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Who's Driving Your Company?

Win RFP
Roll Again

Leverage Distinctive Competence
Roll Again

Conducted Product Reviews

Take Bonus Card

Perform Win/loss Analysis
Advance 3

Measured Customer Satisfaction
Roll Again

?

Lost a Maintenance Renewal
Go Back 2

Became an Expert on the Market
Advance 2

You Have to Work Late
Go Back 1

pmc

Become PMCP Certified

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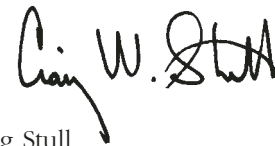
Whose problems are we going to solve?

Many of us ponder how we would run a company if we were in charge. My dream business was one where there were no meetings. Having worked in a variety of large high-tech companies, I grew to despise the unbridled litany of meetings that, as a product manager, I was expected to attend. Having founded Pragmatic Marketing about ten years ago, I must admit that we do still have meetings, but we keep it down to about one per year.

It seems like we often fall into the trap of revisiting topics that had already reached deadlock in previous meetings. Yes, we could solve this issue if we only had a bigger budget, more people, or code delivered on time, none of which is going to happen. One company I visited even invented a code-name for this problem, called "blue." If a topic had already been discussed in a previous meeting with no hope of resolution, someone would simply say, "blue" and everyone knew to stop beating this dead horse and move on.

Many of the topics discussed in meetings are focused on internal problems. This tends to lead product management into a tactical fire-fighting mode, thereby ignoring their role as the messenger for market problems.

Imagine my delight when I visited a company that started their meeting with a simple question, "What customer, or prospective customer, problem are we here to solve today?" I asked myself if I was delirious. Had I heard this correctly? Apparently, all their meetings begin that way. If there isn't a credible answer to the question, serious doubt is cast about the validity of conducting the meeting. I could see that this was a company that took their business seriously, realizing they weren't a technology company, rather, a problem-solving company—who incidentally provided technology as part of the solution.

Craig W. Stull

Craig Stull
President and CEO
Pragmatic Marketing, Inc.

About Pragmatic Marketing, Inc.

Pragmatic Marketing, Inc. was formed in 1993 to provide product marketing training and consulting to high-tech firms by focusing on strategic, market-driven techniques. Pragmatic's training courses emphasize business-oriented definition of market problems, resulting in reduced risk and faster product delivery and adoption. Since its inception, Pragmatic Marketing has successfully graduated over 25,000 product managers and marketing professionals. For more information, visit www.PragmaticMarketing.com or call 480-515-1411.

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Competitor Intelligence

Market Understanding

Customer Understanding

Product Intelligence

A Market Intelligence Primer

By Ed Crowley

So what is Market Intelligence? In its broadest sense, Market Intelligence is the capturing of information relevant to a company's markets. In a more practical context, it is the gathering, analysis, and dissemination of information that is relevant to the market segments your company participates, or wishes to participate in. As the diagram below shows, this encompasses four cornerstones: Competitor Intelligence, Product Intelligence, Market Understanding, and Customer Understanding. Market Intelligence is not just data.

Each of these areas can be a discipline in and of itself. However, their true power comes from the integration of all four of these disciplines. For example, you may know that a competitor is pricing a product below their normal pricing range (Product Intelligence). However, when you also know that this company is planning to replace this product with an entirely new line of products (again Product Intelligence), the reason for their pricing action becomes clear. When this information is combined with the

knowledge that the company's board of directors has challenged the CEO with growing market share (Competitor Intelligence) and that they have a strategic goal of entering into a new market segment (again Competitor Intelligence), this information becomes much more valuable.

Knowing that a competitor has reduced pricing in order to prepare for the entry of a new product line in order to gain share in a new market segment is valuable. But how valuable is this market segment, and what will it take to be successful in the market segment? This is where Market Understanding and Customer Understanding comes in. By analyzing secondary data regarding the market, market share trends, and other market data, one can understand whether this is a segment that will "fuel the competitors" growth, or whether it will be a drain on their resources (Market Understanding). Market Research provides tailored insight into the key customer requirements, loyalty of customers to existing vendors, and other factors which will impact a firm's potential for success in a new

(or existing) market segment. It's this combination of data and analysis that generates information which is relevant to making decisions.

So what does it take to deliver world-class Market Intelligence? There are four key ingredients for a world-class Market Intelligence organization.

1. Data sources and 'field' resources

2. Analytical skills and processes to pull the data together

3. Technology foundation and platforms to deliver, store, process, and distribute the information

4. The support of, and access to, top management

Data gathering and field resources are the foundation for any Market Intelligence organization. This is the set of individuals, processes, and information services (often third party companies such as IDC) that provide the basic data on product shipments, competitor profiling, and other data relevant to the market. A world-class →

Types of MI

Clients	Market Intelligence	Challenges
Board, Executives		Comprehensiveness
	Competitive Understanding Market Understanding	Bridging to the Unknown
Executives, Development, Finance		Depth Complete Picture
Executives, Development, Geography Teams, Sales, Finance	Competitor Intelligence Product Intelligence Market Understanding Customer Understanding	Efficiency Immediacy Cost Management

Competitor Intelligence
- Investments
- Org. Changes
- Strategy

Product Intelligence
- Pricing
- Product Intros
- Promotions

Market Understanding
- Market Share
- Opportunity Forecasts
- Market Volume Analysis

Customer Understanding
- Product Definition
- Customer Requirements
- Loyalty/Satisfaction

MI organization finds ways to turn the entire organization into one large intelligence-gathering unit. By the use of incentives, education, and existing information infrastructure (such as email) the entire organization including Sales, Purchasing, Finance, and Development can become a source for gathering competitive and market information. For example, one Fortune 500 Company offers its Sales people a monetary incentive to turn in competitive tips. As a result, the Sales people are always on the lookout for new products in customer and reseller locations. In some cases, these Sales people have even encountered pre-introduction beta or evaluation products in customer locations. These "first looks" at competitive products can be invaluable in planning pre-emptive actions to attack new products from your competitors.

However, gathering the data is not enough. Without rigorous analysis and insightful reporting, the data remains simply… data, it never becomes useful information. In order for Market Intelligence to be useful, different types of data (market share, competitor product cost data, etc.) must be merged together into information which is relevant to key decision-makers and the decisions they are making. The ultimate test of the data and the analysis is whether it provides the right information in order to let the decision-makers make decisions with confidence.

For example, reporting to the executive team that the company is gaining market share in a specific market is important. However, that data is only marginally beneficial. The data's true power is unlocked when it is combined with information about competitor's actions, sales and channel activities that have resulted in competitive advantage, and a succinct and accurate definition of all the other factors that are driving the market share gains. And it will only

have impact if it is presented in a concise and well-articulated report or presentation.

Another key aspect is having the right information infrastructure to support the flow of information in and out of the analytical team and to ensure that the 'data' is processed with as little manual intervention as possible. For example, often times the data on market share provided by large market data providers such as IDC (International Data Corporation) or DataQuest is not in the right format, or is not defined in such a way as to be useful to the ultimate marketing decision maker. For example, it may be composed of product segmentation based on processor speed (in the case of PC's) when the decision-maker uses segments based on customer types. In this situation, an investment in developing a database to convert the data provider's segments into the segments used by the decision-maker is critical. Without this investment in automation, very experienced market analysts must spend considerable time making manual conversions using spreadsheets, pivot tables, and PowerPoint® slides! This is a very inefficient use of valuable market intelligence resources.

Finally, it is very critical that the Market Intelligence group has access to top decision-makers. This can be a challenge for many reasons. Often this is due to the decision-makers believing that Market Intelligence has little value relative to their own 'gut' instinct. Sometimes the Market Intelligence organization has historically provided "low impact" Market Intelligence and thus has little perceived value with the decision-makers. And in the worst case, it can be the result of missed expectations in the past resulting in low credibility for the Market Intelligence organization.

No matter what the current state of the Market Intelligence team's access to decision-makers is, it is possible to

improve the situation. And the more this situation improves, the better the Market Intelligence team will understand the key decision-maker's needs. This, in turn, will result in better analysis and information being provided to the decision-makers, which in turn will result in greater access to these same decision-makers.

Creating boundaries for Market Intelligence. It is also very important to understand what Market Intelligence is not. Market Intelligence is not a crystal ball into the future! While predictability is improved with good Market Intelligence, there are far too many variables in the market place to ever provide 100% accuracy into the future actions of competitors or customers/markets. It is also important to understand that the Market Intelligence agency is not the decision-making team. In fact, while the Market Intelligence team needs to have an intimate understanding of the issue at hand, to understand the information needs of the decision-maker, and to provide recommendations, they should not be the decision-maker. Why? Because once they become the decision-maker, they have a vested interest in the outcome and lose objectivity. One of the key functions of a good Market Intelligence organization is the ability to monitor the firm's progress versus the market after decisions. This monitoring is important in order to determine if mid-course corrections are needed. In order to provide unbiased monitoring and complete objectivity in

developing recommendations, it is critical that the Market Intelligence team does not 'own' the ultimate decision or have a vested interest in the outcome.

A true-life example. In a recent assignment for a Fortune 500 technology company, I was challenged with turning a division-level Marketing Research organization into a world-class Market Intelligence group. While the Marketing Research team had a significant amount of talent, it was not seen as key to the division's business-making process. By leveraging the existing talent within the team, investing in database development and automation, focusing on key executive information needs, and reaching across organizational boundaries to integrate all types of market intelligence sources, this division-level research team became the premier Market Intelligence organization for the corporation. A few of the key actions that enabled this change are as follows:

- The first step was ensuring that everyone on the team is sharing a common vision for what the Market Intelligence group should be, what it should deliver, and what are the key focus areas for improvement. It is important that the entire team is involved in this process, and that they feel ownership for the final results. Our efforts in this area resulted in a very actionable mission statement, annual group objectives, and the definition of career development paths. As a result, the entire team was bought into the process and focused on achieving world-class status.

- We invested significant time and financial resources in building databases and tools to automate the analysis process. In fact, at one point, one analyst spent about six months of full time effort managing the development of these tools. This was a difficult investment to make since the team was already understaffed. However, as a result of enabling these tools, we were able to go from having three staff members spending 80% of their time in generating one global market share report on a quarterly basis, to having one staff member and two interns spending 50% of their time in generating 42 highly-segmented (and impactful) market share reports over the course of a year. As a result of this significant productivity improvement, the team is able to spend significantly more time in developing customized analysis, which is highly-tuned to the executives needs.

- Our team began hosting worldwide/cross-divisional summits for the marketing research and competitive analysis units within the corporation. These summits resulted in significant collaboration across teams and a better flow of information and analysis. This improved the information flows and the entire organization's analysis.

- During the early stages of this assignment, and on a regular basis thereafter, the team would meet with executives and internal clients to understand what information they needed, what they were not getting, and what was working well. As a result of these meetings, and following through with information tuned to the clients and executives needs, the team became "the" source for market information. From the board level, to other Marketing Intelligence teams, to the clients, this team became the source for critical Market Information. In fact, this information gathering

and analysis process became a critical and required component of the decision-making process.

Over the course of three years, this team transitioned from a very effective marketing research team to a world-class Market Intelligence organization, which is a model and resource for the entire organization. In fact, the team became so effective that they began driving corporate-level issues such as developing a corporate-wide market-forecasting model. This model has become the foundation for the executive strategic planning process.

In summary, there are many critical elements to building a world-class Market Intelligence team. And it is not a quick process. However, with time, investment, and patience, the development of a world-class Market Intelligence team is possible. And this team can become a strategic asset to the company. **pm·c**

Ed Crowley has held positions in marketing and general management for both start-up and Fortune 100 companies including IntelliQuest, Texas Instruments, DataProducts, QMS, and VTEL. Ed has developed and managed world-class Market Intelligence systems for both manufacturers and Market Intelligence vendors in the technology market. Currently, Ed is manager of world-wide printer marketing for Lexmark International's Product Solutions and Services Division and can be contacted at eacrowley@photizogroup.com.

Ed is also the Executive Editor for the Intelligence Briefing, a newsletter for Market Intelligence professionals and marketing decisions makers. This newsletter offers insights and how-to-tips for developing Market Intelligence capabilities. Subscriptions to the Intelligence Briefing are available at www.photizogroup.com.

Win/Loss Analysis

By Sue Duris

We have all seen it written that product managers should get out of the office and visit customers, or, at the very least, telephone one customer a week. This is important not only for customer retention reasons, but also for competitive analysis and product performance reasons as well. With the state of the economy, and everything product managers have on their plates these days, that is a task easier said than done.

But what if product managers started participating in the back-end of a sales win or loss? If a win, the product manager would be helping to develop the new relationship, resulting in retention and obtaining valuable customer feedback or, in the event of a loss, finding out the reasons for the loss, be it a product issue, sales issue or support issue, possibly resulting in the prospect using the company as a backup vendor or placing the company on the "short list" for future proposals.

Regardless, the product manager becomes the objective third party who helps the company and customers/prospects have better success in converting sales. Product Management can easily sell the Sales team on performing this task by stating the benefits of doing so:

- Product Management can perform the function, thus saving the sales team valuable time.

- Product Management acts as an objective third party, which will result in a prospect or customer's ability to be more open about the sales win or loss.

- Product Management obtains feedback on how to make products more robust, thus resulting in more sales down the road.

So, now that you are conducting win/loss analysis, what is the next step? Use the following handy checklist and you will be on your way to performing effective win/loss analyses.

Before the interview

☐ **Sit down with the sales team involved in the win or loss.** Be sure to include the highest-ranking Sales person in the discussion. Get the Sales team's input as to the background such as how the company got involved in the proposal, the type of relationship they had/have with the customer/prospect, sales processes involved, products or solutions used to close the sale, the result, and whether they anticipated this result.

☐ **Schedule the interview with the customer/prospect.** Let them know in advance the topics you plan to discuss.

During the interview

☐ Introduce yourself and thank the prospect/customer for their time.

☐ Explain upfront that the purpose of the interview is to learn as much as possible about the customer or prospect's perceptions and experience during the recent sales process so your organization can continually improve.

☐ Discuss confidentiality. State that you want to communicate feedback throughout your organization, but if the customer/prospect feels there are certain aspects that are too sensitive, they should be identified during the conversation.

Checklist for Product Managers

Ascertain the following:

- [ ] Confirm the opportunity, product/solutions, and get customer/prospect to expound on it. What "pain" did/didn't we solve and what are customer/prospect's expectations in our ability to solve that pain?

- [ ] Find out the other firms that were competing for the business. Why was your firm included in the mix? How and why did the customer/prospect make it a competitive process?

- [ ] Overall, why did/didn't your company win the business?

- [ ] Explain the decision-making process. Who was involved in the decision? What were the key selection criteria?

- [ ] What was the customer/prospect's perception of the quality of the Sales team's management of the relationship? Did the customer/prospect meet other personnel from your organization? What was the customer/prospect's perception of them?

- [ ] What were the customer/prospect's thoughts about your proposal and presentation?

- [ ] Was the customer/prospect comfortable with your capabilities? Which capabilities were most important to them?

- [ ] What were the customer/prospect's thoughts about your pricing? Was the customer/prospect able to determine true value from your pricing?
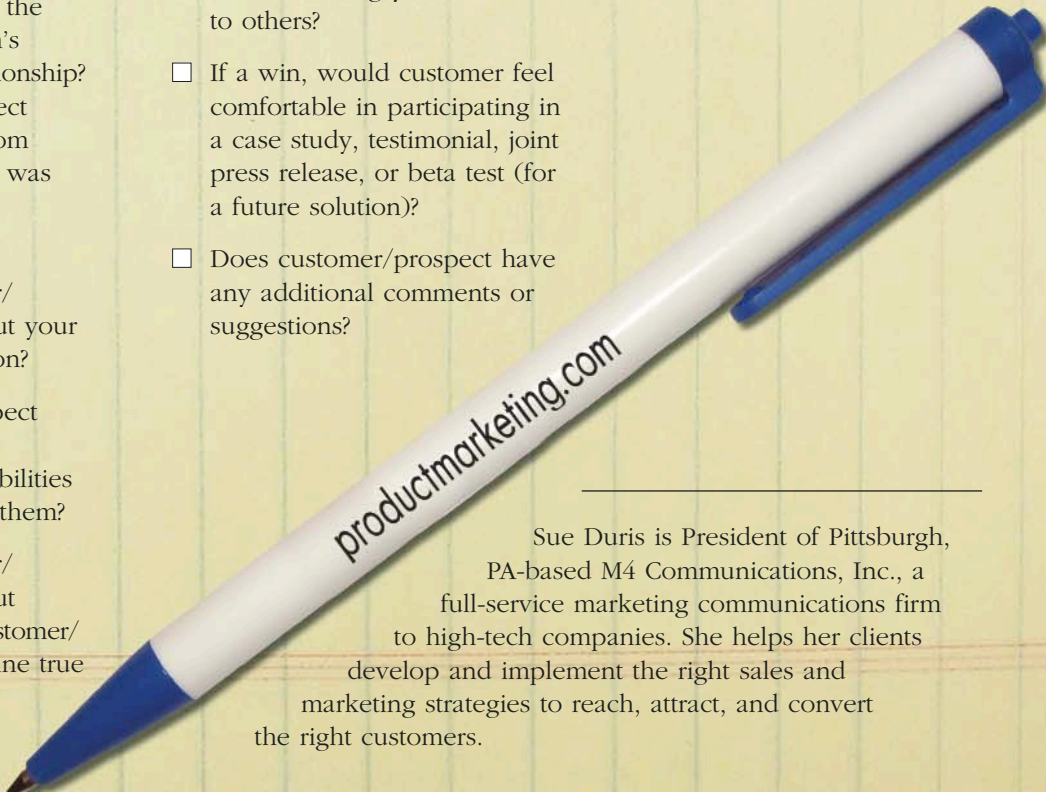
- [ ] How did you stack up against the competition? What did the customer/prospect view as your strengths and weaknesses? What did the customer/prospect view as your competitors' strengths and weaknesses?

- [ ] Did the customer/prospect call your references? If so, were they helpful?

- [ ] What was the customer/prospect's perception of your organization before entering the buying cycle? Did the perception change? If so, how did it change?

- [ ] What advice would the customer/prospect give you for working with them in the future?

- [ ] Would the customer/prospect feel comfortable in recommending your solutions to others?

- [ ] If a win, would customer feel comfortable in participating in a case study, testimonial, joint press release, or beta test (for a future solution)?

- [ ] Does customer/prospect have any additional comments or suggestions?

Post-interview

- [ ] Send a thank you note to the customer/prospect.

- [ ] Summarize in writing the notes from the interview and distribute them to appropriate internal personnel.

- [ ] Conduct the debriefing meeting and list any action items that came out of the meeting.

Win/Loss Analysis should be conducted regardless of whether business was won or lost. Consistently implementing this process will make your solutions and your company more valuable, and build more credibility in the eyes of your customers and prospects.

pm·c

Sue Duris is President of Pittsburgh, PA-based M4 Communications, Inc., a full-service marketing communications firm to high-tech companies. She helps her clients develop and implement the right sales and marketing strategies to reach, attract, and convert the right customers.

Phil Myers, President and CEO, Cyclone Commerce

"To make marketing a strategic weapon in your business, Pragmatic Marketing's Framework is your blueprint. I have used it for ten years and it works."

– *Phil Myers*
President and CEO
Cyclone Commerce

If you are trying to leverage your investment in product management and marketing, the first place to start is with a proven methodology. Pragmatic Marketing® has always focused on the unique challenges of managing and marketing high-tech products.

The Pragmatic Framework has been fine-tuned by 25,000 attendees over 10 years and has been proven to create high-tech products that customers want to buy. Pragmatic delivers on the promise in its name—they present a practical course of action that really works.

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Product Management and RFPs

One of the biggest headaches for software companies of all sizes is the creation of Requests for Proposal (RFPs). RFPs are labor-intensive, exhaustive and exhausting efforts to tout the product. The effort to produce RFPs can be a drain on precious resources in Sales, Marketing, and Engineering, and product managers get involved more often than they wish they did.

The blood, sweat and tears expended on an RFP is all the more frustrating because you're left in doubt about whether it really makes any difference in winning the sale. Often the RFP is a cruel exercise in jumping through hoops for a prospect that is using you as "column fodder." You're column fodder if your purpose is to provide a point of comparison, a systematic review with the pretense of objectivity that only serves to back up an emotional decision, made long ago, to go with a product they like—somebody else's product.

Yet despite what they tell people in sales training, you can't exactly blow off the whole RFP process and still hope to win a sale. While it's up to the sales rep to make sure that you have not been selected as column fodder, your company must create an RFP that:

- stands out from the others

- demonstrates the uniqueness of your product

- wins over the doubters

- gets you to the next step in the sales process

So if you must do RFPs, how can you make the whole experience a little less painful? How can you streamline the process so that fewer resources are spent on what is arguably an ineffective way to make a sale? Read on for some guidelines to focus the RFP process.

Sales owns the RFP

Lots of people help with RFPs, but Sales has to own them. Yes, it's business for your whole company, but it's their commission checks we're talking about. The head of Sales must be the one ultimately responsible for making sure RFPs happen, and happen well.

Everyone is tempted to pass along the RFP like a hot potato, so don't let Sales foist it off on Marketing or Product Management.

Marketing ensures the messaging

Marketing, while not owning RFPs, helps review the wording on both the surface and at a deeper level. First, Marketing ensures that the content is okay, with correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, and style. Marketing weaves the correct messages about benefits and differentiation from your competition.

When there's a new question, one you haven't had to answer before, have Marketing draft the first version, then you should review and approve the final wording.

Product management provides the benefits

The product manager understands the benefits of the product, and can tell good stories of how others have used it to their advantage. The product manager also knows what to say to undermine the selling points of the competition.

The role of product manager is to intervene when needed to augment existing materials or draft new materials. Use your understanding of the product, on both the technical and marketing levels, to explain how good the product can be—without overstepping the bounds and committing to functionality it doesn't do.

By Jacques Murphy
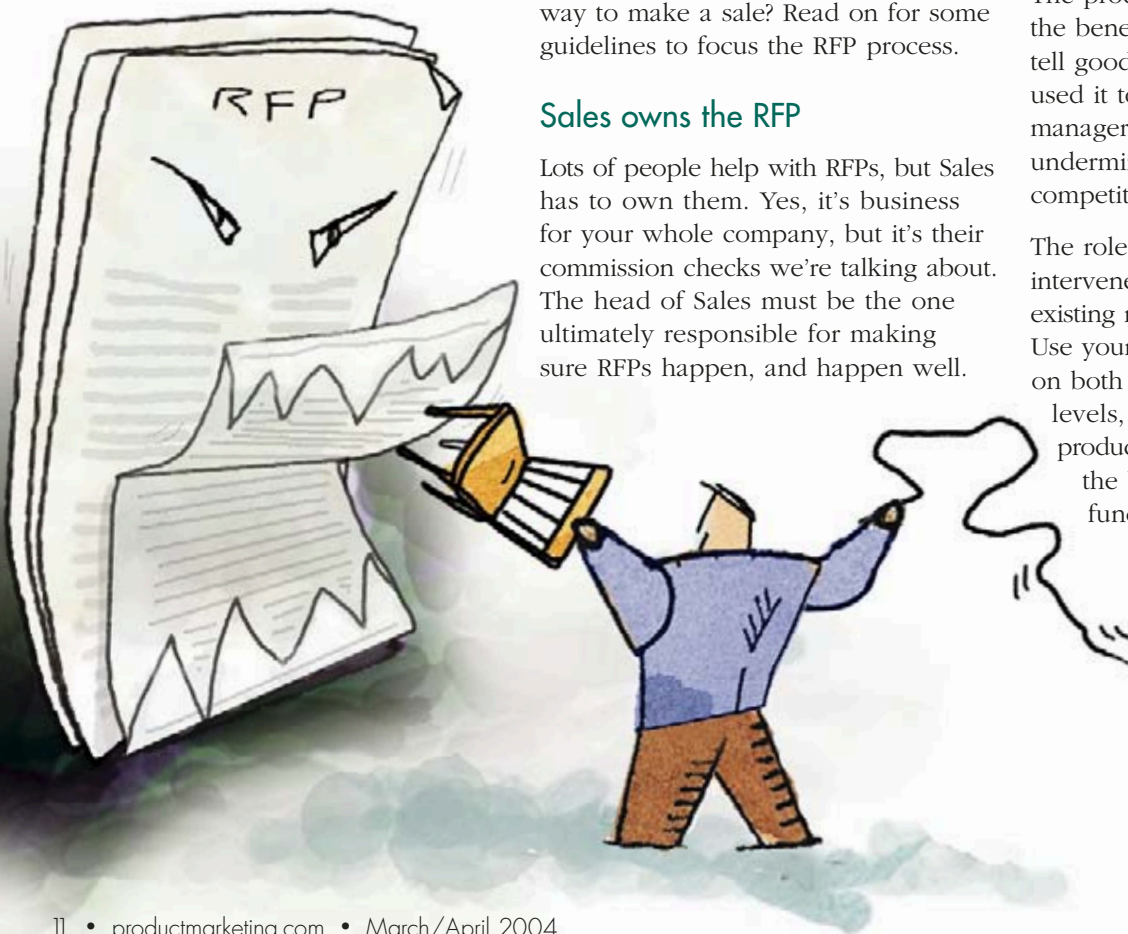
Sales engineers do the footwork

Sales engineers are the ones who work with the sales reps (an on-demand effort, as with so many sales activities) to build the RFP. This includes:

• assigning who provides content

• scheduling work and review meetings

• answering all questions

• requesting help with specific answers

• riding herd on all the content providers

• dotting the i's and crossing the t's

A sales engineer should be the one to put together the first draft of the RFP, getting it as complete as possible, following the guidelines from the initial strategy discussions before sending it around for review and filling in the holes.

Build a knowledge base

If Marketing and Product Management are going to spend the extensive amount of time it takes to strategize, focus the content, and write appealing answers, all that hard work better be put to good use over and over again.

Build a knowledge base that collects, categorizes (and even indexes) all answers to past RFPs, incorporating content from each RFP as it is sent out, to be used as the knowledge base to answer future RFP questions. This can be as simple as a word processing document, with a table of contents or index, or a number of documents that are categorized and indexed using a spreadsheet listing the appropriate filename next to a keyword or under a category. The sales engineer's job is to use this knowledge base to build the first draft of the RFP.

Create small building blocks

Don't try to create large templates or entire sections of answers. Break up your answers by individual question, because each RFP is going to require that you sort and order these blocks of information in different and unpredictable ways.

If you find that you're frequently breaking up blocks of standard content from the knowledge base in new RFPs, take those blocks and break them down further.

When you put an RFP together in this way, your first draft will probably read like it was slapped together. That's okay. The next step is to take a pass at tying together and unifying.

It's the online age

My, how technology makes it easy to publish and link information these days! The knowledge base is a perfect example of something that belongs on an Intranet, where everyone in the company can access it as needed.

You can even set up your index as an Intranet page, where you click on categories, listed questions, or index words to jump to standard content.

Answer the question, please

Although you're using standard content, it's critical that the team reads each question and adjusts the content to specifically address everything in each question. No reader wants to puzzle through a response only to realize that it didn't answer what was asked.

Which leads us to the next topic...

It's never really cookie cutter

RFPs aren't cookie-cutter (fortunately or unfortunately—I'm not really sure which side to weigh-in on for this), so your responses to them can't be either. An RFP has to read like your company sat down and wrote a specific response to the questions, concerns, and priorities raised in the guidelines.

You can take care of much of this in the Executive Summary, where you highlight what the prospect has indicated are the most important concepts, directing readers to more detailed sections in the body of the RFP.

If you do your homework, focus your effort, work hard and get lucky, your RFP will get you to the next step in the sale. Never mind that the final scope of work may sound nothing like your initial proposal. A closed sale is a good thing. **pm.c**

Jacques Murphy has over 15 years of experience in the software industry. He writes an email newsletter called Product Management Challenges that focuses on increasing software product momentum in terms of development, marketing, sales, and profitability in order to improve the product's competitive position. Jacques currently works at Entigo Corporation, where he champions a web-based warranty chain management application. To regularly receive helpful tips for software product management, send an email to jacquesm@epix.net with "subscribe" in the subject line.

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Pragmatic Marketing seminars introduce a framework that gives *technology* marketers the tools necessary to deliver market-driven products that people want to buy. We focus on all practical aspects of juggling daily tactical demands with strategic activities necessary to become expert on the market.

STRATEGIC

Market Analysis	Quantitative Analysis	Product Strategy	Product Planning
		Business Case	Positioning
Distinctive Competence	Market Sizing	Pricing	Sales Process
Market Research	Product Performance	Buy, Build or Partner	Market Requirements
Market Problems	Operational Metrics	Thought Leaders	Product Roadmap
Technology Assessment	Win/Loss Analysis	Innovation	User Personas
Competitive Analysis			Product Contract
			Release Milestones

Practical Product Management ™

Requirements That Work™

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Do you understand the relationship between prospect management and product management?

Does it seem that product managers are overloaded with tactical activities?

Are you getting the most out of your investment in Product Management and Product Marketing?

Does your Product Management function need more structure and process?

Are product managers spending too much time supporting Sales? Development? Marketing Communications?

Do your product managers and product marketing managers understand their roles?

Are your product managers trailing the other departments instead of leading them by six or more months?

Are requirements a moving target?

Do your product managers rely on the sales channel for product requirements, positioning, name, or pricing?

Are your Market Requirements Documents not providing enough detail to Development so they know what to build?

Do your product managers wander into design in the Market Requirements Document rather than provide the market facts that Development needs?

Are you struggling to keep control during the product planning process?

Is there agreement between Product Management and Development on what to do?

Does Marketing need a consistent process to build and deliver market messages that influence each of our target buyers and markets?

Do you need a process for selecting and designing programs that produce strategic results?

Is Marketing disconnected from the sales process—generating leads and sales tools that go nowhere?

Can you accurately measure marketing's contribution to the company's goals for revenue growth, customer retention and positioning awareness?

Do the people who plan and implement go-to-market activities need to know how their individual roles fit together?

TACTICAL

| Marketing Plan |
| Awareness Plan |
| Customer Acquisition |
| Customer Retention |

Program Strategy	Sales Readiness	Channel Support
Buyer Personas	Collateral & Sales Tools	Channel Training
Market Messages	Presentations & Demos	"Special" Calls
Launch Plan	White Papers	Event Support
Lead Generation	Competitive Write-Up	Answer Desk

Effective Marketing Programs™

Practical Product Management™

Practical Product Management is for product managers and those who manage or contribute to aspects of product marketing and management. This two-day seminar fully explores the role of technical product management, providing tools and a framework to help get products to market more efficiently.

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The framework we teach, refined and perfected over 20 years, shows specific processes to find and develop profitable opportunities, plan market-focused products and create winning promotional and sales campaigns. Each seminar offers immediate actionable ideas, templates and tools.

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I. Strategic Role of Product Management
- What is marketing?
- Definition of the role of product management
- Contrasting product management and product marketing
- Assigning ownership of responsibilities
- Identifying the "first steps" with gap analysis

II. Market Analysis
- Distinctive competence
- Market research
- Market problems
- Technology assessment
- Competitive analysis

III. Quantitative Analysis
- Market sizing
- Product performance
- Operational metrics
- Win/loss analysis

IV. Product Strategy
- Business case
- Pricing
- Buy, build, or partner?
- Thought leaders
- Innovation

V. Product Planning
- Positioning
- Sales process

VI. Case Study

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

DAY 3 Requirements That Work™
(For those who write requirements)

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

IX. Analyzing Business and Technology Drivers
- Reviewing specifications
- Prioritizing the product feature set

X. Getting (and Keeping) Commitments
- Product contract
- Getting the product team in sync
- Getting executive support
- Communicating the plan in the company and in the market

Requirements That Work™

Requirements That Work is an intensive one-day course that introduces a straight forward method for creating product plans that product managers can write, developers readily embrace, and that produce solutions the market wants to buy.

I. Defining Roles and Methodology
- Understand the source of conflict between Development and Marketing
- Define clear roles and responsibilities
- Introduce a product planning methodology

II. Gathering Input
- Channels of input to product planning
- Organizing product ideas
- Quantifying market needs

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

IV. Analyzing Business and Technology Drivers
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This course explains how the most successful high-tech companies plan, execute, and measure marketing programs and sales tools.

I. Roles and Responsibilities
- The Pragmatic Marketing® Framework
- The Effective Marketing Programs Process
- Role definitions & skills assessment

II. Buyer Personas
- Positioning by type of buyer
- Creating buyer personas
- The sales channel persona

III. The Strategic Programs Plan
- The business case for marketing programs
- Supporting sales goals
- Metrics that engender management support
- Building the right marketing budget

IV. High ROI Sales Tools
- Writing useful, high-impact collateral
- How to generate success stories
- Real thought leadership in whitepapers
- Building a strategic website

V. Goal-Oriented Program Execution
- Controlling lead quality and throughput
- When to use online marketing
- Measure results without CRM
- Program priorities for each goal

VI. Start Where You Are
- Prioritizing next steps
- Start with existing programs
- Setting measurable goals

Who's Driving Your Company?

By Gabriel Steinhardt

Introduction

Every company claims it wants to deliver value to its customers, be profitable, and establish leadership in its core markets. Such assertions seem only natural and one would expect to be presented with a corresponding corporate strategy that supports such goals. However, closer inspection reveals that many companies often employ product delivery strategies that lead these companies far away from their business objectives.

Delivering products is a process that begins with a combination of innovation, technology, and market sensing. Each of these driving elements contribute to the initial product concept and its development, but over time and depending on the company, some driving elements will demonstrate a stronger and more lasting impact on the product concept and its roadmap. This is not necessarily due to merit or market forces, but more commonly is an outcome of the corporate culture and business perspectives which dominate the company.

Certain corporate functions that embody the aforementioned driving elements take charge of directing the company's overall product delivery strategy. For example, in one U.S. software firm, a business unit manager noted, "Marketing has had a relatively limited role in the past; technology is what has driven this company. We're a technology-oriented firm." In contrast, in a U.S. packaged-goods firm, a marketing manager said, "Engineering has absolutely no sense of the consumer. They're a group of educated technology scientists who can do amazing things, but they need focus."

Corporate business goals and wants are relatively similar across diverse industries, but the methods they use to reach their goals vary greatly. Let us explore these different approaches to product delivery strategies, known as technology-driven, sales-driven and market-driven.

Take my road: Technology-Driven

Some companies believe they know what is best for the customer. They operate under the notion that they can develop technology, design products based on that technology, and have entire markets buy their products because they are "technologically superior." These technology-driven companies, whose product delivery strategy is determined by their engineering departments, often create products without thoroughly researching the market and without fully understanding the prevailing market requirements.

This sounds somewhat detached from end-user needs, and may very well be so, but a technology-driven approach has its advantages. It enables a company to rapidly deliver products to market since it skims/skips lengthy traditional market research, and consequently bases product design decisions on internal company expertise.

An example of a company who chose to strive forward with a plan to launch a new product in the market without having conducted market-research first is that of Sir Clive Sinclair, a British entrepreneur who was also a brilliant engineer and consummate salesman. Sinclair trusted his intuition for all his product decisions. At the time, he believed that the moment had arrived where the general public was sufficiently interested in electronic wizardry to provide for a completely new market of inexpensive and relatively simple-to-use computers. Without conducting any market research whatsoever, in 1980 he ordered 100,000 sets of parts so he could launch at high-volume his new ZX80 computer. By 1982, Sinclair's company revenue was £30million, compared with £4.65million the previous year.

Sinclair and his engineers had intuitively succeeded in assessing the combined potential of technological developments and changing consumer needs, as opposed to researching the market potential for an innovative product. Sinclair's business decisions proved enormously successful, yet very fortuitous.

Technology-driven products are often advanced and therefore appeal to early adopters and niche markets who seek the latest technological developments.

Additionally, technology-driven products may also become a high-risk/high-reward venue to be favored by speculative investors. Such products await a triggering event that causes a dramatic surge in demand. Those events may range from the hypothetical (for example, future governmental legislation that would promote vehicles with fuel cell engines) to the actual (sales of survival gear when people

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were confronted with the spectra of Y2K, or the tremendous demand for security equipment post 9/11).

But this is the problem with being technology-driven; it is a risky approach to delivering products. Adopting a technology-driven posture has, over time, proven low growth potential due to failure to implement proper marketing activities and because of the isolated manner in which products are managed. Many technology-driven products are characterized by having complex features or unnecessary features, and some technology-driven products are realistically unneeded.

At the 2004 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada; Gerard Kleisterlee, the CEO of Philips, quoted data from a Yankee Group survey:

"30 percent of all recently introduced home networking products sold today were returned because the consumer could not get them to work; and 48 percent of potential digital camera owners were delaying their purchase because they perceived the products to be too complicated."

The conclusion is quite obvious. Although some may succeed with a technology-driven approach to product development and management, there is a bigger chance that driving the best technology to customers will not yield a prosperous outcome. This is simply because the company and its product are focused on providing better technology; and not on closely matching customer needs and abilities with that technology.

A cruising taxi: Sales-Driven

A technology-driven company is focused on its technology; and a sales-driven company is focused on maximizing short-term return on investment. Accordingly, the prime responsibility of most corporate departments in a sales-driven company is to help the sales channels with knowledge, ways to sell, and sales support.

Like a taxi driver cruising city streets looking for passengers who are heading to different locations, sales-driven companies cruise their markets seeking deals with customers who very often have different needs. Such as with the proverbial taxi driver who will deviate out of his way to accommodate the passenger going in the opposite direction, so will these companies alter their product's features in order to accommodate the particular wishes of a specific customer.

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with being sales-driven and providing custom work. Generations of tailors have sewn fitted clothes to people of different shapes and sizes; and scores of taxi drivers worldwide transport passengers to their varied destinations.

The advantage of being sales-driven is less risk because there are always unique business opportunities and individual needs to satisfy. A sales-driven product strategy can be a lifesaver and used as a survival mode tactic if market segments start deteriorating or are in a chaotic phase which precludes targeted marketing programs.

The downside is that a sales-driven product strategy is a short-term approach that does not build highly-sustainable product lines. Without those sustainable product lines it is very hard to build market leadership and promote company growth.

The eventual outcome of a sales-driven approach in high-tech companies is a plethora of product variants (produced via modification of core products) which are sold to different customers. These product variants are full of highly-individualized custom features that are developed, tested, documented and supported. This situation invariably leads to resource duplication, wasted effort, loss of distinctive competence and great difficulty in implementing product roadmaps.

Due to market dynamics, the majority of sales-driven companies struggle in the long run because there is nothing

much to differentiate them from the competition, other than price, which becomes their primary marketing tool.

Driven to success: Market-Driven

To gain a status of being market-driven, a company has to engage its customers and listen to their needs. It is all a matter of timing since asking customers what they want during the sales process is not considered actually listening to the market.

Only by taking a long hard look at end-markets and paying attention to customers' demands before proceeding to develop a technology platform or products, can be regarded as a market-driven approach to product development and management.

A case of sales-driven culture posing as market-driven happened to Big Blue. IBM®, was the dominant force in the technology industry and synonymous with innovation and cutting-edge technology. IBM achieved its leadership position through a market-driven approach by using its massive sales force to determine customer needs. However, the company ran into trouble when it stopped listening for needs and began telling customers about its latest new product or technology.

Applying a market-driven approach demands commitment and discipline as it is a very procedural approach. Companies with an informal work culture and loose organizational structures fail at applying this methodology and so do companies

eager to rush into the market because of the time involved in executing all phases of the market-driven process. But when properly applied, the result is a product that will solve a pervasive market problem in an established market segment, and for which customers are willing to pay. Experience has shown that rewards do come for those who patiently follow the course.

Market-driven companies produce sustainable products with visibly notable targeted value. The biggest reward is that a market-driven product helps establish market leadership and revenue-growth potential.

Conclusion

A study conducted several years ago by querying top marketing executives working at one-hundred leading U.S. technology companies, showed that despite all the talk about being market-driven and customer-focused, 54% of respondents viewed their company as actually being technology-driven. Companies do understand which approach they should follow

and publicly declare it, but indeed it is hard to mend ways and transition because becoming market-driven will demand a painful shift in corporate culture and business practices.

For those who take the path, success is lasting. In the high-tech world (e.g. Microsoft®) and consumer goods industry (e.g. Procter & Gamble), a leadership position can be established and maintained by being a very effective market-driven organization that has superior skills in understanding, attracting, and keeping valuable customers with products that deliver real value. This is not just a cliché but a formula for success.

What ultimately prevails in companies is the understanding that product value is always determined by the customer, not by the company or its technology. This understating in turn leads to the realization that finding technology that solves known market problems is easier and more profitable than finding or catering to buyers of that technology.

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Collateral Is No Way to Support the Sales Force

By Michael Fischler

The Scene

Imagine you're in Sales.

In response to an inquiry from a qualified lead, you sent out your standard collateral package. A gorgeous folder. A corporate brochure, datasheets, annual report, recent press releases, backgrounder, tear sheets, white paper, CD ROM, and a personal cover letter.

Now it's time for that initial sales call.

You join the prospect in the conference room. She has your package in front of her, with some additional pages from the web, from the analysts, from the competition and from her own notepad.

"So," she begins, "why don't you give me a little idea about your company, what you do best and your history and so on, and then maybe a general product review. I know you sent me this very impressive package, but I have been so swamped I haven't had time to really study it."

In fact, about 90% of this first meeting is a rehash of the issues covered somewhere in that package. Products. Customers. History. Stability. Services. Partners.

After the meeting, a thought occurs as you cross the parking lot—one that has occurred often, in similar situations and similar parking lots: "if only we could have gotten down to business instead of wasting all that time going through the basics. If only she had read that damn information package."

But she didn't. They rarely do, you remind yourself. Your cell rings. With a quiet curse at the Marketing department that created such useless material, you answer it.

The Problem

That curse is a righteous one.

As marketers, we do not effectively support the Sales force—and we should.

We create a collateral package, like the one I described above. Some of us even call that package a sales tool. But what we really create is a kind of promotional potpourri. An assemblage of sweet smelling stuff in an attractive folder. Actually, we don't even create most of the content. We build the brochure and some data sheets, and then leave lots of pocket space in the folder for the Sales force to add whatever they can find—from white papers to annual reports to ad tear sheets. If it's on the lit shelf it may very well end up in the package.

The primary content-inclusion policy is "bulk is best."

The primary organizational structure is "pretty in front, ugly in back."

Now, that kind of package has its place. The corporate brochure, the data sheets, yes, even the press releases, tell people that we exist. They are perfect on a trade show booth table; as a general deliverable in response to web requests;

as something to get a ball rolling. But once that ball is rolling, once the lead is generated and qualified, once the Sales force is ready to begin its difficult process of winning that competitive battle... that random package is of no use. They need something else to help them do their job better, faster, more effectively. They need tools. And it's our job to define, specify and, in this particular case, even build them.

It is a strategic marketing challenge— the same strategic challenge we face when we deal with our products. Define a marketplace with an identifiable need. And then specify product that serves that need.

- The marketplace is the sales force.

- The need is for tools to support their effort.

- And the product is a new kind of collateral—a targeted, goal-driven and measurable kind.

The Proof

Strategies, marketing or otherwise, begin with hypotheses: things to prove or disprove. And that's where we begin. If we think back to our opening scenario, a clear syllogism presents itself for validation.

- Shortening the sales process will have value to the Sales force.

- Sales tools can be created to shorten the sales process.

- Therefore, creating sales tools will have value to the Sales force.

The first of the two premises is easy to prove. There is little controversy among business leaders that the shorter the sales process the lower the cost of sales. Similarly, there is equally strong

agreement that the more streamlined your process, the greater your competitive advantage. If two companies start the process at the same time, the one who gets to the CTO first is ahead of the game. There are, of course, as always, exceptions—but they are exceptions that prove the rule.

It's the second premise that is the more complex and difficult to prove. Can tools that we build shorten the process?

Be careful how you test this. The impulse to "just ask the Sales force" is strong—resist it. Asking them "will sales tools help shorten the sales process?" is asking them to do our analysis for us—it's not their expertise. In many, if not most, cases the answers will be understandably subjective, and in many cases, purely tactical.

Rather, the correct question is, "Where can your sales process be shortened?" The answers serve as our initial roadmap. But they're hardly enough. A rep who hates cold calls will focus on that. Another who feels swamped will talk about increased bandwidth. A third might say, "lower the price." Each will focus on their own individual needs. Good input. But just a starting point.

We have to find out for ourselves. It's time for a few ride-alongs with the Sales force. Experience the sales process in person, at each identified phase. A few initial calls. A few technical meetings. The financial grillings. A few deal closings. You, as a marketer, have to watch what happens and reach a reasoned conclusion from a careful analysis as to where and how the process you experience can be shortened.

Don't misunderstand. The Sales force, your marketplace, needs to be involved in this, just as the marketplace for your

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products are involved throughout the development. But that product marketplace doesn't write your functional specifications, they just provide guideposts. The same is true here.

In the scenario we started with, the best place to shorten the process is right at the start—to create a situation where the prospect and the rep can get down to business. You may find that your answer is different—that some other element of the process makes more sense for you. Perhaps it's getting the right kind of technical information into the hands of the right technologists early on. Perhaps it's establishing a way to broadly demo product for the influencing end-user community. Perhaps it's something else.

But whatever the results of the analysis, what we end up with is a directed, proven understanding of the process. Its phases. Its players. Its duration. Its dangers.

Now we can begin to develop a product.

The Product

Sticking with our initial scenario, we experienced that the majority of time in that first meeting was spent answering four basic questions:

1. Are you a good company?

2. Do you make good products?

3. Will your products do what I want them to do?

4. Do your customers get value from your products?

Our mission is clear. Develop a product—some kind of product—that will, in advance of the first sales call, clearly and completely answer those four questions. And by answer, I mean with hard evidence. Claims, promises, hyperbole—the foundation of most collateral—won't cut it. Don't pillage your existing collateral and start extracting phrases like, "Acme is the leading provider of…" (unless you really are the one company that truly is the leader), or "we provide the lowest total cost of ownership of any product in the marketplace today" and so on (unless you have an independent analysis that says so—it's a claim when you say it, and it's evidence when Aberdeen Group says it).

The goal of this must be: It Has to Be Used. You have to use every device you can muster—culled from designers, instructional technologists, and other similar sources—to compel readership. Since the goal is simple (four questions answered) you're not going to force them to study 5,000 words of collateral to find 100 words of evidence. Nothing you say will stray from the point.

The shape and form of our product will, of course, vary depending on all sorts of factors: from process phase to budget to media to audience. Maybe it's complex—a glittering multimedia spectacular. Maybe it's just as simple as can be: a document called, "The Four Things You Need to Know About Acme." But however it is built, and whatever it

addresses, Marketing has, at last, done its job. We have identified a need: create tools that shorten the sales process. We have examined the nature of the need and determined how best to satisfy the need. And we have built product that does the job.

The Outcome

Now let's revisit our scenario.

You join the prospect in the conference room. She has your package in front of her, with some additional pages from the web, from the analysts, from the competition and from her own notepad.

"So," she begins, "let me ask a couple of questions." She opens *The Four Things* and directs you to page 3. "Here it says that you were awarded 'Best of Breed' at the Annual Software Forum. What other companies were you up against?"

About 90% of the conversation focuses on specifics generated from that simple document.

After the meeting, a thought occurs as you cross the parking lot—one that has occurred often, in similar situations and similar parking lots: "That was very productive." **pm.c**

Michael Fischler is founder and principal of Markitek, a strategic marketing consulting and coaching organization which he started in 1992. In his 27-year career, Michael has helped companies on five continents and 14 countries develop a stronger strategic approach to marketing. He has worked closely with executives of startups and Fortune 100 companies alike, coaching them on developing customer-focused marketing strategies and tactics—from establishing basic marketing skills to refining and perfecting already sophisticated ones. He is a widely-read columnist, and a popular speaker at marketing conferences worldwide. He can be reached at mrf@markitek.com, or www.markitek.com. To learn more about this topic go to www.markitek.com/nocollateral

Pragmatic Marketing Hits a Major Milestone

25,000 students take the product management plunge

Pragmatic Marketing instructor, Barbara Nelson, presents a Garmin GPS system to our 25,000th student, Tim Johnson, product manager at RightNow Technologies.

In late January, at our Practical Product Management™ seminar in Austin, Texas, Pragmatic Marketing reached an important landmark. That was the point at which our 25,000th student completed one of our high-tech product management courses. But rather than blowing our own horn, we asked our 25,000th attendee, Tim Johnson, product manager at RightNow Technologies, Inc., an on-demand CRM software vendor in Bozeman, Montana, to tell us why he came to the course and what he took away from it. Here's what he had to say:

For most companies, the challenge almost always is: What exactly is product management? After working in product management for about four years, I began to realize there really is a discipline associated with this field. And, while I was up on a lot of areas, there were many things in product management I could still learn. Some of my co-workers at RightNow had been to the Practical Product Management course, and I decided this was the place where I could take my professional skills to the next level.

What I got out of the course was that we, as product managers, wear a lot of hats. In fact, there are 37 of them. By going through the course, it became obvious there are certain things I work on diligently and others I have more or less ignored. If you want to be successful and become a market-driven company, you have to handle all 37 duties. Rather than jumping straight into defining product features, you have to look at the underlying problems you are trying to solve. And then structure your product around those issues.

This course also made me realize that we are doing pretty well at RightNow. We are striving to be market driven, and we actually do many of those 37 things. So the course helped me validate that we are on the right track and will only get better. Plus it helped me understand how I can expand my role beyond the tactical side and into strategic product management.

Barb Nelson was a great instructor. She delivered the material without referring to the notes, which tells me she really knows it. It was more than having it memorized; it was practical experience she drew on from her work experience that directly relates to the challenges I'm going through as a product manager—it's not just theory.

To me, being the 25,000th person to attend this course means there is a real need for it in the market. It validates that there is an industry methodology around product management—rather than everybody going about it differently. There are certain things you should be doing. Are you market driven, or are you not? Anyone who wants to understand product management and what it takes to be a market-driven company absolutely needs to attend. **pm.c**

Product Roadmaps

A product roadmap is a frequent request from the sales force and others in the company. "What's coming in the next release and the ones after that?" Long buying cycles common with strategic products often mean the buyers need to know what the product will contain when the cycle ends. A roadmap details the features and platforms for future releases over the upcoming months and years. A product roadmap reveals your current plans but is not a commitment.

Just like planning a trip, a roadmap communicates in broad strokes what you plan to do. One normally plans a route for a trip, but rarely follows the route precisely. You may see a restaurant and decide to deviate from your plan and lunch there. You might hear a traffic or weather report and change your route to bypass the problem. You can make corrections to the plan and still make it to your destination.

By Steve Johnson

Major features that are mandatory can be assigned to a release schedule. But don't put "hoped for" features on the list. Remember: the sales channel and the customer will assume that the roadmap will be delivered, so only publish what you know to be guaranteed.

What is the downside?

A product roadmap shows the sales channel and our major customers where the product is headed and what features to expect in future product releases. Unfortunately, it also tells the competition. The competitor may ace your new features before your product hits the street.

Once a roadmap is published, it cannot easily be changed. More than one product manager has been shocked to see the roadmap stapled to a contract as an attachment. What began as a plan has now become a commitment. Many companies find that they need two roadmaps: one for internal use and another for external delivery. While this may be necessary, a better rule is "never print your roadmap." Only the product manager should talk about product futures. A product manager may use the roadmap in a presentation but should never print or distribute the presentation. ➔

What should be in a roadmap?

Typically, a roadmap contains release names and approximate delivery dates. Break the table into major features: impacts on client-side and server-side applications, platform support, and markets served. We often see this done in a table with dates across the top and product areas down the left, as shown below:

Market forces impact each level of the roadmap. Key industry events, new operating systems and platforms, new competitors, all act as market forces that should be documented in the roadmap. Changes in market forces usually result in changed priorities in your roadmap.

A roadmap should contain those items that are virtually certain. My advice: stick to the truth. The more you know, the more you can comfortably tell.

	2Q03 ("blue")	2H03 ("taco")	2004 ("earwax")	2005 ("popeye")
Major Feature	Maps	Fault Correlation		Peer-to-peer installs
Client/User Interface	Web enablement	standalone 3D maps	Onscreen assistance	
Server/Architecture		New data model	J2EE rewrite	
Platform	SQL Server support	Discontinue Win98, Win NT support		Linux as primary OS
Market	US		EMEA	AP

Be prepared for this: once you hint at the feature-set of the "blue" release, the sales channel will ask for a little more detail. "Will it be Java? Will it also have reporting?" Before you know it, they've dragged information out of you that you hadn't intended to reveal. They will absolutely complain that they need more specifics, and then they'll need demos, and then they'll need an early copy to close a deal.

Decide what will be communicated in your product roadmap and then don't say any more.

Solve the right problem

A product roadmap is often an effective sales tool in a long sales cycle. It may also be perceived by the Sales people as a "magic document" to help close a deal. But perhaps you don't need to talk about roadmaps at all. Interview your sales people to find the root cause behind their requests for a roadmap. The two most common root causes for a roadmap are missed delivery dates and unfocused segmentation strategy—neither of which can be cured with a roadmap.

In order to publish a roadmap officially, a development organization must be able to hit scheduled dates. The best way to achieve this is to reduce the size of every feature set to what can be achieved in 90 to 180 days. With smaller releases, your product comes out more often; the deal-closer feature ships this year instead of next year. Pragmatic Marketing's Requirements That Work™ class teaches how to define smaller releases that ship more often, often completely nullifying the channel's need to sell futures. One organization with two to three years between product releases used this method to cut their delivery time to a release every quarter. Their customers asked them to ship less often!

The other common reason that channels sell futures is a mismatch of customer and product. Without a market segmentation strategy, we often find the channel pitching the product to people that it isn't really defined for. As a result, the product lacks certain features that are necessary to solve the customer's problem. The Sales people attempt to convince the customer that their necessary feature will be in the next product release, and then campaign to get that feature in the release. That's how custom requirements end up in contracts.

Next steps

A roadmap can be an effective sales tool in a long sales cycle if it communicates without committing. Review your product plans for the next few releases and see what items are certain. Put those on a grid with dates. Now discuss the roadmap with your manager and with your Development lead. Are they (and are you) willing to share this information with Sales people, customers and competitors?

Steve Johnson is an expert in technology product management. He works for Pragmatic Marketing® as an instructor for the top-rated courses "Practical Product Management™" and "Requirements That Work™" as well as onsite courses. Steve is also a frequent presenter for various technology marketing forums throughout the United States and Europe, author of many articles on technology product management, and is the webmaster of http://productmarketing.com—a website devoted to technology product management.

Link Up and Learn

A conversation with

five industry gurus

about product

management

associations

Now that you've taken a Pragmatic Marketing® course—or perhaps several—where can you go to continue to exchange ideas, discover new resources, and network with your peers? It's easy—a local product management association (PMA). In recent years, PMAs have exploded across the country, offering an engaging and safe place to discuss product management issues and challenges, listen to informative speakers, access useful templates and plans, make valuable connections, and much more.

For this issue, *productmarketing.com* sat down with founders and leaders from five of the most active PMAs for a Q&A about the value of participating in a product management association and advice for those who want to start or grow a PMA. Taking part in the discussion were:

BOB LEVY, product manager for IBM Rational Software, co-founder and past president of the Boston Product Management Association (www.bostonproducts.org)

KEITH BOSWELL, 20-year software industry veteran, partner at Market Acuity, and moderator for the Triangle Product Management Association in Research Triangle, North Carolina (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/trianglepma)

JASMINE DE GAIA, senior product manager for Lucent Technologies and executive director of the Silicon Valley Product Management Association (www.svpma.org)

ANTHONY HUMPHREYS, product manager for Datatel, Inc. and president of the DC Product Management Association in (www.dcpma.com) Washington, DC

ALAN ARMSTRONG, product manager for Wily Tech and co-founder and long-time leader of the Toronto Product Management Association (www.tpma.ca) ➔

Q&A on Participating in a Product Management Association

Q *What are the challenges facing product managers today that make a product management association viable and important?*

BOB: Product managers are challenged by the rate of change, the volume of information, and the professional scope required to uncover new business opportunities. Augmenting oneself by developing close ties with those who complement our skills and abilities is a compelling vehicle to overcome professional challenges. That was the fundamental premise motivating the founding of the Boston Product Management Association.

ANTHONY: The problem is two-fold: First, within the organization, the product manager's role and responsibilities are often misunderstood. So we need help making the company aware of what we do or should be doing. The second problem is the product manager being able to deliver on what he or she should be doing. Things like being an expert on the market, pricing, all the things that are so critical in product marketing and product management—but for which we often have no formal training. Much of the PMA's effort is placed on educational activities that help product managers know what they should be doing and improve on their skills.

Q *Why do you think a PMA is well-suited to helping product managers solve some of these challenges?*

ALAN: Product management is such a unique position; there haven't been the kinds of resources we need to grow and develop our careers. The PMAs have sprung up recently to fill that void. Most marketing courses, like AMA, are not particularly relevant to high-tech product managers. In terms of networking and learning, it's much more valuable to network with high-tech professionals.

KEITH: The typical marketing associations are heavily consumer-oriented and marcom-focused, where they deal with traditional aspects of marketing—rather than being geared to what most product managers do, which is setting product direction. How do you cross-manage all the different departments in a company to bring a product to market? How do you research new markets to potentially enter? Product management has the ultimate matrix management nightmare, where you need every department in the company to be on board to bring a release to market. Yet none of those departments reports directly to product management. Where do you get resources for that? Beyond Pragmatic Marketing® and a few books, there are very few tools out there to help product managers learn. That's where the PMAs come in.

ANTHONY: An association like this can bring an unbiased voice to a community of product managers. It can bring a level playing field to all product managers and make countless resources available for their use. An association brings community to an area where there is none. It is a

place where you can get together and learn, network, and share information surrounding that unique niche that is product management. At DCPMA, we're looking to give members a place where they can find great training, a place where they can come learn with great presentations, a discussion board, links to other resources, and more.

Q *What is the core value product managers can gain from participating in this type of association?*

KEITH: It's like having a virtual mentor to go to when you don't have an answer to something. A lot of product managers operate alone, or they don't have a product management guru in their organizations. A PMA is a great source of information. It's like having your own library of templates and advisors you can tap when you run into a problem. You have the ability to tap resources you would never have access to or you would have to pay for. It's almost the open source effect. You benefit from the collective intelligence of the community—even for those of us who have been doing this a long time. I've been in product marketing for quite a few years, and I still learn things and am able to get information from my group. Plus, from a professional standpoint, it's good to network and see what other people are doing and make sure you're up to speed—especially in this extremely volatile and competitive job market. It's a fantastic way to advance your career. If you're an eloquent contributor, you'll get recognition and credibility among your peers in the region.

ALAN: The networking aspect is huge for members. As product managers, we can be pretty isolated. There is nobody else in the company who does our job and nobody to talk to

about the job itself. In Toronto, we wanted to create a place where people could find that personal and professional development—and maybe just a bit of group psychology. Product managers should look at these associations as a long-term investment in their professional network. You get to know who's who, which companies are which. If you need to collaborate with a company, you know where to look. And you know people, so if you get stumped or need a resource, you have someone to call. And the pizza isn't bad either.

Q *What's the value of a local or regional group versus just an online discussion group or a national association?*

JASMINE: I think you need that face-to-face interaction. The big benefit is that we are a community. People know each other now and can have meaningful conversations instead of just making small talk. And that is really beneficial because product management is fairly new as a profession or a specific career. It's not like you can go back to your alumni if you went to engineering school. Most of those people are engineers; they aren't product managers. So I think it's important that we help each other.

ANTHONY: It's getting product managers together with other product managers in their area. The value of a regional group is to shake someone's hand, to network for jobs, to meet new contacts, to discuss MRDs and product roadmaps—and ask questions and take off on other people's questions. Our mission statement is: the place to network, innovate, and share. That community is what everyone's looking for.

Q *What does a PMA offer that product managers can't get elsewhere?*

JASMINE: What we offer members is education, community, and networking. The monthly speakers we have are very high quality. For example, we had a great session by Marissa Mayer, Google™ product manager. We had Yahoo® host an event and they were recruiting, so we had a huge turnout, probably 150 people, because a lot of people are looking for jobs. Pragmatic Marketing® presented a workshop about how to position yourself as a product manager and a session based on best practices in product management, which drew both new and seasoned product managers. Every other month, on Saturday mornings, we hold an interactive workshop series with smaller groups. So you can learn something during the monthly speaker lecture, and then apply it hands-on during the workshop. We offer a host of other resources, including discussion forums, job postings, a newsletter, and a website with a lot of content, including presentations from all of our past events.

KEITH: First and foremost, my group provides a forum for people to share thoughts and ideas about product marketing. I wanted to create a watering hole for other product marketing people in the area. A second goal is to provide members with networking opportunities. It's great to get to know other people who are in the same role. The third thing is that Triangle PMA has become one of the go-to places for product marketing job postings in the Research Triangle Park. The fourth thing is the templates, providing people with a place to exchange tools. If you go to the file section of the site, there are things ranging from sample beta checklists, GA checklists, and tools

for releasing a product. One of the big things people ask for is the Launch of Product X Master Plan.

ANTHONY: At DCPMA, we have had numerous high-level outside speakers come in. It's a chance to get a vice president of marketing or a president of a company who clearly has some significant experience in areas where we, as product managers, might not. It's being able to get someone like Steve Johnson from Pragmatic Marketing®, who has been in the field for 20 years. Or it's Bob Martin from IFR Consulting, Inc. sharing knowledge that most product managers want but yet don't have. It's the ability to get expert resources from the outside to bring in fresh perspectives and ideas. About a year ago, we launched www.dcpma.com as a way to have an events calendar, a link to our discussion board, resource links, board member contacts, and bios. That has worked extremely well as an archive for all the event presentations and as a home for templates, MRD documents, roadmaps, and all the tools that keep professionals coming back over and over.

Q&A on Building a Product Management Association

Q *How did you get started building your PMA, and what are some of the secrets for early success?*

BOB: Success factors during our group's early growth included quality speakers and content, content aligned with group interests, clear vision, and focused networking opportunities. We began with the assumption that you can obtain the essentials your group needs to thrive either free or via corporate sponsorship. For example, one member's workplace will undoubtedly have meeting space,

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another will have contact with quality presenters, and many online tools can be used free-of-charge. It's important to establish an online community early. While the BPMA has since graduated to a professionally developed site, Yahoo Groups (http://groups.yahoo.com) is free and meets early-stage requirements: email discussion group, online polling, and the ability to post files.

KEITH: I'm able to run the Triangle group by myself, because we're using Yahoo Groups. It's a fantastic place to set up calendars and events for a group. It also has the ability to let people easily add files or photos or links. It's low on graphics, but we're more content-focused, anyway. The downside is that Yahoo puts advertisements on every stream, and they automatically opt you in to numerous categories. So you need to tell people who subscribe how to opt out. I send all new members an article, Protecting Your Privacy in the Yahoo Environment.

JASMINE: We started over three years ago as a small group of people attending the Pragmatic Marketing® course. After the course was over, we wanted to continue to discuss ideas, problems, and issues. It was very grassroots, very free-form. We set it up as a monthly event, and the idea was to bring in speakers, local product managers, people who are having success in the industry to talk to the rest of the group and share ideas. All the speakers were volunteers, and the location was donated by companies. Once it got off the ground, we had 20 or 25 people at each meeting, most were mid-level product managers and some junior people starting out and looking for a network. As we grew, we defined what the mandates of

the organization were: a community for networking, education for product managers in the Bay area, and a safe place for people to express ideas and talk about issues.

ALAN: The Toronto PMA co-founder and I initially met each other through postings on a Pragmatic Marketing® forum. It took us three or four weeks to realize that we actually worked in the same building in Toronto. We pulled together our first meeting and had 35 or 40 people attend. I didn't know there were that many product managers in my area. It was amazing. And now three years later, the association has its own independent executive team, six or seven corporate sponsors, and a large and active membership base. We also set up a Yahoo Group, which is an effective way to host a discussion group and do polling. We had executive meetings to do planning. We relied on getting very good speakers at least every other month—for example, local marketing professors from universities.

Q *How do you go about recruiting volunteers and leaders?*

BOB: We allocated 20 minutes during our kickoff meeting to brainstorm next actions and roles. While not every volunteer will stick to his or her commitment, many long-term volunteers will have been those who suggested an idea you promptly insisted they implement. Delegation is a prerequisite of success and will be supported by those who buy in to the basic premise of the group. Be sure to socialize after this first meeting to begin the recruitment process. You can begin spotting candidates for your leadership team as the kickoff meeting winds down. Be sure to develop a leadership

pipeline to ensure the growth of your association. As you recruit volunteers, consider that you will undoubtedly elect one of them to assume the job you are currently performing, so be sure to coach and mentor appropriately.

ANTHONY: When you decide to build an organization, you do it just like you would in a corporate setting where you have to build support people. So we did. We have a president, VP of marketing who is our webmaster, a VP of membership, a VP of events, and a VP of development who is responsible for membership.

JASMINE: Having well-defined roles and responsibilities for your leadership team is incredibly important. We took a look at many successful associations, and structured our team roles around that model. [See the accompanying sidebar for the SVPMA's Roles and Responsibilities.] Because everyone's a volunteer and everyone's busy in their jobs, you have to spend time determining how to structure responsibilities, spread the work, and get people to do what they committed to. Early on, we spent a lot of time on that—just getting people to define their roles.

Q *What steps can you take to ensure that speakers and topics resonate with members?*

ALAN: We treated our first meeting as a requirements-gathering session. We billed it as a get-together to talk about the problems that product managers face in everyday work environments. We got the group talking about what was going on in their everyday lives. What big problem did you have today or

yesterday or last month? What came out of that was a list of raw comments. And we stood back and looked at the list and said: These are the things product managers are struggling with, and we can use these themes to shape topics for future sessions. Come to think of it, we actually used the Pragmatic Marketing® Framework to build our PMA—it was a market-driven process. Some of those topics included: the basics of doing the job, requirements-gathering techniques, making business cases. Another big theme was negotiating with and presenting to executives. That was a big challenge.

BOB: Aligning future content with group interests can also be achieved via periodic online polling of the topic content ideas you have collected. Yahoo Groups or other online polling tools are adequate as long as you promote and reinforce polls during your meetings.

Q *How important is it to hold regular meetings?*

BOB: Consistency of timing and venue helps maximize the value of word-of-mouth and facilitates retention. The BPMA has established a tradition of meetings being held on the third Thursday of each month, except August and December when members are most inclined to take vacation. These meetings are most always hosted in the same location.

ANTHONY: When our group first started, the location moved around a good bit—primarily because we have members spread over two states and the District of Columbia. But we realized we needed to take down some of the potential barriers to people attending, where they might not remember when and where the

next meeting was. Now, we meet the third Thursday of every month at the same location to keep the continuity going. Most of our members are located in Virginia, so that's where we hold the meetings. We get a lot of the same people back, which is wonderful for richness. And we have been fortunate in having a lot of new members come. We are also in the process of trying to build more community activities, things like a twice-a-year barbeque or a social event.

KEITH: I hold group meetings once a quarter: usually two networking meetings and two topics. In the past, I've had speakers from Pragmatic Marketing® or a local consultant. Next time, I intend to have it about product automation tools. I'm convinced that will pack the house. Just the past few years, people in software have started paying attention to product lifecycle management. While there have been requirements management tools for quite a while, there haven't been many tools for product managers to manage the lifecycle of a product or manage a change request from beginning to end. And those tools are starting to appear.

JASMINE: I think you really need that face-to-face interaction to build the relationships and build people's commitment to the organization.

Q *How do you go about getting new members or attendees at the events?*

BOB: Word-of-mouth has proven the single most effective marketing vehicle to generate in-person attendance at BPMA monthly meetings. Runners-up include posting meeting detail in local trade publications.

JASMINE: It has really been organic, by word-of-mouth. Pragmatic Marketing® was also very helpful, because they point people to the PMAs after they take the courses.

Q *How do you handle recruiters and vendors?*

KEITH: I approve people to participate and keep tight controls over vendors and recruiters. I do not let them post directly to the list, and they will be automatically banned from my group if they do. I actually provide a very specific set of rules for all participants on the discussion list to prevent gross self-promotion.

ALAN: In Toronto, we made sure that the association was not a recruiting forum. We specifically discourage job postings to our lists; in fact, if somebody did that, we shut them down. The reason was two-fold: We wanted this to be focused on product management expertise and networking with peers; and we wanted companies to feel comfortable about their employees attending.

Q *Do you charge membership dues or fees to attend events?*

JASMINE: We set up a regular membership structure, which went a long way toward building member loyalty. In the beginning, membership in SVPMA was free. Then we started charging $5 at the door of our events, just to pay for food and refreshments. But there was no real commitment. With our annual membership structure, it still works out to the same $5 per event, but you pay your $60 up front.

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So we get much more of a community of people. We're seeing a lot more of the same faces at our events. We also started holding the events at a hotel, which has become our regular location. That way we aren't spending time trying to hunt down companies to host us, and we could free up our time to work on bigger things for the organization.

ANTHONY: We're looking at the idea of sponsorships for events, and we're actively considering membership dues. The purpose there is two-fold: number one to generate revenue in order to make the association have some staying power; but, more importantly to get commitment from membership. On our discussion list, we have up to 250 active members of DCPMA. But on any given month, we have only 40 members show up for a meeting. We want to get additional buy-in from our members. So we're considering instituting membership dues later this year.

ALAN: At first, we were charging $2 a session just to cover the cost of the pizza. But we needed funds to create a more professional structure and some resources. So we ended up going with $10 per session, or $50 per year. That boost did not hurt

attendance in any way. Plus with an annual receipt for membership, people are sometimes more inclined to expense the $50 than they are $2.

Q *What about the decision to become a non-profit organization?*

JASMINE: We stayed at the grassroots level for a year and a half. We had considerable discussion over whether we wanted to continue at that level or grow to something bigger. If we were going to grow, everybody needed to be on board. We also went through all of the normal group issues: your forming and your storming (we spent a lot of time on storming). Then we finally got to norming, and now I would say we're performing. Then we reorganized the board, defined roles, and started to have structured meetings. We have one in-person board meeting and one conference call every month. We also make sure everyone on board makes it a priority to attend the events, as well. The other piece is assigning responsibilities and action items and holding people accountable to them. All of those things started coming together. We became more professional as an organization and started gaining momentum and growth.

JASMINE: We had a bit of a debate over becoming a non-profit organization. There were some members who felt we should stay at the grassroots level and keep things simple and low key. Of course, the group was still somewhat unstructured at that point. Once we got a lot more order to the organization, it instilled a level of confidence that we needed to grow up and become what we really could be. I got a California NOLO book and handled the process myself. The benefits we saw for the organization becoming a non-profit were: 1) we wanted to get the credibility of a non-profit association, 2) it actually helps you get discounts on things like meeting space if you are a non-profit, 3) it's easier to get sponsors, and 4) it's also a bit easier to justify the annual membership.

Q *Any lessons learned or advice to those starting a new association or growing one?*

JASMINE: I would say be patient. It takes some time. Surround yourself with a good team that has well-defined roles. That's really important, because there's a lot of work involved, and you don't want people stepping

SVPMA Board Roles and Responsibilities

President. Ensures organization operates to meet goals and acts as spokesperson for organization.

Director of Communications. Responsible for newsletter, meeting minutes and event summaries.

Director of Events. Selects meeting topics, coordinates and schedules speakers and sets logistics agenda.

Director of Membership. Owns communications with members about events, as well as managing membership list.

Director of Web. Updates SVPMA.org website, maintains event and presentation archive, administers forum and makes technology recommendations to Board.

Director of Finance. Accountable for collecting event revenue and paying expenses and for ensuring that SVPMA operates in a fiscally-responsible manner.

Director of Marketing. Three words: branding, promotion and partnership.

over each other. I would also say just let it grow as it is. It will take shape by itself. If we had tried to push our organization to become a non-profit a year ago, I don't think we would have been as successful as we are now.

ANTHONY: I recommend having regular, standalone board meetings where you can focus on setting strategy to make the association better. Don't try to rely on meeting with your board during or after meetings. The second thing is to try to engage sponsors right off the bat. The third thing is to make sure you have continuity—that your meeting is always in the same place at the same time. Another critical piece is to always focus on what your membership wants to get from the association. Finally, learn from and adopt best practices from other successful PMAs.

ALAN: I think I speak for the group in saying that anybody who has built a product management association would be glad to help out others with ideas or to talk things over. Touch base with someone who's already lived through it and learned the pitfalls. Send us a note—we'll be glad to help out. **pm•c**

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June 14 – 16* ....Bedford, MA
June 21 – 23* ....San Francisco, CA
June 28 – 30* ....Atlanta, GA
July 12 – 14*..................................Cambridge, MA
July 14 – 16* ....San Francisco, CA
July 26 – 28* ....Vienna, VA
August 9 – 11*..................................San Francisco, CA
August 16 – 18*................................Bedford, MA
August 23 – 25* ....Minneapolis, MN
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August 11 ....San Francisco, CA
August 18 ....Bedford, MA
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