Product Management on a Dime

by Greg Cohen

With the current recession expected to run well into 2010, businesses will continue to focus on the bottom line. This means smaller budgets and less discretionary spend. Fortunately for Product Managers, there are a number of tricks to getting big budget results without breaking the bank.

1. **DIY Research** – A two city focus group can set you back $50,000, but conducting the research yourself can yield most of the same benefits for $1000 or less.

You can run a focus group at your office, at a hotel meeting room, or even via webinar. The same holds true for customer interviews and even usability research. Likewise, win/loss analysis usually requires only a phone call. If you sell to consumers, stopping someone in the street to ask their opinion is free. Lastly, online surveys through email or from your website are perfect for a tight budget. One of my favorite survey tools, Zoomerang (www.zoomerang.com), gives you basic capability for free and advanced features for only $19/mo, which is well worth the minimal expense.

2. **Website and Collateral –** Website elements and collateral is one area where the global marketplace and simple

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June Event: "Making Your Websites and Applications Social" with Josh Elman, Senior Platform Manager, Facebook

By Steve Sun

Josh Elman, Senior Platform Manager at Facebook spoke at the June SVPMA meeting about "Making Your Websites and Applications Social." The speaker introduced Facebook Connect (an extension of Facebook Platform) as an example of a way to quickly integrate the functionality of Facebook and the power of social networking into your product without having to invest building your own tools or be limited by the size of your own community. By doing this, Facebook users will be much more likely to share and comment on your websites and applications, helping your businesses to

1) Build traffic

2) Create deeper engagement and

3) Make more $$$

The Best Product Management Model?

By Marty Cagan

One question I get quite frequently is "Google is making boatloads of money, so how can we do product management like Google?" Or another common variant is "Apple creates fantastic products. How can we do product management like Apple?"

You can understand why some might look at Google or Apple and think they should just clone what they do. But odds are they'd be making a big mistake.

Don't get me wrong. While Apple and Google have very different models of product management, on the whole I'd argue they're right for their companies (at least as long as their founders continue to stay so deeply involved in product).

But I have yet to recommend Google's model of product management to other companies. And in the case of Apple, to implement their model you'd have to clone Steve Jobs.

The product management model for Google is very different, and I argue it needs to be, and the same is true for Apple.

While there are a set of skills that are important for all tech product managers – skills like assessing opportunities, defining product principles, product discovery, and prototype testing – there's more to succeeding in an organization than just the skills involved.

It's much like a sports team. Yes the skills are critically important. If you can't catch a ball, you won't go far as a receiver. However, winning requires more than skills. It requires having a game plan or strategy for winning, working well as a member of a team, adapting to your opponent, the playing field, and the conditions.

Similarly, building a successful product management organization requires not only developing the skills of your product managers, but making sure they know how to work effectively with the rest of the product team, as a key part of your company's overall product development organization and product development process, and knowing how to create the type of products your company requires, and knowing how to compete successfully in the markets you play in.

When I talk with a company about the "best" product management model for them, I'm looking at several factors, including:

- The Type of Product. It matters whether you're producing a consumer internet service, a consumer electronics device, enterprise software, or a small business services. There are unique challenges of each and the model should suit the needs.

- The Product Development Process. For example, if the product development team is using Scrum there are very specific demands on the product managers and designers. Understanding the product development process is essential. Every process has limitations and the "best" product management model will proactively attack these limitations.

- The Role of Product Management. In many companies the roles and responsibilities are sliced up differently and the "best" product management model is one where the staff has the ability and the desire to serve the role that's needed. This also applies to the other key related roles such as interaction designers and engineers, founders and executives.

- The Size of the Organization. A 12-person venture-funded startup with a very involved product-oriented founder, has very different needs than a 4000-employee public company with a large base of existing customers.

- The Company Culture. Sometimes this is in fact the dominant factor. For example, if you have a company where one or two people effectively make all the product decisions that matter (and want to continue doing so), then you want a product management model that facilitates this, rather than fights it.

Apple, Google, Microsoft, eBay, and Yahoo all have different product management models, and I argue they should. Could each be improved? Certainly. Could you learn things from each of them? Absolutely. But you won't improve by trying to force-fit a model from one company into another.

Unless a company has made the decision that they want to try to change their culture, I instead typically focus on getting the company to embrace the strengths of their culture or process, and make sure the product management model they select is proactive in addressing the weaknesses.⌘

Marty Cagan is a partner at Silicon Valley Product Group (SVPG) and author of the book "Inspired: How to Create Products Customers Love." To sign-up for his newsletter, goto www.svpg.com.

May Event with Luke Hohmann, Founder and CEO, Enthiosys

By Greg Cohen

Luke Hohmann, Founder and CEO of Enthyiosys, presented at the May meeting of the SVPMA on Collaborative Roadmap Development. Luke discussed how to tackle some of the stickiest issues with road-mapping, the limitations of roadmaps, and how to engage customers to meaningfully gather feedback about how the product should develop. The speaker then treated the audience to a hands-on collaborative roadmapping session focused on how the SVPMA should develop over the next three years.

Luke introduced the idea of adding swim lanes to a roadmap that covers:

1. Markets served

2. Features & Benefits

3. Technical architecture

4. Events and Rhythms (e.g. having product available for the holiday season)

5. Timeline

Even with swim lanes, roadmaps can make it hard to show balanced growth over time when a product is about how a collection of features behave together rather than a single killer feature. To tackle this, Luke has developed a game called "Prune the Product Tree," which forces participants to evaluate a set of features that holistically make a whole product. Prune the Product Tree is one of twelve research or "Innovation Games" that the speaker has developed. (To learn more about all twelve games, a review of Luke's book "Innovation Games" is also published in this newsletter.)

For the SVPMA meeting, pre-printed trees standing about five feet tall were attached to the walls. The audience then divided into teams of 5 to 6 people, with each team taking one tree. Paper leaves, magic markers, and tape were also distributed. The audience brainstormed on speakers, topics, and services the SVPMA might deliver over the next few years. Each idea is written on a leaf and then placed on the tree. Ideas closer to the trunk are expected to happen sooner. Branches are used to group like items, for example, speakers from specific companies on one branch and topics on another.

The room was abuzz with energy. Participants had great fun while also brainstorming some brilliant suggestions for the SVPMA board and volunteers to run with. Luke then explained why the game is so effective. In a typical feature suggestion system, customers are not limited by any constraints and the connections between multiple suggestions get lost. With Prune the Product Tree, participants must view and evolve the tree holistically, ensuring balanced growth and sets of features that advance the product to the next level. ⌘

Greg Cohen is a principal consultant at the 280 Group(www.280group.com) and on the board of the Silicon Valley Product Management Association. He has over a decade of product management and marketing experience, including Software-as-a-Service, channel sales, open source software, and agile development. Greg can be reached at greg@280group.com.

Mark your Calendars for these upcoming events:

- August 5th - Ben Tarbell, Director of Products, Solar City
- Sep 2nd - Yossi Zohar, Director, Amdocs Product Business Group
- Oct 7th - Brian Lawley, founder and CEO, 280 Group
- Nov 4th - James Morehead, VP of Product Management, SupportSoft

For more information, please go to
www.svpma.org

E-mail postings to SVPMA@yahoogroups.com

Product Management Manifesto

I am a product management professional.

I am dedicated to bringing great products to market. Products that delight my customers. Products that are massively profitable for my company. Products that help change the way people work and live.

In the course of managing my products there are thousands of small decisions that must be made and tasks that must be accomplished. The sum of these can add up to a phenomenal product. I choose to own the responsibility for making this happen.

I am an expert in all areas regarding my products: customers, the market, technology, competition, channels, press, analysts, trends and anything else that must be taken into account in order to win.

I have a strong vision for my products and develop winning strategies that align with my company's goals and ensure that our investments of time, money and energy are well-spent.

I am committed to using the best methodologies, tools, templates and techniques available to be more efficient and effective at my job.

I have a plan for my career and I will further my professional status by attending training courses, becoming certified and reading books, blogs and newsletters to learn best practices.

I am the voice of my customers and represent them in every critical decision that is made.

I am a leader. I develop strong alliances with everyone that I need to in order to ensure the success of my product. This includes sales people, engineers, support, marketing, customers, channel and business partners, management, the Board of Directors and anyone else necessary. Some of these people will be very difficult to work with, but I will find a way to make everyone successful as a team.

I refuse to settle for mediocrity and I will be tenacious and professional in my approach to getting the best possible results.

I believe that Product Management is one of the toughest, yet most rewarding jobs in the world. Though I will face great odds and challenges I refuse to become jaded or negative.

Though I have all of the responsibility, it is highly likely I have little or no formal authority. Therefore I will do whatever it takes to persuade others to do what is right for customers and my company.

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Book Review

Innovation Games: Creating Breakthrough Products Through Collaborative Play
by Luke Hohmann

Innovation Games by Luke Hohmann reveals a series of product research techniques in the form of games to uncover what customers want, need and will actually pay for. The research games are designed to work with software, services, and physical products. Some of the games may seem familiar to other research or observation methods you have used in the past, but with a small or large twist to make customers open up and share at a deeper level.

The book is divided into three sections:

1. **The Why and How of Innovation Games** – Discusses how to set-up a customer research project, where Innovation Games fit along the spectrum of research methods, and how to organize and run a successful Innovation Game.

2. **The Games** – Each game is described in detail including why the game works, how to set it up, and how to analyze the data. There are twelve games in total:

   - **Prune the Product Tree** – Customers place product feature leaves on a wall sized image of a tree to structure how the product should evolve over time.

   - **Remember the Future** – allows customers to visualize what success with your product looks like at some point in the future.

   - **Spider Web** – Uses a spider web to probe relationships between your product and other products your customers use.

   - **Product Box** – Lets your customers design a box to sell your product bringing to the surface the benefits that are most important to them.

   - **Buy a Feature** –Customers are given money to buy upcoming features in your product. But many features are priced out of reach, so customers must work together to pool their resources to purchase the most desired features.

   - **Start Your Day** – Uncovers when and where a customer uses your product, including periodic tasks that they might otherwise not recall in a traditional interview situation.

(Continued from page 6)

- **Show and Tell** – Lets your customers show off how they use your product to understand the most important artifacts that customers produce with your product.

- **Me and My Shadow** – Shadow your customer to identify hidden needs and understand how they use your product.

- **Give Them a Hot Tub** – Brainstorming session with your customers using outrageous features to get then to think out of the box and develop breakthrough ideas.

- **The Apprentice** – Develop empathy within your team by having them use the product with real customers in a real situation.

- **20/20 Vision** – A prioritization exercise to get customers to make tradeoffs and rank potential features.

- **Speed Boat** – An effective way to gather information on what customers dislike about your product without it turning into a demoralizing complaint-fest.

3. **Tools and Templates** – This final section is relatively short and details everything you need to run a successful session including sample invitation letters, agendas, check lists, basic materials, cus-

tomizing the session, and tips for running each session.

Although the author covers the benefits of using professional facilitators, *Innovation Games* is written as a "How to Manual" with enough detail to turn any product manager into a customer research expert. Further, if budget or distance is a roadblock, an online version of the games launched in June. More details can be found at: http://www.innovationgames.com.

Isn't it about time you had some serious fun with your customers? ⌘

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With regard to deeper engagement, Josh provided an example that when he comes to work on Monday morning, he doesn't necessarily need to ask his colleagues what they did over the weekend, as many of them have updated their Facebook pages over the weekend with the activities that they undertook. So, as opposed to sharing a laundry list of what each other did, they can immediately begin a deeper conversation about activities of mutual interest. Similarly, they can launch into a deeper conversation about new websites and applications that they want to share.

To illustrate how Facebook Connect can help make websites and applications more socially friendly, he presented a few screenshots of the site Joost, while he explained the 'Social Stack' or approach behind Facebook Connect.

This stack begins with identity. Josh lamented that the problem in going from website to website is that you need to fill out too many sign-up forms, as each website is trying to gather demographic information about their users. With Facebook Connect, Facebook users will have a single sign-on that is integrated with other sites. In doing so, sites like Joost will now have access to the name, location, and preferences of those users already created in Facebook. Hence, the information collection process is simplified (if not eliminated.)

Secondly, instead of going to a site and trying to bring all your friends there by importing your contacts, a Facebook user can leverage his/her existing 'social graph' for social distribution to that site. There's no longer a need to type a bunch of names into a blank box.

Lastly, using all the interactive functionality within Facebook, users can share their respective views and experiences about the website or application.

In sum, such is how Facebook Connect can make a website and application social, leading to faster growth and distribution.⌘

Steve Sun is a product manager with expertise in creating service offerings for hardware and software solutions. More details about his professional profile can be found at www.linkedin.com/in/stephensun

software tools can help you save big. If you are not using a service like Elance (www.elance.com), check it out. I have found tremendously talented graphic artists and flash programmers in such far away places as Argentina and Turkey. They are easy to work with, responsive, and truly capable. Elance provides a collaboration space and makes payment simple. Likewise, one of my favorite case study and white paper writers is in the UK. Since international calls from the US are pennies using Skype, Vonage, or calling cards, distance is no longer a barrier for customer interviews. The vendors I have worked with over the years have easily saved me two to eight times current market rates.

Likewise, if you need to add screen shots and demo videos to liven up your website, checkout SnagIt and Camtasia by TechSmith. SnagIt ($49.95) provides an intuitive screen capture tool with similarly easy to use graphics program for quick and professional looking annotations. Camtasia Studio ($299) is perfect for recording and narrating onscreen demos. It's not quite as easy to use as SnagIt, but well within the capabilities of the average product manager.

3. **Collaboration** – Need a collaboration space to work more effectively with your team. Google sites provides basic wiki functionality plus integration with google docs for free. You can also set-up your own wiki with free software such as twiki wiki (twiki.org). Of course, if you want to pay so you have top tier support, most services in this category such as SocialText are still reasonably priced.

4. **Search Engine Optimization** – Did your online advertising budget get slashed? It might be time to go back and tune your site for search (aka SEO,) because search is free. In particular, consider developing specific landing pages optimized to your top converting search words.

5. **Skip the tradeshows –** If your budget is tight, it might be time to scale back the tradeshows, especially those that you can't link to a positive ROI. Between the exhibit costs, shipping, graphics, and travel, trade shows really add-up. Instead, do webinars to your own direct marketing list, including hosting industry speakers of interest. If you are still building your list, time to double down on this activity. Ask expert speakers who you recruit to help publicize the event to their lists. Reach out to your partners to host joint webinars where you each invite your prospects and then share the

registration list. Also, ensure there are multiple opportunities on your website to capture contract information, such as registering for company updates, a white paper, a sales call, or a free trial.

6. **Direct Marketing** – Every company needs to have its own direct marketing database. This is a list of all customers and prospects who have expressed interest in the company. Emailing to your own list costs pennies and has a high likelihood of being read. Keep your list informed on your latest releases, special webinars, and limited time offers.

7. **Prototyping –** It costs a lot less to identify issues in prototypes than in actual code. If prototyping is not in your bag of tricks, now is the time to start. In the free category, you can always sketch prototypes on paper. Paper prototypes have the advantage that users feel like you have not invested a lot of time in them and therefore are very open about what needs to be changed. Although higher fidelity prototypes are more realistic, it can sometimes dampen feedback. You can also create reasonable prototypes in Microsoft PowerPoint and

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- Greg Cohen, 280 Group

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Excel. If, however, you do have $589 to spend, check out Axure (www.axure.com). In addition to designing realistic screen shots and wire frames, you can also make them functional to more easily identify issues for users.

8. **Be more productive -** With reduced budgets, you're going to need to do more with less and do it better. The good news is, there are more resources available to product managers than ever before. The profession has really matured and the number of experts willing to share their knowledge continues to grow. Next time you run into a tough question, don't try to recreate the wheel, instead search the web and literature:

   a. **SVPMA Archives** – The Silicon Valley Product Management Association has been hosting Product Management Thought Leaders for almost 10 years now. There is a rich set of archived presentations that can be found at: http://www.svpma.org/archives.html. Topics include "Working with Engineering", "How to Accelerate Your Product Management Career", and "Using Great Product Development Process to Achieve Great Results"

   b. **Free Templates** – there are plenty of free templates for PRDs, MRDs, etc. You can find a good sampling on the 280 Group site at: http://www.280group.com/freeproductmanagementtemplates-tools.htm

   c. **Books** – There are too many PM books to list, but some recent publications include: *Expert Product Management* by Brian Lawley, *The Art of Product Management* by Rich Mironov, *Inspired* by Marty Cagan, and *The Product Managers Desk Reference* by Steven Haines.

   d. **Toolkits** – Need a little more guidance than the book and free templates provide? The 280 Group bundles templates, tools, and a narrated presentation on how to bring it all together for topics including Product Launch, Product Roadmaps, and Running Beta Programs. Prices range from $99 to $399.

   e. **Self-Study Certification** – Now might be the perfect time to become a certified product manager. 280 Groups offers the CPM® Self-study course including the AIPMM exam for $1295. Self study can save you over 50% compared to live training, plus you do not have to be out of the office or incur any travel expenses.

9. **Hire a Contractor –** If you don't have budget for new headcount, consider bringing on a Product Management contractor part-time or on a project basis to move your most urgent projects forward.

Remember, the companies that outperform after economic downturns have continued to invest in their products and their marketing. You may not be able to dictate your budget, but will be rewarded if you can stretch your dollars to keep or even gain product momentum through this recession. ⌘

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