—to achieve our goal?
- What are the contingency plans to those options?

“I am very pragmatic, decisive, a deliberate thinker and have a high degree of curiosity, empathy and grit. I help bring teams together and give them a common goal or objective.”

**Nicole Steele, independent consultant, more than 20 years of experience in healthcare/science**

“I am strategy focused at the product design/user level, B2B. I work well with customer-focused product managers. I am more qualitative than quantitative, but I view data as a valuable steppingstone.”

**Adrian Makohon, PMC-III, head of product management, PRISMA GmbH**

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE

PRODU  
PROFESS

## A HUMAN FOCUS

“My colleague likes to say as product managers we are puzzle masters. We go out to the customers, find out what they need and tell the engineers—who can design what you need if you give them boundaries. You need to know a lot of different areas; a little bit about a lot of things.”

**Tom (last name and employer withheld for anonymity)**

“My role is to translate what the customer says they need into something that solves their problem. I work in a highly technical healthcare field (laboratory informatics), so translation between the users and the development team is a critical part of my job.”

**Nancy Rourke, PMC-IV, vice president of product and business development, LIMSABC Technology**

“I’m a ‘WOO-er’ (win others over), a conduit and storyteller for the products I champion. As a product marketer, I connect with people—from our customers and the external market (including analysts) to our product management and sales teams. While data are important, understanding the human connection to the product is vital to our success. Intuition and gut can never be underestimated. We are all consumers first, whether at work or rest or play.

“I communicate and build the connection to each shareholder group in the product life cycle. I tell stories—translating the features, use cases and ultimate benefits into meaningful and relatable messages to demonstrate the value of my products. I like to clarify complex situations into relevant and consumable stories. I love working with our product and development teams on bringing our products to life.”

**Lisa Quinn, director of global product marketing, inRiver**

## A SOLUTIONS FOCUS

“I am focused on the macro-level, problem-solution arena. A big driver for me is to solve problems in the simplest manner possible that satisfies the need in the vein of ‘jobs to be done’ philosophy. When I was younger, I was really interested in being involved at the design/implementation level, but there are a lot of talented software engineers that are artists and, when given a problem and scope, can design wonderful solutions. Obviously, ceding the design takes trust with the developers and a lot of commitment from me to properly define the problem, user, his or her expectations, etc.”

Greg Council, vice president of marketing and product management, Parascrypt

“I am a user-centered product manager who focuses decisions on ‘What is the user’s goal?’ I ask myself, ‘What are my clients’ or the market’s goals?’ and aim to introduce products, features and services that get them to that goal. I am a huge believer in the Pragmatic mantra of ‘Your opinion, although interesting, is irrelevant.’”

Nancy Rourke, PMC-IV, vice president of product and business development, LIMSABC Technology

YOURSELF AS A

PRODUCT  
PROFESSIONAL?

## AN ADAPTABLE FOCUS

“I have had experience with the entire product management life cycle while leading product management organizations. I flex from strategic to execution, depending on the product status. When hired at a new company, I first take inventory to understand what is working and what needs tweaking.

“As a product manager, it is critical to partner with your technical team along with operations and sales. Nothing will be successful unless you all work together. Using the Pragmatic Framework gives you all the tools to apply to your company’s situation and needs.”

Laurie McBrierty, consultant, 15 years of experience as vice president of product management in healthcare-related businesses

“The responsibilities and challenges of a product manager are directly dependent on where you are in the life cycle of a product. All products are born, thrive and then die. They may do it at different speeds, but the fatality is unavoidable. It is the product manager’s duty to understand how to best maximize the return on investment of the product over its lifetime.”

Stephane Blondin, vice president of product marketing and management, Presagis

## A BIG-PICTURE FOCUS

No matter how you view yourself as a product manager or product marketer, you’re the one who can rewrite that description, said a 15-year veteran of the profession.

“Typically, people are in strategic, marketing or product development. I have been in all three functions during the length of my career,” said Ross Reynolds, PMC-I, vice president of product and marketing for Marketly, a San Francisco Bay area media and software company. “Now, I operate like a general manager and am enjoying it. When you are planning your career, ask yourself, ‘What kind of product professional do I want to be?’” 

### About the Author

Jim Fickess is a freelance writer in Chandler, Ariz. His career included being an editor for *The Arizona Republic*. Send questions or comments to [editor@pragmaticinstitute.com](mailto:editor@pragmaticinstitute.com).

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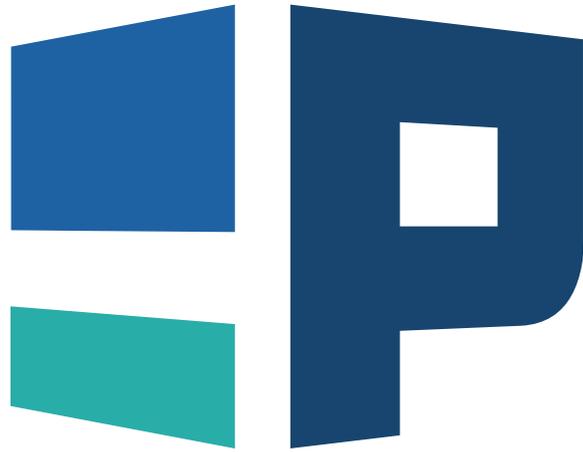
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**BUILD BETTER PRODUCTS**

**22** Beating Disruption: How to Win in the Fight to Be First

**26** Staying Ahead of the Competition with Predictive Analytics

**28** Predictive Analytics in Action

**SELL MORE STUFF**

**32** Competitive Intelligence Revisited

**36** Sharks vs. Ballons: Leveraging Customer Bias for Better Marketing

**LEAD STRATEGICALLY**

**40** Strengthen Your Strategic Smarts

**43** 4 Shifts to Put Your Next Presentation into High Gear

**COLLECTIVE THINKING**

**47** True Confessions from the Front Lines

**PRAGMATIC APPROACH**

**49** Put this issue's ideas into action

# Beating Disruption



## How to Win in the Fight to Be First

BY  
ANDREA  
OZIAS

**B**ACK IN 2000, REED HASTINGS TRIED TO SELL HIS THEN-STRUGGLING company to Blockbuster Video for a mere \$50 million. Blockbuster had heard of Hasting's company, Netflix, but it wasn't buying the hype.

As a former high-ranking Blockbuster executive later noted, "Management and vision are two separate things." The video delivery (and later streaming service) company was losing money and Blockbuster didn't see the disruptive effect Netflix was about to have in the market.

The unrelenting fight to innovate, disrupt and lead your market is a formidable battle, full of opportunities that can make or break your business, as it did for Blockbuster. Neutralizing disruptive attacks from competitors or becoming a disruptor yourself requires planning beyond today—and even tomorrow.

## Enter the Fray

Industry disruption has been a reality for most large companies for a while, according to a 2018 Accenture study. An analysis of more than 3,600 companies found that disruption has a pattern that can be identified, understood and prepared for—rather than being a random event beyond your company's control.

Accenture developed an index that broke disruption down into its key components, which allowed them to position companies in 20 different industry sectors and 98 subsegments across four periods of disruption. The firm then identified steps companies could take to mitigate risk depending on where they fell on the index.

### Durability

Companies need to reinvent their legacy business rather than focus on preserving it. That means maintaining cost leadership in the core business and making key offerings more relevant to customers (e.g., making offerings cheaper but better).

### Vulnerability

Companies must make their legacy businesses more productive. This can position them to develop and leverage future innovations—both their own and their competitors'. This could mean reducing dependency on mixed assets and monetizing underused assets.

### Volatility

Companies must change the current course, radically transforming the core business while scaling new businesses.

### Viability

Companies need to embrace a constant state of innovation, which involves increasing the innovative offerings to existing

customers while also aggressively expanding into adjacent or uncharted markets.

"Business leaders need to determine where their company is positioned in this disruption landscape and the likely speed of change," said Omar Abbosh, Accenture's chief strategy officer. "The more clearly they see what's changing around them, the better they can predict and identify opportunities to create value from innovation for their business and rotate to the new."

Accenture's study asserts that in periods of rapid-fire change, companies need to deploy one of four strategies to act quickly: grow the core, transform the core, scale the new or pivot wisely.

So where can product professionals start in their quest to stave off unexpected disruption?

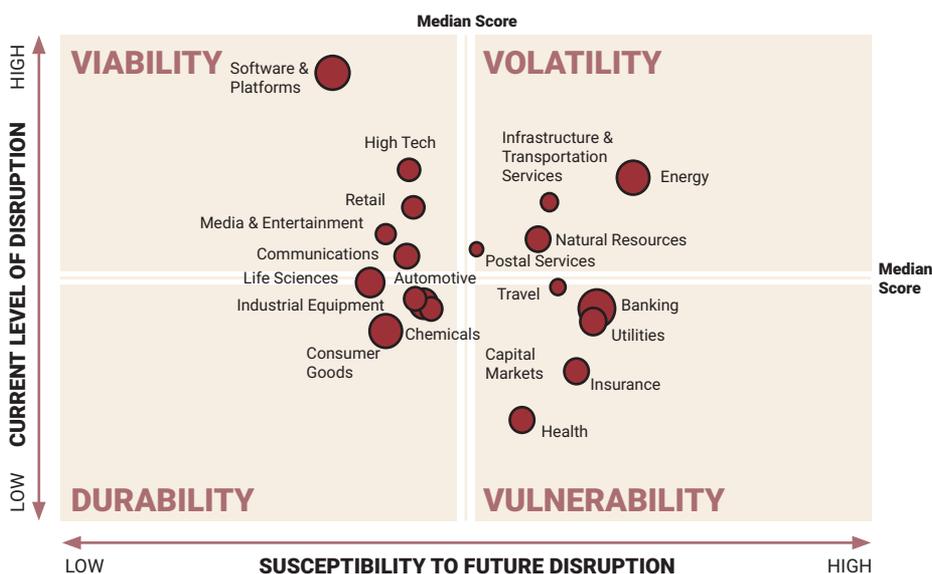
## Complacency Breeds Vulnerability

When thinking about potentially disruptive changes, one of the best places to start is understanding what customers hate about you.

"There's always something," said Diane Pierson, PMC-VI, a Pragmatic Institute instructor with more than 20 years of experience in product management and marketing. "For Blockbuster, it was late fees. Legend has it that Reed Hastings started Netflix after fighting with his wife over a Blockbuster late fee. True? I don't know. But everyone believes it *could be*."

Pierson emphasized the importance of not dismissing the elements of your business that cause deep dissatisfaction simply because you're the industry leader. This is where disruptors attack first. Vincent Lo, director of marketing insights and strategy at social media management platform Hootsuite, echoed Pierson's comments.

## THE FOUR PERIODS OF INDUSTRY DISRUPTION Source: Accenture. ©2018.



●●● Average enterprise value of companies in the study sample

## DEFINITIONS

### Durability

Disruption is evident but not life-threatening, and companies still enjoy structural advantages and deliver consistent performance. One-fifth (19%) of companies fall into this period.

### Vulnerability

Disruption is moderate, but companies are susceptible to future disruption because of structural productivity challenges (e.g., high labor costs). One-fifth (19%) of companies fall into this period.

### Volatility

There is a prominence of violent, sudden disruption, as traditional strengths have become weaknesses. One-quarter (25%) of companies fall into the volatility period.

### Viability

Disruption is constant, sources of competitive advantage are often short-lived and new disruptors constantly emerge. More than one-third (37%) of companies fall into this period.



“Look at adjacent markets, how other industries could be potentially disrupted and—when it is disrupted—how it will affect you.”

“When users and end customers complain about a certain deficiency, there’s a lot of room for innovation and disruption,” he said. “Look at all the disruptions that have happened in the past five or 10 years and you notice that they all solve for that last-mile problem.”

The grocery business is a prime example of this. At its essence, it’s a logistics business: getting food from suppliers to customers. And no one solved the logistics of moving items from point A to point B like Amazon. Once it did that for shoes and electronics, there was no reason it couldn’t expand and build on this differentiator in other markets.

“Amazon created one of the most enviable supply chains on the planet, and now it doesn’t matter what they distribute,” said Michael Smart, PMC-V, founder and managing principal of Egress Solutions Inc. “Pick your local grocery store; could it have seen the impending impact of Amazon 15 years ago? The answer is ‘yes.’”

Insurance is another industry that’s ripe for disruption due to general customer dissatisfaction. No one buys insurance because it’s the best product available, or the best solution—they buy it because they have to have it.

“When you see reviews and customer sentiments that people are buying (a product or service) to fill a need or gap rather than because the products they have are moving forward in that space, that’s where I think the disruption is,” said David Washer, a competitive intelligence expert at competitive intelligence firm Klue.

### Look Beyond the Obvious

Entrepreneur Corey Brundage has started five different companies, and with each new venture he’s tried to understand the demand side of the market. His most recent company, HONK, enables users to find and order roadside assistance from a browser, phone or tablet, without a membership fee. The company’s beginning was influenced by two factors, one public and one personal.

When Uber’s financials were leaked in 2015, the market was first exposed to how disruptive the car service company really was. “It was too late for the taxi industry to do anything,” Brundage recalled, but he added that the information about Uber’s number of users, the volume they were doing and how quickly the business was growing was interesting to people looking at new models in the on-demand and technology-enablement space—particularly as it applied to the service industry.

Then, about six months later, Brundage and his fiancée had a car breakdown that left them without a vehicle for two days—just because of a simple dead battery. He wondered why there wasn’t an app they could have tapped into for roadside assistance. That personal experience, coupled with his thoughts around on-demand services, led to the birth of HONK.

“Sometimes something as simple as one company having an edge in a market and getting some of their data out there can be a pretty big force in terms of disruption, even across other industries,” Brundage said.

Similarly, when thinking about opportunities to disrupt or the potential to be disrupted, product professionals should look beyond their markets.

“Look at the outside,” Lo said. “Look at adjacent markets, how other industries could be potentially disrupted and—when they are disrupted—how it will affect you.”

### Keep Your Ear to the Ground

Just because a company produces something new or different doesn’t guarantee success. “You have to know there are a ton of failures before something works and something catches,” Washer said. “The market has to be there, the product has to be there, and they both have to be there at the same time.”

Identifying the right time and product requires testing, and it always comes back to consumer feedback. Washer has several questions that he asks clients when helping them build their battle cards, including what you hear people talking about.

He offered the words “big data” as an example—a term virtually unknown when it emerged in 2005, but relatively universal today. Washer also said key data points come in the form of unstructured data: words and sentiments in social media posts and online communities, for example.

“That’s where the big challenge of this exercise comes in,” he said. “It’s the tweets—how do you flag what no one else has seen yet? We’ll find key leaders in an industry and watch them. If they’re talking about it, odds are we’ll be hearing about it sometime soon.”

Lo said that, beyond individual key words, scenarios in the social space also provide an opportunity. When social scenarios start with “I wish there was a ...” or “What if ...”, those are indicators of a larger situation—and areas that are ripe for disruption. Customers are outlining scenarios in which no one is satisfying a need.

### Build Your Tech Allies

To survive and thrive in a disrupted industry, companies need to transform and develop their core business while at the same time innovating to create and scale new business, according to Mike Sutcliffe, group chief executive of Accenture digital.

“Embracing digital is part of it. We found that the lower an industry’s digital performance, the more susceptible it is to future disruption,” he said. “Digital technologies can help make a company more resilient in times of disruption in a number of ways, whether by driving better outcomes from existing products, developing entirely new digital services, lowering costs or increasing barriers to entry.”

Brundage believes data will play a critical role in identifying potential disruptions—but it’s still in a developing stage.

“I think most businesses have keyed in on the fact that they need to create hypotheses, validate those and let the customer ride in the passenger seat in the definition and development of products, and most people are doing that,” Brundage said. “But what becomes really interesting is things like A/B testing. In a lot of scenarios, it doesn’t work and you’re probably making decisions based on bad data. Some of the elements that are coming out of data science are going to solve those problems.”

This is a particularly high hurdle that most companies are still trying to jump. While many companies gather a lot of market research, few are effectively aggregating or communicating what they learn to deliver actionable insights.



**“The things that usually knock companies on their rear ends are things that could have been seen.”**

“Most companies could improve their competitive position—not to mention their top- and bottom-line performance, customer satisfaction and employee morale,” Pierson said. “They can do this by identifying the sources of valuable market knowledge and working with a data science team to gather, aggregate and prioritize.”

### Hone Your Competitive Intelligence

To keep tabs on competitors, seemingly minor indicators can show if a rival is about to make an industry-shaking change:

- Job openings give a view into the roles a company is trying to fill and how it describes the work that needs to be done. You get a glimpse into your competitors’ priorities and what they’re thinking from a vision perspective.
- Online employer review sites like Glassdoor.com provide insights into areas of opportunity. Disgruntled employees share company challenges, customer complaints and how the company is investing or shifting.
- Website monitoring tools can reveal what the competition is testing and what it carries forward.
- Social monitoring of specific events, like marketing and technology conferences, can be useful. Lo explained that when you see trends or clusters of certain ideas at these types of events, you’ll see the output three, six or 12 months later.
- The words a competitor uses also can hint at a coming change. Washer said CEO speeches and SlideShares from conferences are good tip-offs, as CEOs often talk about changes before they’re a common theme. When you hear them using a different language, it’s likely something is coming, and that’s possibly a new market opportunity.

### Winning the Disruption War

Innovation and disruption aren’t new threats, but they are moving faster. Rather than waiting to see what happens, product professionals should take steps to not only beat potential disruptors at the front gate, but also consider what it will take to become a market or industry disruptor. And this takes time, dedication and an ability to think differently.

“The things that usually knock companies on their rear ends are things that could have been seen,” said Smart, who was also a principal consultant for Pragmatic Institute from 2007 to 2009. “They’re the things that, as really high-performing product people, we should be chipping away at. But you never ‘solve’ it. It never stops needing to be done.” **IP**

### About the Author

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STAYING AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION WITH

# Predictive Analytics

BY  
SRIRAM  
PARTHASARATHY

**M**OST PRODUCT PROFESSIONALS are competitive, well-researched and typically grounded in their thinking and expectations. They're adept at influencing without having direct power. It's the things outside of their control that keep them awake at night, and the primary "thing" that's out of their control is competitive disruption.

Changes in customer behavior, the industry and competitors' offerings are why products routinely go out of favor—particularly in the digital space. For example, a digital enterprise product that was well-received when it launched in 2015 may be on the "reinvent or die" list this year after a series of startups enter the market with highly competitive offerings.

But this is the typical tale of many software solutions that failed to read changes in both customer behaviors and the market. Companies that see these changes early in their innovation journey have an edge, while the rest find out the hard way. The trick is to use your business data to figure out how to reach and keep that competitive edge.

## Leveraging Predictive Insights

Today, most applications, such as apps or dashboards you use in your daily job, tend to talk about what happened in the recent past. This is useful for the business to understand the health of the company, but it doesn't help shape the future. With a gold mine of business data, you have an opportunity to get an edge by predicting what is likely to happen as well as recommendations for the best action to take.

Old applications

New applications



Predictive analytics allows us to uncover what will happen—and subsequently incorporate those insights into current and future digital products. The following are examples of refactoring current applications to add predictive insights for significant differentiation from the competition.

APPLICATION	What does the current application do?	Predictive feature with good ROI that can be added to the application
CRM	Report who churned in the past six weeks	Who will churn in the next six weeks? Best preventive action to take?
Loan Application	Report how many customers defaulted on their loan	Which customers will default in the next six weeks? Best preventive action to take?
Accounts Receivable	Summarized who paid and did not pay their invoices in the past six weeks	Who will pay their invoice late in the next six weeks? Best preventive action to take?
Call Center	Summarized call volumes and call duration in the past six weeks	How many calls will we get this week? Do I have enough staff to handle those calls?



### Adding Predictive Insights into Your Existing Application

Following are four simple baseline areas product professionals can explore to create the right frame of mind for adding predictive insights. Each includes example questions to put your thinking on the right path. And remember: Every question you are trying to answer should have a good ROI.

1. **Predicting outcomes:**
  - a. Will this customer churn?
  - b. Will this customer default?
2. **Forecasting metrics:**
  - a. Number of orders?
  - b. Number of calls to call center?
3. **Identifying anomalies:**
  - a. Is this a fraudulent transaction?
  - b. Is this a fraudulent claim?
4. **Creating segments:**
  - a. Segmenting customers by demographics/sales patterns
  - b. Segmenting patients by demographics, health history and medications taken

Predictive insights provide an opportunity to innovate and add new capabilities to existing products or help create new product offerings. For the digital products you're currently managing, look at your existing product and ask what future outcomes can be predicted that will create an opportunity for you to add significant value for your customers. It can be as simple as taking your current key operational metrics, using them to predict their future value and deciding whether that prediction, along with some recommended actions, will help positively affect your business.

### Getting a Handle on the Technical Side

To truly understand how you're able to acquire and leverage the predictive insights you need to make your products successful, it's important to understand the behind-the-scenes work it takes to get the analytics you want and the information you'll need to get it done.

Traditional programming involves someone (a programmer) coding a program (building rules) that uses available data to produce an output. To keep the rules updated, the programmer writes more rules:



In machine learning, the data that is input and output are fed to an algorithm that automatically creates the rules. In turn, this program can predict on future data:



For example, to build a customer churn application, you would feed the machine-learning algorithm with data (e.g., demographics, product use, transactions) that includes samples

of customers who have churned as well as those who have not. The algorithm mines this data and formulates the program to predict whether someone will churn in the future:



This enables the creation of higher-order complex rules that can be updated with changing customer behaviors—something that is impossible if manually written by programmers. It can also identify multi-factor rules that can be hard for humans to identify.

This automated process provides you with an opportunity to leverage business data as a financial asset and add new predictive features to your products.

### Putting Analytics into Action

After identifying a key predictive insight, it's time to test and check in with your customer base. It's important to constantly experiment and engage customers with new ideas—that's what leads to innovation and the ability to remain relevant in the competitive market. This work leads to enhancements of the existing product and possibly results in a new product for a cross-sell/upsell opportunity.

### A Call to Action

Identifying the predictive problem you're trying to solve is your starting point. Define the benefits this solution will have for both customers and the business. And don't be afraid to experiment to get early customer feedback. Capture enough data to engage with stakeholders and, ultimately, navigate your way in the right direction. **IP**

### About the Author

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### Harness the Power of Data to Build Better Products

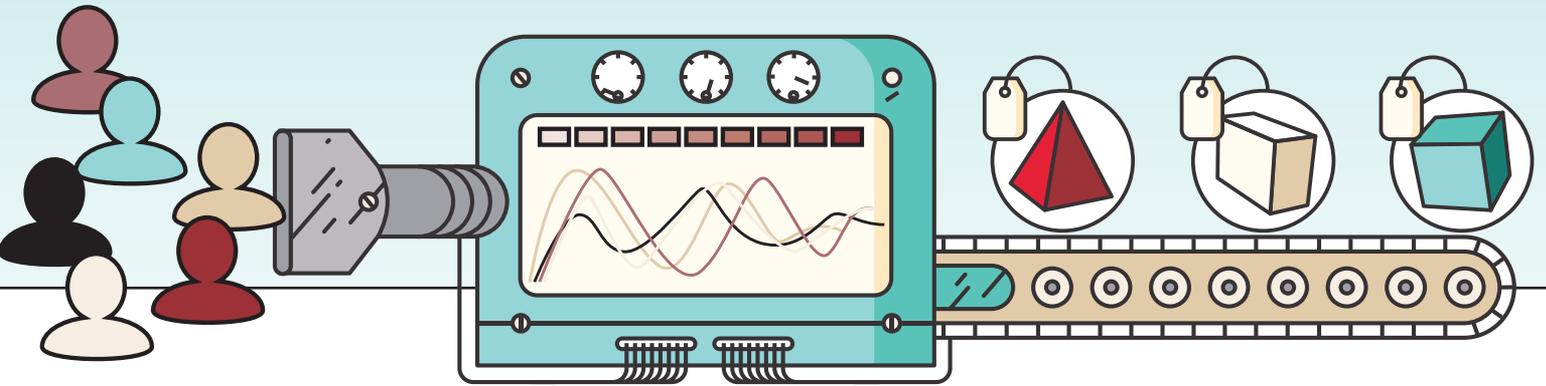
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PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS IN ACTION

# Using Insights to Drive Success

BY HARISH KRISHNAMURTHY



Editor's Note: The company's name and information in this case study have been changed for confidentiality.

**T**HE BEST WAY TO TACKLE ANY problem is one step at a time, and ABC Co., an end-to-end hardware and software solutions business, knows this firsthand. The company knew what success looked like: dominating in the enterprise and small- and medium-sized business sector (SMB). But there were a couple of critical questions that needed answers: Where—and how—do you start to penetrate that market?

ABC Co. wrestled with this conundrum. The company was earning more than \$1 billion in annual revenue through its collaboration, business analytics and services. While Fortune 100 companies always grab attention and seem like the ideal big fish to hook, the reality for ABC was that brokering deals with large-scale multinationals would bring its own set of challenges, including slower sales cycles, highly complicated negotiations and other hoops to jump through.

Primarily serving corporate customers throughout North America, ABC targeted the SMB sector, as it represented 30% of the total market—and was growing 10% annually. Beyond overall sales opportunity, this sector offered numerous other benefits:

- Companies were looking for solutions to implement quickly, which meant they needed to be complete solutions
- Though the total deal price typically was smaller than those with Fortune 100 companies, the margins were better
- Even if SMBs bought in smaller amounts, there was more down-the-road growth opportunity and faster sales cycles

The critical issue ABC was facing was the fragmented nature of small- and medium-sized businesses across North America, which made it challenging to accelerate growth.

### Taking the First Step

ABC had extensive sales and marketing capabilities and was looking to improve conversions from those activities. Historically, conversion rates had been 12% for prospect-to-customer conversions, but management wanted to see that increase to 14% for the next year. To meet this goal, ABC needed a deeper understanding of the customer segments and full customer life cycle for the SMB sector.

The company also wanted to identify relevant customer life-cycle data that would help predict future purchase behavior. The company had more than 100,000 prospects in its database, but

TYPICAL CUSTOMER LIFE CYCLE ▶



effectively targeting the right customers required efficiency and a priority list of prospects that were likeliest to deliver a solid return on investment.

To solve for these issues, ABC partnered with us at TechMileage Software Solutions. The highest priority for TechMileage was to analyze customer segmentation and behavior patterns and develop predictive analytics models representing the various stages of the customer life cycle. These would help ABC prioritize prospects and customize sales and marketing activities for customers who are likeliest to purchase.

### The Role of Predictive Analytics

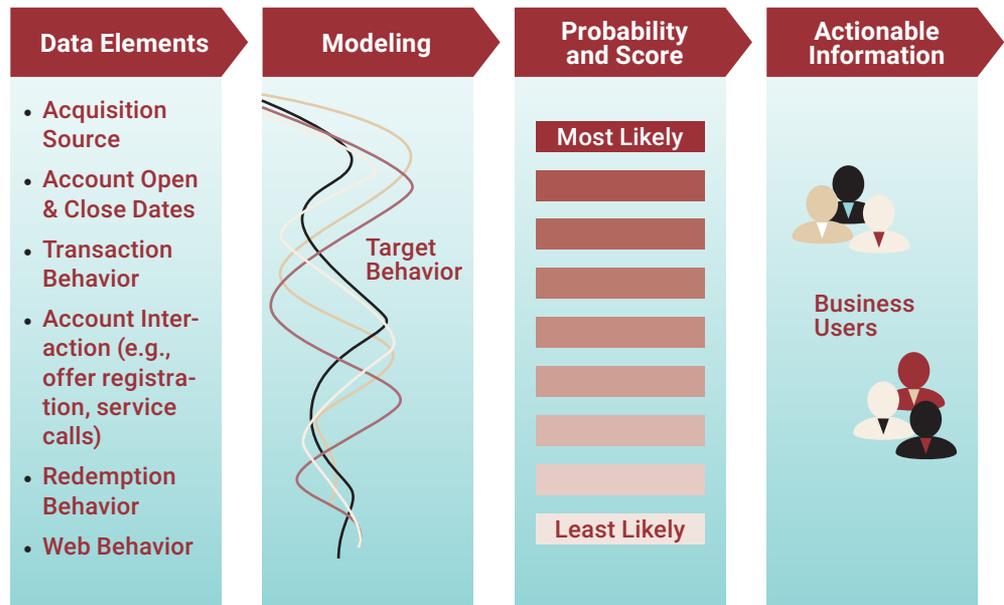
Prior to its engagement with TechMileage, ABC had a manual analysis process in place. The company’s analysts developed static models across multiple regions to try to understand each segment’s needs. But, along with being extremely manual and inflexible, the attempt to build that type of segmentation and analysis was also proving to be error-prone.

TechMileage worked closely with ABC’s client development and sales and marketing teams to develop a solution and build a customer life-cycle model based on the data elements collected from customers. The result was a robust predictive model created with a large sample of more than 10,000 SMB customers.

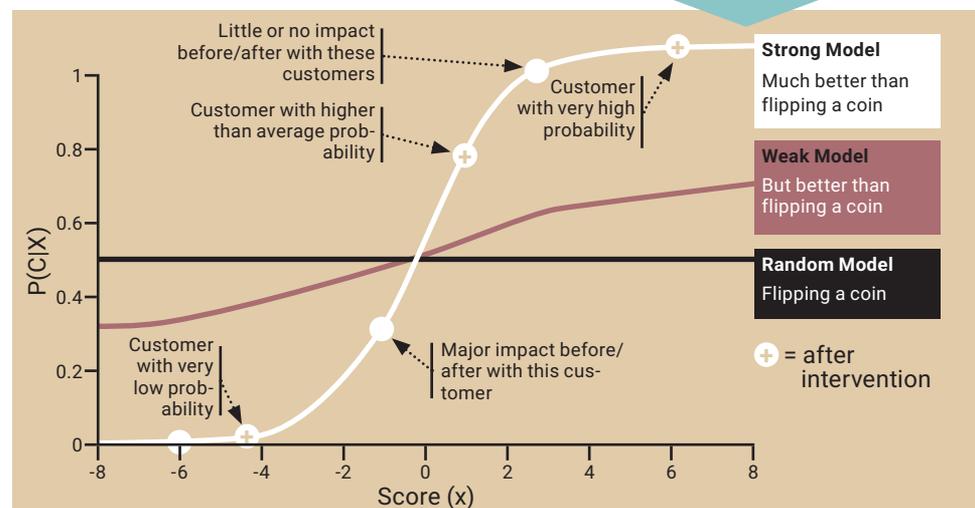
However, this model was not developed overnight. There were several stages, including proof of concept, the testing of different models, implementation and, finally, live testing. Once the live testing proved accurate, the model was applied to all regions across North America. In total, implementing the predictive analytics model took nearly a year.

## ABC’s Predictive Model

Typical structure of customer life-cycle predictive model



Using predictive models to identify actionable population



During the process, ABC was able to analyze prospects' and customers' purchase behavior from the prior five years. Based on the analysis, ABC learned:

- Among hundreds of thousands of leads, which ones were high priority and likeliest to close a sale
- That the company was losing 30% of its customers after the first year, and 50% of the remaining customers in the second year; this was a result of ABC not going back to its customers with a clear purchase path

### The Outcome

The development of a full customer life-cycle model resulted in a predictive modeling tool that allowed ABC to improve its outcomes. Customer life-cycle analysis and predictive modeling helped the company create and prioritize tangible strategies and tactics to drive a better return on sales and marketing efforts focused on SMBs, including:

- Differentiating marketing tactics by segment
- Aligning and dedicating sales resources to the prospects that have a higher likelihood to buy
- Differentiating channel execution by segment
- Aligning and enabling offerings to be prioritized by segment and based on the stage of the customers' life cycle
- Identifying key dependencies within the customer life cycle

As a result of leveraging deeper insights about the customer's life cycle, ABC improved its overall prospect-to-customer conversion by 3 percentage points, from 12% to 15%, and achieved total growth of more than \$200 million.

### One Step at a Time

Perhaps the most significant lesson ABC learned during the project was that the initial model produced would not be the be-all, end-all solution. During all phases of the project, refinements were continually made to the data that was being gathered. For example, once the proof of concept was created, both teams from TechMileage and ABC realized there were other variables that needed to be included. And, as more variables were implemented, new aspects revealed themselves for consideration.

Ultimately, ABC and TechMileage will continue refining the data going in to get different views that will have a bearing on performance. And each refinement will serve as one more step toward success. **SP**

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Life-Cycle Stage	Initiatives Driven by Predictive Modeling	Business Results
<b>Acquisition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize leads and contacts in the database for sales and marketing teams</li> <li>• Optimize and profile SMB channels, assess channel capacity for marketing opportunity</li> <li>• Establish sales tactics and incentives specifically rewarding new-client acquisition</li> <li>• Prioritize specific business partners and affiliates based on their likelihood of closing the sale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+67% growth in SMB new clients</li> <li>+131% growth in new client revenue</li> </ul>
<b>Activation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create compelling offers based on buyer model and incentives to grow wallet share</li> <li>• Develop compelling value propositions for products and services based on model attributes of successful implementation</li> <li>• Cultivate small initial purchases because they are key to activation and gaining a footprint in the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New clients in SMB sector grew to represent 20% of revenue (up two times, year to year)</li> </ul>
<b>Upsell/ Cross-Sell</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare new-client data against predictive buying models to target ongoing purchases</li> <li>• Align sales and marketing activities with predicted timing of subsequent purchases as critical to upsell/cross-sell opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average new client spending is +81% year to year.</li> </ul>
<b>Promotion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven by model key attributes leveraging insights from predictive modeling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invest in digital marketing vehicles</li> <li>– Invest in and leverage web and e-sales tools to engage clients</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28% of leads generated from digital marketing and marketing initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile and develop standard nurture campaigns</li> <li>• Utilize digital and email-based programs with timing created from modeling</li> <li>• Target installed or dormant customers and re-engage according to their stage in the life cycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using predictive modeling to create future needs allowed nurture campaign to add value</li> </ul>

DID YOU KNOW?

# 90%

# OF ALL THE WORLD'S DATA WAS GENERATED IN THE PAST TWO YEARS.

Every two days, we generate as much data as all of humanity did up to 2003. What is your company doing with that information? Leverage all of your available data and improve your business decision-making with real, hard data. Our two-day course, *The Business of Data Science*, will show you how to harness the power of data science and machine learning to drive your products and your organization into the future.



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THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS

# Competitive Intelligence

**C**OMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE IS A LINE ITEM ON almost every product professional's job description and includes phrases like "be the expert on your buyers," "understand the competitive landscape" and "help position our company's offerings to differentiate."

In practice, these are often empty words that fall to the bottom of the priority list. While probing product professionals for their thoughts on competitive initiatives at a recent networking event, one vice president of marketing retorted with, "Don't marketers always look at the competition?" Based on that response, I had to ask, "Do you incorporate win/loss analysis? Does your sales team use battlecards?"

"No," he said sheepishly. Before answering, he knew I had proved that his competitive initiatives didn't run as deep as he originally postured.

Based on the responses I heard that night, I was compelled to prove that many product professionals aren't doing an effective job with competitive intelligence. For the purposes of this article, competitive intelligence responsibilities span both the product management and product marketing function.

## Assessing Your Competitive Chops

This article outlines 10 suggested criteria that can help you assess how competitive you are in your day-to-day activities. Each criterion can be placed in a provided scorecard—a sort of competitive intelligence index—to help you measure the effectiveness of your competitive initiatives. As you progress from Criteria 1 to Criteria 10, a resounding "Yes!" showcases your increasing strength as a competitive-intelligence professional.

Part of this journey is demonstrating the difference between competitor intelligence and competitive intelligence. *Competitor intelligence* focuses exclusively on a single aspect of the competitive-intelligence landscape: the competitor. *Competitive intelligence* focuses on the competitor and many more attributes, including supply chain, company culture and government and industry regulations. With an understanding of this subtle—yet crucial—difference, you can move toward understanding whether your competitive-intelligence efforts are creating an advantage for your business.

## WEAKER CRITERIA

### CRITERIA NO. 1

#### Feature Matrices

For many, analysis often translates into a feature matrix that compares a company's product with that of its competition's. The result often resembles the technology equivalent of a *Consumer Reports* product review. These matrices rely heavily on competitor—not competitive—intelligence.

Product management guru Steve Blank talks about these feature tables. "Too often competitive analysis drives product requirements in startups," according to Blank. This leads to developers building the maximum rather than the minimum number of features. Instead of death by PowerPoint, this equates to death by feature matrices. How many criteria can you create? My personal record is 250 rows.



# Competitive Intelligence Revisited

BY ALOK VASUDEVA



Don't marketers  
always look at the  
competition?"

## CRITERIA NO. 2

### Deal-Desk Support

It's satisfying to know when you have demonstrated subject-matter expertise. It is even more gratifying when a salesperson gives you a high-five for a deal you helped close. This type of field support aids in creating bad habits from sales. Salespeople may frequent your desk for that one-off special request that helps close a deal.

One of the first product tenets I learned the hard way was Pragmatic Institute's rule "Product management should help sales channels, not individual salespeople." It's important to create an information repository that's accessible by the field. If the field has exhausted all other avenues, then you should have an established workflow for salespeople to access you, the competitive expert.

## CRITERIA NO. 3

### Research Beyond the Web

Many of us resort to the web, particularly Google, when conducting research. In competitive-intelligence vernacular, this is referred to as open source intelligence (OSINT). Competitive-intelligence pioneer Leonard Fuld said that "Free data, no matter how good your search skills, is generally something everyone else has and offers little competitive advantage—at least in its raw form." On the other hand, search engines offer names, Fuld said, that can be used to springboard to where experts and truly valuable information lies—in human intelligence (HUMINT).

## CRITERIA NO. 4

### Systematic Process

Do you incorporate any type of methodical process in your approach to tackling competitive intelligence? The process itself is less important than adhering to a workflow. The simplest yet most practical one I have seen is:

Planning and Direction

Collection

Analysis

Dissemination



Corporate marketing often is an underutilized resource that should be tapped for further insights and a clearer picture into competitors' actions."

CRITERIA NO. 5

**Digital Intelligence**

Product teams often have an invisible wall between their departments and corporate marketing. Corporate marketing often is an underutilized resource that should be tapped for further insights and a clearer picture into competitors' actions. Tools like BuzzSumo, MOZ Link Explorer, Moat, SEMrush, SimilarWeb, SpyFu and iSpionage can demonstrate the competitor's top organic and paid search rankings, top referring websites, top display ads, social media posts and traffic.

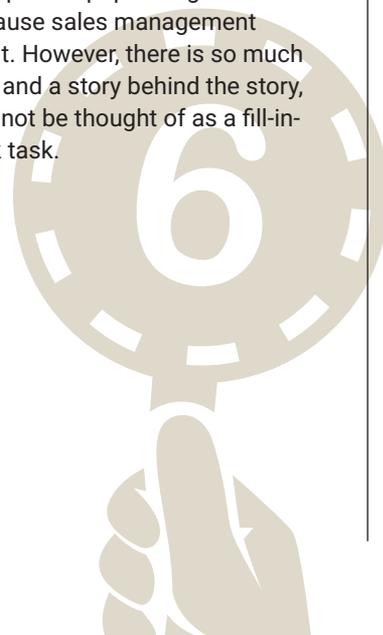
For example, I can gauge a company's size and marketing caliber by the marketing automation tool it deploys. Smaller vendors will choose a marketing automation platform that does not require a dedicated full-time employee. They simply don't have the internal resources and, therefore, need a less complex offering.

Digital intelligence can even be used before a product launch, whether it's naming a product, establishing and popularizing a product category that resonates with industry analysts, or reaching out to influencers for additional coverage.

CRITERIA NO. 6

**Win/Loss Analysis**

In the past couple of years, many conferences have covered win/loss analysis to better understand why a company has either won or lost customers. Clearly, many companies have an understanding about what win/loss can do for them, yet many have not created a formalized program. Win/loss is often relegated to a salesperson populating a CRM field because sales management requires it. However, there is so much narrative and a story behind the story, it should not be thought of as a fill-in-the-blank task.



CRITERIA NO. 7

**Sales Training**

How the salesforce understands the competition and uses marketing-produced materials is vital. One very useful internal sales tool often showcased during training is the battlecard—a mini, competitive playbook that is a staple in every competitive-intelligence professional's briefcase. Often a two-page, double-sided document, its relevant section headers include:

- Company strengths
- Company weaknesses
- Where we win
- Overcoming objections
- Probing questions

For a battlecard to be effective, it should offer accurate data, exclude conjecture and be presented in an easy-to-read, scannable layout.

## COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE SCORECARD

Criteria		Point value	Points earned
No. 1	Resorting to creating feature matrices	0	<input type="text"/>
No. 2	Providing deal-desk support	0	<input type="text"/>
No. 3	Targeting the web as the main source of intelligence	0	<input type="text"/>
No. 4	Developing a systematic competitive-intelligence process	5	<input type="text"/>
No. 5	Gathering digital intelligence <i>*Bonus points: Using technographic analysis</i>	10 10	<input type="text"/>
No. 6	Implementing a win/loss program <i>*Bonus points: Leveraging a third-party win/loss provider</i>	10 10	<input type="text"/>
No. 7	Including competitive material with sales training	10	<input type="text"/>
No. 8	Using competitive intelligence software	15	<input type="text"/>
No. 9	Incorporating strategic frameworks <i>*Bonus points: Running a war game</i>	20 10	<input type="text"/>
No. 10	Obtaining a seat at the table	30	<input type="text"/>
			<input type="text"/>
			Total Points

Based on the criteria outlined, assess how competitive you are in your daily activities. Reward yourself with the corresponding point values and total your points to determine your strength as a competitive-intelligence professional.

**< 20:** Making the claim that you are incorporating competitive intelligence is more of an ethos.

**20 to 50:** You understand the basics but have not put them to use. Perhaps an internal advocate/sponsor can help move the needle from a resource-allocation perspective.

**50 to 90:** You have the makings of a competitive-intelligence expert. Make sure your voice is heard within your organization.

**> 90:** You could very well save the company from any future threats.

**STRONGER  
CRITERIA**

### CRITERIA NO. 8

#### Competitive Intelligence Software

Since 2017, there has been an uptick in venture capital investment in market and competitive intelligence (M&CI) software. While software does not replace the work of a competitive analyst, it can augment the arduous task of sifting through news feeds, social media and website changes.

### CRITERIA NO. 9

#### Strategic Frameworks

Many competitive analysis efforts fail not because of the collection of information, but because of the analysis of the information. There are many analysis frameworks that should be used—from tactical and immediate to those that allow for deeper, longer-term analysis. Examples of strategic frameworks include the BCG Growth-Share Matrix, Porter's Five Forces, Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard and Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas.

### CRITERIA NO. 10

#### Seat at the Table

Perhaps the most satisfying KPI for any competitive intelligence professional's success is getting the proverbial seat at the table. It's important to have executives acknowledge competitive efforts, even if the competitive-intelligence professional does not have face-to-face contact with executives. Success would be if the analysis, combined with an analyst's opinion and perspective, has changed some strategic corporate initiative—something that transcends product-level analysis.

### Justifying the Competitive Intelligence Function

Competitive-intelligence professionals are susceptible to corporate restructurings, and their responsibilities often are absorbed into the product management or product marketing functions. As a result, the competitive charter becomes best-effort, executed only when there's time.

A stronger understanding of competitive criteria will help you assess how competitive you and your organization are in day-to-day activities. And now you have a competitive index scorecard to measure and assess the value of your initiatives. **IP**

#### About the Author

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# Sharks vs.

## Leveraging Customer Bias for

**H**ERE'S A QUIZ: YOUR CHILD IS INVITED to two birthday parties on the same afternoon. At one, the kids will be at a beach just a mile from where sharks were seen last year. The other party is in a small banquet room decorated with balloons. To which party do you send your child?

You picked the banquet room with the balloons, right? That certainly seems like what most cautious parents would choose. But here's the scary truth: Balloons kill 13 times more people each year than sharks. (How? Well, for one, balloons can burst and fly into your throat, causing suffocation.) But we don't hear much about this because it doesn't make the news the same way a gory shark attack does.

We all make decisions—influenced by biases we're not always aware of—that aren't necessarily rational. It's important that we

recognize that our inherent cognitive biases can lead us to make bad product and marketing decisions. We must also recognize that those biases can affect our customers' purchase decisions.

It's common to assume that most business purchase decisions—especially those of significant strategic value, complex implementation and high investment costs—are highly objective and involve detailed investigation, benchmark comparison and critical analysis. But cognitive biases have a far greater effect on B2B customer decisions. Once you recognize those biases and understand how they affect your customers' decisions, you can begin leveraging those same biases to your marketing benefit.

### Loss-Aversion Bias

Groundbreaking research in the late 1970s by behavioral economics pioneers Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky found that the psychological pain of losing something is more than twice as powerful as the pleasure of gaining something of equal value. Simply put, we hate to lose more than we love to gain.

This is one of the few cognitive biases that many marketers recognize and attempt to leverage in their marketing efforts. We seek to identify customers' pain points (the fear of loss that keeps customers up at night) and then focus sales messaging on how our products can best alleviate those fears and avoid those losses.

It's common to see B2B marketers leverage the pain-over-gain model by focusing messages on customers' pain points. Most of this customer pain-point focus is on the business pain, which falls into two basic categories:

- The inability to reach a critical business goal
- How to navigate critical business risks/obstacles

These two business pain categories often are combined to create a value proposition: "(Your product) helps (your target customer) better achieve (critical business goal) by helping you more effectively address (critical business risks/obstacles)."

Yet, even when your value proposition successfully communicates your ability to solve critical business pain points and achieve key business goals, it may not truly differentiate your product. After all, your competition may be communicating something very similar.

B2B marketers often fail to recognize another pain point: personal pain. This is often overlooked because it's assumed that most B2B purchases—especially for business-critical solutions of significant investment—are

### DON'T ACCIDENTALLY FUEL THE STATUS QUO BIAS

WHEN LEVERAGING LOSS AVERSION in your marketing, be careful not to overdo it. Follow discussions of risk and loss with how your product alleviates and removes those risks quickly, easily and effectively. If you focus too much on the fear, it can backfire due to the status quo bias—causing customers to make no decision at all (the deer-in-the-headlights effect). Doing nothing, after all, most often is the easiest choice to make, especially when any other decision has a high perceived risk.



# Balloons

BY  
ROD GRIFFITH

## Better Marketing

made objectively and based on a predefined set of key business, functional or technical criteria. We believe the purchase decision is based on careful investigation, analysis, and competitive review and benchmarking.

But studies have found that emotions and personal value play a far greater role in B2B purchase decisions than most people have thought. In fact, a CEB/Motista survey found that B2B buyers who see the personal value of your product are not only far likelier to purchase your product, they also are willing to pay more for it.

Few B2B marketers have caught on to this, and most fail to incorporate personal-value messaging. Instead, marketers leverage loss aversion by focusing solely on their business values—which often are the same as their competitors’—reducing their competitive differentiation.

To best leverage loss aversion, expand your focus beyond business pain points. Determine customers’ personal fears when it comes to making the right—or wrong—purchase decision. Examples of personal pain points include:

- Damage to professional reputation
- Reduced or slowed advancement opportunities
- Harder, more stressful work (or longer hours)

For example, a medical technology company may improve its value proposition by not only communicating how its products better solve key medical-practice pain points, but also by addressing how it allows practice owners to work more reasonable hours—and spend more time with their families. By communicating how you help customers better overcome their business and personal pain points, you both strengthen and differentiate your sales messaging strategies.

### Familiarity Bias

That we prefer the familiar is hardly an earth-shattering revelation. In the marketing realm, familiarity is why we seek brand recognition. It’s also why, if you have brand recognition, you likely spend significant time and money trying to maintain it.

If you don’t have brand recognition, you’re likely spending almost as much trying to gain it. Even if you have the resources to build significant brand recognition on a national or global scale, you may not have the time—it can take months, if not years. If this is where you find yourself, focus on another type of familiarity: challenge recognition.

Even if customers don’t recognize your brand, they may

recognize and deeply relate to the challenge your product addresses. People tend to gravitate toward solutions that alleviate the challenges and risks with which they’re most concerned. If customers recognize that you’re addressing a critical challenge, they’re likelier to pay attention.

The perceived level of risk involved with any challenge is not always proportionate to the actual risk. A nonmortal shark attack will fuel widespread news reports and become socially viral almost immediately. Meanwhile, we hear almost nothing about balloon-related deaths. And if perceived risk was even remotely proportionate to actual risk, we would never use staircases: 5,000 times as many people die each year from staircase accidents as they do from shark attacks.

Use this variation of familiarity by focusing on key challenges like:

- New or tightening regulations
- Product end of life or technical cliffs
- Changing customer needs
- Missed opportunities

These situational challenges often are effectively communicated via dramatic loss stories and reports. For example, a financial software company might showcase a story in which a manufacturer had its customer and vendor data stolen. Perhaps the theft occurred because it was using outdated software that was noncompliant with new regulations or it was past end of life and no longer supported with security updates.

Along with helping customers to recognize the business threats your product addresses, it also is important to communicate how your product helps address more personal/professional concerns:

- Job security
- Professional reputation
- Increased work stress
- Advancement
- Potential legal action
- Lack of personal time

Over time, creating challenge recognition can also help accelerate your brand recognition as customers begin associating your product with the ability to address both business and personal risks.

## The Halo Effect Bias

The halo effect refers to the tendency to make prompt observations about someone or something as part of a first impression, and then allowing those initial observations to influence how we interpret subsequent information about that person or thing.

More commonly recognized in our first impressions of people—you never get a second chance to make a first impression—in the marketing realm the halo effect significantly affects how customers form their first impressions of products and brands. Marketers need to promptly establish a positive first impression among prospective customers. This is key because the customer will interpret future information about your product as supporting those initial positive impressions.

Unless you're a heavy advertiser in your marketplace, most B2B customers will develop their first impression of your product via your website. A smaller portion may be introduced to your company at your exhibit booth at a trade event.

To make that positive first impression, you've likely placed a lot of attention on the messaging for your website and tradeshow exhibits. But how effective is your messaging? Does it clearly communicate your value proposition? Is that value proposition unique? Or is it similar to what your primary competitors are saying?

Several factors can keep you from making that positive first



Biases not only affect our marketing decisions, but also our customers' purchase decisions."



impression. Your value proposition may not be aligned to true customer needs. Your sales messaging may lack real differentiation. Or you may simply be communicating your information in the wrong order. But one of the most common mistakes is that your value proposition takes too long for customers to truly understand. This is a real challenge—and a common mistake for marketers of complex products. This is especially difficult to overcome because today's customers face ever-expanding content bombardment, not to mention an ever-shrinking attention span. The average attention span of people has shrunk from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds today. That's one second shorter than the attention span of a goldfish! So, the time to deliver a clear, concise value proposition that resonates is limited.

While your value proposition and sales messaging are vital for a positive first impression, there are other ways to leverage the halo effect. One means is to associate your company with some of your more well-known and successful customers. For example, well-designed company websites and other sales tools often showcase a series of recognizable customer logos. Associating your company with a recognized, highly regarded customer lets some of that customer's positive image rub off on your company. Customer success stories and testimonial videos also are useful in leveraging the halo effect to your benefit.

## Sharks vs. Balloons

Cognitive biases creep into the way we communicate as well as into the way we process and understand information. These often-unconscious biases can cause people to make improper conclusions that lead to bad decisions. It's important to recognize that these biases not only affect our marketing decisions, but also our customers' purchase decisions. Once we understand that, we can find ways to leverage those biases to improve our marketing efforts.

The intense fear of sharks hasn't always been the case. Most people didn't think about them much ... until the summer of 1975. That's when a young filmmaker named Steven Spielberg released a movie named *Jaws* and turned great white sharks into the deadly sea monsters we fear so much today—more than 40 years later.

Meanwhile, we still love balloons. 🎈

## About the Author

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### EDITOR'S NOTE

To learn more about behavioral economics and how we make decisions using subconscious filters influenced by what we read, hear and experience, see Neil Baron and Robert Hatcher's article "It's All in Your Head: The Effective of Cognitive Bias on Our Decisions and Our Products," published in the spring 2019 issue of *The Pragmatic*.

# Your Kumbaya Moment Awaits.



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# STRENGTHEN YOUR Strategic Smarts

BY ART PETTY

**T**HE ONLY THING MORE EXASPERATING than being told “You’ve got to develop your executive presence” during your performance evaluation is “You’ve got to think and act more strategically.” While various reactions—many unfit for print—jump to mind, there’s often a kernel of truth in these vague statements. And while sorting out how to develop your presence or strategic thinking skills is challenging, it is surmountable.

## A Strategic Pause

Most organizations use competency models to evaluate and support team members’ development. Rather than digging into the nitty-gritty of these models, I’ve found it helpful for individuals to think in terms of a simpler structural model called Foundations + 4 Pillars.

Each of us builds our lives and careers on core values tied to culture, faith, environment and life experiences. Add technical or vocational skills, your broader sense of purpose and your drive to succeed, and this describes your professional foundation. We then build four pillars on this foundation that are essential for career success:

- 1. Operational agility:** how well we translate issues into outcomes required for success in our organization
- 2. Communication adaptability:** how we adjust and adapt our approaches and styles in varying communications settings (this is home to the elusive concept of “executive presence”)
- 3. Leadership flexibility:** how we adjust our leadership style and behaviors to meet the needs of a given situation
- 4. Strategic and critical thinking:** how we explore, assess, frame and decide—particularly in situations of ambiguity (this is where strategic intelligence lives)

Building these pillars is a career-long learning effort that demands deliberate focus, constant experimentation and ongoing feedback and coaching.

## The Difference Maker

Consider the consummate get-it-done professionals who draw upon their operational agility and communication adaptability strengths. And then there are the masters at working across organizations. These professionals draw upon their leadership flexibility. Many product managers show tremendous strength in these areas.

But it’s the fourth pillar—strategic and critical thinking—that is seen less frequently in most workplaces. Professionals who show abilities in this area are great at looking

at complex problems and developing novel solutions that seize opportunities or mitigate emerging risks. These individuals see patterns in the noise of the marketplace and market forces, and they translate what they see into approaches and decisions that help their companies win.

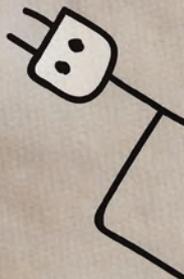
While it might seem like strategic and critical thinkers have won the genetic lottery when it comes to these skills, it is possible for everyone to build their strength in these areas. It

happens by learning to think differently about customers, roles and industries.

But before diving into these exercises, it’s important to remember that developing your strategic intelligence is a journey, not a destination. Relax and recognize that great strategists became what they are through time, experimentation and a fierce desire to learn and grow. You will develop on your path at your own pace.



**Developing your strategic intelligence is a journey, not a destination.”**





### Strengthen Your Decision-Making Muscles

Much like your actual muscles, your decision-making abilities respond to exercise and deliberate strengthening. Unfortunately, the notion of strengthening as a decision maker is virtually nonexistent in traditional development programs. That's annoyingly ironic given the importance of decision making in our individual, team and organizational success.

An easy way to start this new workout routine is to maintain a journal and track your decisions and outcomes over time. Document your assumptions, note how issues are framed and identify the expected outcomes. Compare results with expectations and conduct a post-mortem on your decision process. In the future, experiment with alternate framing and invite objective outsiders to challenge your thinking. By studying your tendencies and biases, you can work to mitigate them for subsequent decisions.

“Decision-making abilities respond to exercise and deliberate strengthening.”

Not convinced? Remember, someone else usually has a voice in whether you succeed, and the choice is mostly a function of that person's confidence in your decision-making ability. The more those in power trust you to make the right decisions, the greater your opportunities.

### War-Game or Red-Team Your Competitive Situation

Stress-testing your assumptions and simulating different approaches or strategies is a potent teacher that challenges us to look at the bigger picture and key decision issues. If your organization hasn't institutionalized this process, be proactive and incorporate stress testing into your team's activities. The group orientation and practice provide everyone the opportunity to think through and around both company and competitors' strategies.

### Find Trigger Events in the World and Connect Them

“Why will the emergence of autonomous vehicles lead to a huge demand for artificial hearts?” When I've posed this question to different groups, the first answers tend to ignore trigger events. While it's amusing to think about the fear and stress of moving at a high speed in a car with no human driving, it's also the wrong way to look at the question.

A practiced critical thinker views the emergence of autonomous vehicles as a trigger event. In this instance, one line of reasoning suggests that as autonomous vehicles become ubiquitous, the number of fatalities from accidents in intersections should shrink or disappear. Because a good number of hearts (and other organs) for transplantation come from accidents at intersections, it's reasonable to predict a shortage. Combine this trigger event with the broader trend of an aging population, and the lack of transplant organs occurs at a time when demand is rising—likely catalyzing innovation and investment.

Whether the heart scenario will manifest as described is less the issue than prompting you to look for trigger events and connect them to your environment.

### Break Down Your Industry Walls

One of the most successful product managers I've known recognized the tendency of the companies in her industry to think in the narrow confines of their own walls. She pushed her product team to look at unrelated industries for trends, approaches and ideas and then apply selected concepts to her company. These efforts opened multiple markets, facilitated new partner relationships and provided ideas for rethinking several aspects of their operations.

This application of analogic thinking proved brilliant, and it's one we all can replicate. Push yourself and your team to look beyond your industry to ask—and answer—questions like “What does this mean for us?” and “What, if anything, should we do with these insights?”



**Immersing yourself in something outside of your day job can be incredibly cathartic.”**

### Get a Hobby and Go Deep

Who knew that a calligraphy class would one day connect to innovations that changed our world? But it was Steve Jobs' fascination with calligraphy that led to the unique typefaces and fonts in the original Macintosh computer. This differentiation helped carve a unique brand persona for Apple.

There's no guarantee that your hobby will lead to nearly a trillion dollars in market capitalization; however, it will expose you to different ideas, different ways of thinking and a separate network of individuals with unique interests and skill sets. These are the raw ingredients for new ways of looking at situations. As a bonus, immersing yourself in something outside of your day job is incredibly cathartic and can be transformational.

### The Bottom Line

Yes, hearing “You need to be more strategic” is an annoying piece of vague feedback. However, instead of dismissing the input, reframe it and seek opportunities to think and look differently at situations. The tools here offer healthy exercises to level-up your strategic thinking and grow that professional pillar. How you apply your strengthened abilities is, of course, another critical-thinking puzzle to solve. 



**Push yourself and your team to look beyond your industry.”**

### Learn to Love and Thrive in Ambiguity

“I don't know where to start on solving this problem!” a client recently said to me. I shocked her by replying, “That's great!” But I meant it.

When there's no clear starting point and no pre-established way forward, you are challenged to think creatively and innovatively. Developing unique solutions for novel situations stretches and strengthens your strategic-thinking muscles. I regularly counsel clients to seek challenges with high degrees of ambiguity as a core part of their development programs.

One caveat: Fear of being wrong keeps many individuals from embracing these moments of ambiguity. Pressures from the organizational culture or the boss are primary contributors to fear in the workplace. Remember that the four pillars play best together.

Your communication adaptability is essential for navigating challenging conversations with your boss and key stakeholders. Operational agility and leadership flexibility are required to bring ideas to life. Use your skills, embrace the ambiguity and learn from your experience.



**Developing unique solutions for novel situations stretches and strengthens your strategic-thinking muscles.”**

### About the Author

**Art Petty** is an executive and emerging-leader coach and leadership/communication workshop developer and leader. He also writes the Management Excellence blog ([artpetty.com/blog](http://artpetty.com/blog)) and Leadership Caffeine articles and books. He can be reached at [art.petty@artpetty.com](mailto:art.petty@artpetty.com). Connect with him on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/artpetty](https://www.linkedin.com/in/artpetty) or follow him on Twitter@artpetty.



## TO PUT YOUR NEXT PRESENTATION INTO HIGH GEAR

BY CANDIANNE HAACKE

**T**HE NO. 1 SECRET TO HAVING A SUCCESSFUL executive presentation is to KEEP. IT. SIMPLE. Nearly three-quarters of all initiatives fail, and those failures—which take both a human and economic toll—are usually attributable to a simple lack of focus. Think about this: How many times have you sat in a presentation that left attendees looking (and probably feeling) confused? Conversely, how many times have you watched a presentation sail along and end with everyone on a clear path forward?

The art and science of delivering a solid presentation may seem like a “nice to have” rather than a “have to have,” but the reality is that, by applying basic communications principles to your presentations, you will find yourself on the road to leadership support—and successfully accomplishing your projects more quickly. But delivering a presentation that resonates in the hearts and minds of executives doesn’t just happen. It requires four shifts in your approach.

### Shift 1: Know Your ‘Who’

People don’t make decisions based on facts alone. Knowing your audience allows you to connect in ways that resonate and increase your overall credibility. It adds a level of authenticity to your presentation and empowers you to be open, honest and real—three key factors that increase trust. There are several ways you can learn your audience:

- Research them online; look for bios
- Understand their communication preferences based on recent speeches or questions they’ve asked
- Observe their environment (e.g., how they organize themselves, what they display in their offices)

### PREPARING YOUR PRESENTATION

To maximize productivity when creating your presentation, answer four key questions:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1 WHO ARE YOU PRESENTING TO?</b><br/>Consider your audience’s problems, motives and background.</p>       | <p><b>3 WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID?</b><br/>Include three to seven main points and details that will get your message across clearly and credibly. Move your audience toward the desired state, the new bliss. Include stories, metaphors and visuals to increase retention. Finally, include a call to action (what and by when).</p> |
| <p><b>2 WHY ARE YOU PRESENTING?</b><br/>Keep your purpose firmly in mind; every sentence should advance it.</p> | <p><b>4 HOW WILL YOU SAY (OR SHOW) IT?</b><br/>Reflect an understanding of your audience’s communication and decision-making preferences.</p>   |



**Tension that needs to be resolved is an important characteristic of any good story.”**

Once you've identified the audience members who may have the biggest effect on the adoption of your idea, answer the following questions to establish common ground:

- What are they like? Why are they here?
- What keeps them up at night?
- How can you solve their problems?
- How might they resist your message or ideas?
- How do they make decisions (slowly or quickly, charismatically, skeptically, based on past experiences)?
- What did they say in their most recent discussions and how did they say it?
- Which interrogatives (why, what, how, who) do they use when asking questions?

### Shift 2: Know Your 'Why'

Once you know *who* you're presenting to, identify *why* you're presenting. Miss this shift and your audience won't know where to focus their attention or what they're supposed to do with your ideas. You must squarely fix your purpose in your mind before creating your presentation to best communicate your story.

Define the big idea in a complete sentence, which includes a subject (your audience) and a verb (action). When asked what your presentation is about, don't say, "software updates." Instead say, "Your department will struggle to meet key production deadlines until we update the workflow management software." Also known as your elevator pitch, put the focus on what's at stake.

When forming your purpose, consider:

- What is your audience's view or position on the topic?
- What is the audience's experience with the subject?
- How does your idea benefit the group?

- What are the benefits to the audience's individual spheres (peers, direct reports, followers)?
- How will people, both internally and externally, be affected?

Alternately, consider why you are presenting. What do you bring to the table that others don't? Why is your executive asking you specifically to present? What is his or her pain point and how does it relate to other options, like hiring an outside subject-matter expert to present? If you're not addressing your executive's pain, your presentation is simply interesting. Your goal is to extrapolate and make your insights clear, so action is taken.

### Shift 3: Know What Needs to Be Said

After articulating your purpose, brainstorm what needs to be said. Using a word cloud or sticky notes, quickly write down as many ideas as possible that explain what you want your executives to know, feel and do. Brainstorm alone, in a group and alone again. Go for quantity, not quality. When brainstorming:

- Gather any existing content that is relevant to your idea
- Build on existing content by considering it from a new angle and challenging traditional thinking
- Create new content by experimenting and following your intuition

Next, choose three to seven of your best ideas. Any fewer and this could be addressed in an email or conversation; any more is too many for the average person to remember. As you choose your ideas, remember to tell your executives what they need to hear.

Continue building the presentation by fleshing out your three to seven ideas. Show your logic as simply and clearly as possible and include enough specifics to establish credibility. Explicitly state what you want your audience to do and by when (e.g., President John F. Kennedy's bold aspiration to go to the moon in this decade). If your audience members remember nothing else, they should recall your three to seven ideas—and at least one of these points should indicate what you want your audience to know, feel and do.

Sentences now in hand, set aside uninterrupted time to write and produce your presentation as quickly as possible without stopping to edit. Begin by describing life as the audience knows it (what is), and then introduce your ideas (what could be). The gap between what is and what could be creates tension that needs to be resolved—an important characteristic of any good story.

As you introduce your ideas, move back and forth between what is and what could be to highlight the juxtaposition. Tell stories and metaphors to help listeners recall what they've heard from you and use sensory words to make an emotional connection. Stories add viscosity that makes information stick in people's hearts and minds. Only presenting facts and figures leaves the audience to decide on its own how to process the information—and it's hard to untangle a wrong conclusion.



A few words of caution:

- Keep it simple; slides should have one header with two or three bullets
- Bullet points should contain a verb (action), object (subject) and adverb (timeframe)
- Don't use too many stories or metaphors
- Use common, everyday comparisons that your audience will understand
- Tell stories that are unique, but not out of left field

Next, expand your stories around one of five basic plots:

- **Origin:** the present is understood by knowing the past. This creates understanding of the present by reflecting on history.
- **Rags to riches:** the situation changes from bad to good. This evokes empathy and gets the audience to cheer for down-on-their-luck characters.
- **Rebirth:** a literal or figurative near-death situation that is the genesis of change. This evokes optimism to reverse a bad situation.
- **Overcoming the monster:** something bad or evil is eliminated. This induces righteous anger and compels people to ward something off.
- **Quest:** a seemingly unachievable goal is achieved. This provides hope and inspires problem-solving.

When telling your story or metaphor, include visuals such as video, photos, infographics or charts. People recall only 10% of what is said after 72 hours. That rate increases to 65% when information is presented visually, according to *Brain Rules* author John Medina. But every visual element should have a function. If it doesn't, remove it.

#### Shift 4: Know How to Say or Show It

Presenting to leadership doesn't have to be a great mystery. Yes, people communicate in a variety of ways, but

there are common patterns people follow. Let's focus on four patterns:

- **Facts:** logical, analytical, quantitative
- **Form:** organized, sequential, planned, detailed
- **Feelings:** interpersonal, kinesthetic, emotional
- **Futures:** holistic, intuitive, integrated and synthesized

The way you prefer to communicate and learn may not be the way your audience prefers. As such, it's important to communicate your ideas based on your audience's preferences or you won't keep people's attention. This becomes increasingly important when presenting in group settings, as you'll need to communicate to all preferences.

#### Set the Stage for Success

Seventy percent of strategies fail, and the No. 1 reason why is because they never captured the hearts and minds of their audiences, according to Nitin Nohria and Michael Beer in a *Harvard Business Review* article. Presentations are no different: They must capture the hearts and minds to influence change. This is accomplished by knowing your audience, defining the purpose of your presentation, supporting your purpose and addressing your audience's communication preferences. 

#### About the Author

**Candianne Haacke** is a senior associate in the communication department at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She can be reached at haackeca@churchofjesuschrist.org or connect with her on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/candianne-haacke-0324324](https://www.linkedin.com/in/candianne-haacke-0324324). The author would like to acknowledge Michael Colemere, a communication executive, for his trust and years of coaching on this subject.



## COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

### FACTS

To determine whether you are communicating in a facts-based manner, ask yourself:

- ✓ Does the presentation use facts?
- ✓ Is my information quantified?
- ✓ Do I show clear analysis?
- ✓ Is the information presented logical and to the point?

### FORM

To determine whether you are communicating in a form-based manner, ask yourself:

- ✓ Does my presentation provide details?
- ✓ Is it in a sequential order?
- ✓ Is it presented in an appropriate format?
- ✓ Is it neat?

### FEELINGS

To determine whether you are communicating in a feelings-based manner, ask yourself:

- ✓ Does it acknowledge emotional issues?
- ✓ How does it relate to the audience?
- ✓ Does it include personal examples to illustrate my point?
- ✓ Is it helpful and user-friendly?

### FUTURES

To determine whether you are communicating in a futures-based manner, ask yourself:

- ✓ Is my presentation visual and colorful?
- ✓ Did I integrate metaphors into the presentation?

“Ahem.”



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BY  
MIKE  
BELSITO

# True Confessions from the Front Lines

**W**E MEET ALL SORTS OF PRODUCT PROFESSIONALS at Product Collective, and they have all sorts of stories. With

thousands of product people from around the world participating in our INDUSTRY Interview live video chats, conversing in our private Slack channels and attending our INDUSTRY conferences, we often hear them lamenting the variety of issues they face every day.

But it made me think, “What aren’t they telling us?” So, I decided to find out.

I engaged our Product Collective community of more than 20,000 product people and asked them to confess things—through an anonymous outlet—about their work that they might not otherwise be comfortable sharing. These confessions could be about their typical day, their experience working with a variety of teams ... anything. Following are some of their responses, and some food for thought.



**Prioritization of work often is decided by the loudest voice, not what will deliver the most value to customers.**

—Chief Product Officer

As product people, we know that the loudest person in the room shouldn’t be the one to drive priorities. But the reality is, it happens. While it’s easy to think that less experienced product professionals would let this happen, would it surprise you to know that seasoned product leaders are still vulnerable to this trap? Have you considered that this may not always be a bad thing?

The loudest person in the room may be a senior executive or sales professional. In these cases, these voices may be the ones who are frequently in front of customers. Are they being loud about a product or feature that is strategically right for the company? Or are they simply advocating passionately about a feature a customer is begging for, but may not be the right one to offer? When we automatically give in to the loudest person, it can be hard to know.

**I suggest features or strategies adjacent to the one I really want. I do this to trigger my team or stakeholders to arrive at what I’m looking for—but make them feel like they’re doing it on their own. It feels manipulative, but I get the results and buy-in that I want.**

—Product Manager

Opinions from team members and stakeholders should be valued and respected. But my guess is that a lot of people have also used this strategy—either consciously or subconsciously. If we have a strong intuition about something, it’s natural for us to try to coax others into seeing things our way. One of the best ways do that is to plant seeds for ideas to take root, and then have our team members believe we’re seeing things their way.

Should product professionals actively, consciously manipulate their teams and stakeholders? Certainly not. After all, input from the rest of the team will help make what we’re building better. But this strategy can work to produce the desired results.

**Product managers are not the CEO of the product.**  
—Product Manager

Some product managers like to call themselves the CEO of Product. It's a title that exudes importance. But here's the thing: Product managers aren't the CEOs of anything. It's true that we have influence over product decisions, we seek customer insights and we corral our internal teams to make sure we're making progress on building a product. But we're not CEOs.

CEOs set high-level strategy. They're responsible for ensuring that the right team members are in the right places—and they have the authority to fire them if they're not. CEOs don't have influence; they have authority.

This isn't to say that a product manager's job isn't important. The right product manager can make all the difference in a company's ability to consistently produce profitable products that customers want and need. But product managers aren't CEOs—they're product managers.

**Secrets are power.**  
—Startup Managing Director

This is a meta confession, as it suggests that the notion of having secrets in the first place equates to having some level of power. The individual who made this confession went on to suggest that the power

someone wields when having and keeping a secret can be good or bad—it's all up to the person who has the secret.

Have you ever put some extra padding into your budget to ensure you're covered when starting a project? Have you ever intentionally underpromised because you know you'll overdeliver and earn goodwill? Have you ever chosen "friendly" KPIs that you knew would help results look more favorable?

We've probably all made decisions like these, and they haven't been made with malicious intent. Yet, these still are the types of decisions that involve a secret that we're using to our advantage.

### **It All Comes Down to People**

What can we make from these confessions? The big takeaway is, product people are just that: people. Like everyone else, we're not immune to the human tendencies to have a few secrets. And yes, those secrets can equate to power—with the outcome hopefully being to make better products for everyone. 

### **About the Author**

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SECRETS  
REVEALED

# A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Put this issue's ideas into action.

## Put Numbers to Work for You

80% of all customer data is wasted.

Philip Alexander

PAGE 7

## Leverage Your Innate Talents to Get Ahead

You leverage your emotional intelligence to gain trust and become a better, stronger product manager.

Prerna Singh

PAGE 13

## Keep Your Solutions Simple

A big driver for me is to solve problems in the simplest manner possible.

Greg Council

PAGE 19

## Understand Your Customers' Pain Points

All the disruptions of the past five or 10 years all solve for that last-mile problem.

Vincent Lo

PAGE 23

## Get an Edge Before Making a Recommendation

With a gold mine of business data, you have an opportunity to predict what is likely to happen.

Sriram Parthasarathy

PAGE 26

## Use Digital Intelligence to Assess the Competition

Corporate marketing often is an underutilized resource that should be tapped for further insights.

Alok Vasudeva

PAGE 34

## Understand How People Think and Flex Your Marketing in Kind

Cognitive biases have a far greater effect on B2B customer decisions than you might think.

Rod Griffith

PAGE 36

## Find Patterns Amid Marketplace Noise

Strategic and critical thinking skills help you assess complex problems and develop novel solutions.

Art Petty

PAGE 40

## Apply Basic Communication Principles to Set Your Presentations Apart

70% of strategies fail, and the No. 1 reason why is failure to capture an audience.

Candianne Haacke

PAGE 45



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