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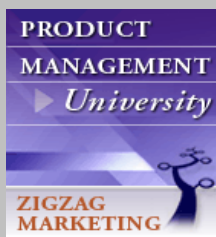## Twisted But True: High-Quality B2B Marketing Messaging Dramatically Reduces Sales and Marketing Effectiveness

by Michael Cannon

Many executives with an underperforming sales or marketing team think they know what the problem is. Many of them are wrong. If Sales or Marketing are not meeting or exceeding their revenue, profit, and market share objectives or a new product introduction is not meeting expectations, one of the first questions to ask is, "Do we have the customer messaging right?"

Customer messaging is the words you use, both written and oral, to persuade a prospective customer to do business with your firm. Most customer marketing messaging, like brand messaging, company messaging, product messaging, and even most value propositions, is descriptive. It provides a description of what your company does, the products and services you offer, the features of each offering, and, if done well, a little bit about the benefits of doing business with your company and the benefits of buying your offerings.

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March Event: Applying Design Thinking Principles in Product Management with Dr. Sara Beckman, Senior Lecturer, University of California Berkeley, Haas School of Business

By Mehdi Hashemia

Dr. Beckman's story was about how you should be a good story teller to be a successful product manager. Stories play many roles in organizations such as: share norms and values, develop trust and commitment, share tacit knowledge, facilitate unlearning, and generate emotional connection.

Sara wanted the audience to think about "design" and the principles underlying a good design. Every design has a story. Stories are a way of communicating the benefits that customers get from new features. A sustainable product works as an integrated system and tells a convincing story about its life cycle. Solutions are a materialization of that story.

There is evidence that investment in design pays off. Sara provided statistics that show companies that win design awards outperform others in one or more stock indices. High design companies have a higher EBITDA, net income, cash flow, and stock market return com-

Decide go / no-go before buy vs. build
By *Jeff Lash*

If you want to be a bad product manager, make your decision about whether to buy, build, or partner on a product one in the same with your decision about whether to create the product at all. Maybe the market isn't particularly attractive, but you can get into it pretty easily by partnering with a company. Or maybe you have a good idea for a product and you think it will be to difficult to build it, so the idea should get "shelved." After all, you have to figure out how the

product will get created at some point, so you might as well figure that out before you decide to go forward with it at all.

If you want to be a good product manager, do not let your buy vs. build vs. partner decision unduly influence your go / no-go decision. Ultimately, the decision about whether to launch a product is a serious one, and the build / buy / partner decision is just one that needs to be taken into consideration.

Unfortunately, sometimes good product ideas can get stopped in their tracks because of a feeling that it will be too hard to build or partner for it, even though truly the investment would be worthwhile. Conversely, bad products can be brought to market because "it would be easy to do" by building or partnering, when the product maybe should not be launched regardless.

Think about when you are planning a vacation — you usually think first about your destination, and then consider your mode of transportation for getting there. For example, if you live in Maine and want to take a vacation in January to a warmer climate, you would look at your different options for travel — plane, bus, train, car, etc. You would review your options to consider whether there is an affordable one which can fit with your schedule, and that may influence your decision on where specifically to travel, when, and whether you can go at all. However, if you found a bargain on a flight to Alaska, that would be irrelevant since your goal is to go somewhere warmer.

Unfortunately, this is the opposite of what often happens with product development. To build off the travel metaphor, even though a company may want to go to Florida, they find a partner who can get them to Wisconsin easily, so they decide to go there instead, even though that's really not where they want to (or should) go.

The go / no-go decision for a product should not be made in a vacuum. There should be some consideration about whether the company is able to build the product internally, or whether there is potential for it to be created using a partnership, or whether there is an opportunity to buy a company or technology to enter into the market. Especially with the latter two options, this can definitely help improve speed to market, address areas which are not in the organization's core competencies, and may present a more favorable cost structure at times.

However, ultimately the go / no-go decision should be based mainly on market-based considerations, such as:

- whether the market conditions are attractive (e.g. size, growth)

- whether there are unresolved problems which the product will address

- whether these problems are urgent and pervasive, and whether there are buyers who are willing to pay to have them resolved (to paraphrase the excellent book Tuned In: Uncover the Extraordinary Opportunities That Lead to Business Breakthroughs)

- whether the product fits the strengths and competencies of the organization

- whether this product could provide the organization with a sustainable competitive advantage

Product managers need to make sure they do not "put the cart before the horse." Focus on the market need and the buyer problems, and then consider the different options for solving it. Whether you build, buy, or partner could have some influence on your decision, though it should not be the predominant factor.   ⌘

Jeff Lash works in product management for Elsevier, and blogs about product management at How To Be a Good Product Manager (www.goodproductmanager.com). You can contact him at jeff@jefflash.com

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April Event: How to Prioritize Your Products Within and Across Strategic Business Units with Michael Menard, President, The GenSight Group

By Jessie Lin

When facing enormous great ideas and product business cases, we only have limited resources. Prioritizing them is at the heart of strategic management. However oftentimes the process is not satisfactory in companies and sometimes it is based on the "gut feeling" of top decision makers. Michael Menard, President and Co-Founder of The GenSight Group, shared some best practices with us at the SVPMA April meeting. Michael currently heads-up the Portfolio Management Practice for The GenSight Group, which provides total solutions in the Enterprise Portfolio Management area, including designing business processes, software and integration. Prior to forming The GenSight Group, he was Vice President of Worldwide Engineering at Johnson & Johnson.

One reason that makes product selection so difficult is the lack of consistent prioritization criteria and weights. Most managers use implicit models based on judgment and experience and are subject to perceptual bias. Human beings see what they believe. An emerging best practice is Portfolio Optimization. It uses multi-variant prioritization, weighted scorecards, and other factors to make selection criteria explicit. Michael focused on creating prioritization criteria, as "design and selection of the criteria can have a profound effect on value and priority." Michael discussed four types of criteria:

- Value - Criteria used to assess the overall value or goodness of a project. (For example, Incremental Sales, Innovation Level, and NPV)

- Risk/Uncertainty - Criteria used to assess the overall risk or difficulty of a project. (For example, Technical Risk and Commercial Risk)

- Investment - Criteria used to assess the cost required to achieve the project objectives. (For example, Development Cost and FTE's)

- Categorization - Criteria used to define and describe. Typically used to put a project into a "bucket". (For example, Focus Area, Business Unit, and Stage)

In developing selection measures, he emphasized using more than just financial numbers, such as ROI, as criteria. After selecting the criteria, a weighted average should be used to get a so-called Prioritization Scorecard. In this way, perceptual bias can be reduced.

Next, Michael showed visualizations of the results. In a case study, he demonstrated how software can be used to visualize the prioritization results in 2D and 3D illustrations. Lastly, Michael showed how to use these visualizations to prioritize products across business units in an efficient manner. ⌘

Jessie Lin is a recent MBA graduate seeking a challenging entry level position in Product Management . She has successfully designed, developed and launched several enterprise web systems and has hands-on experience in market research. She graduated from full-time program at University of Texas at Austin. The best way to reach her is jessie.jianwei.lin@gmail.com.

Mark your Calendars for these upcoming events:

- June 3rd - Josh Elman, Director, Product Management, Facebook
- July 1st - Brent Lang, President and COO, Vocera
- August 5th - Ben Tarbell, Director of Products, Solar City

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

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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P-Camp: World's Largest Free Get-Together of Product Managers

By Keith Rayner

For those of you interested in the origin of the name P-Camp, there's a short note at the bottom, but an alternate description is an "unconference" for PMs. Not much clearer? I must admit to a little confusion myself, but the essence of the event is that the conference agenda is determined by the participants themselves. Now normally, if you're an attendee at an event, the main benefit is that you can sit back, enjoy the presentations, and let everybody else do the work, so there was some trepidation mixed in with the confusion as I wondered how much of a contribution I would be obliged to make.

With an impressive turnout and a palpable buzz of excitement in the air, all apprehension was rapidly dispelled as the format of the day began to crystallize very rapidly. Pre-determined sessions of the more typical corporate presentation style were scheduled throughout the day, four concurrent sessions per time slot. Simple enough. However eight sessions per time slot were up for grabs for the attendees to propose and lead. Just pick up a piece of paper, write your session description in bold letters and pin the paper onto the notice board. Some unconferences let the audience vote on which sessions would go forward, but here it was first-come, first-served, and yes, the slots were filling up fast. Swept up by the enthusiasm, I duly pasted my own topic on the board

The sponsored topics were pretty varied, covering Agile methodologies, user interface design, market sensing, using social media and wikis in product de-

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velopment, recession-proofing your career, and a Charm School for PMs.

The audience generated sessions included Agile, user design, immersion/customer interviews, "Is enterprise software dead", in-the-wild software usage research, but interestingly shifted very much towards topics covering the human relationship side of PM, such as collaboration between PM and Product Marketing, managing your boss, managing the PM roundtable, etc. It seemed like people were really taking the opportunity to learn from the experience of their peers.

The session proposers were given the opportunity to announce their topic to the assembled crowd at the start of both the morning and afternoon sessions, enabling the audience to determine their interest on the spot and then head off to their selected sessions. You were also encouraged to move on to other sessions if your first choice wasn't meeting expectations, but cross-traffic seemed minimal as even the sponsored sessions were designed to engage the audience in the discussion. Round table seating was very much in evidence, and true to the open social theme, live blogging and twittering were rampant with remote tweeters participating in their turn by inputting questions and comments from afar.

As predicted though, the sponsored presentations seemed to gather the most traffic, and although corporate sponsorship helps support and push events along, I'm wondering whether a 100% audience-generated conference might be a better way to go. At the large tech conferences, birds-of-a-feather (BOF) sessions and similar Open Space sessions are usually on the agenda but are often poorly attended because of the conflict with the main presentations, and that imbalance was also evident here.

The sessions that I attended, both sponsored and attendee-led, were very collaborative. Sponsored sessions thankfully avoiding full-blown product pitches; whereas attendee sessions were often conducted by consultants interested in getting new clients, they were obviously experts in their field and proved very informative.

And my own session? Working in the field of internet and software usage research I was interested in learning from a range of PMs on how they currently used research, admittedly for the ulterior motive of improving my own business development approach, but I

figured PMs would be equally interested in other perspectives from their peers. With the title "Incorporating user research into the prod dev cycle", I was pleased with the turnout of fifteen people, and the exchange of approaches and experiences was certainly interesting for me, and also provided insights for the entire group. In all very worthwhile.

Bottom line: I encourage you to participate in BarCamps in your field, whenever and wherever possible. And why not create your own - you'll get a lot out of it.

SocialText was one of the sponsors of the event, (and incidentally early instigators of BarCamp) and have created a great wiki (www.socialtext.net/p-camp2009/index.cgi) of the event, which will give you more insights.

Footnote: a brief history of unconferences:

The first unconference apparently dates back to an XML Developers' Conference in 1998, described as a conference by developers, for developers, now typified by agendas and topics being determined on-the spot by the attendees. O'Reilly later also ran some unconferences, co-opted the familiar "foo" term as a backronym for "Friends of O'Reilly", (apparently the idea of a FooBar as a bar/café meeting place for O'Reilly's colleagues had already been toyed with), and named them FooCamps. Foobar is a random tag for describing variables of undetermined value in code examples, so perhaps the term FooCamp does effectively convey the undetermined nature of an unconference to a geek audience. Since O'Reilly's camps, other organizers of unconferences have used the opposite half of the term foobar to name them BarCamps, and a bewildering array of variations on the theme have emerged (my favorite being BaaCamps in New Zealand), and thus we arrive at P-Camps, for Product Managers. You can keep track of unconferences on the BarCamp.org website. I'm sure there will be many more variations to follow.⌘

Keith Rayner is CEO of Kemarra Inc, a marketing and business development consultancy focused on high-tech in Silicon Valley. Current clients include ClickStream Technologies, a leading research company providing software, internet and mobile usage analytics for improved software development and more targeted marketing. Keith can be contacted at info@kemarra.com

pared to their peers. UK design council data states that companies with emerging products outperformed FTSE, introduced twice more products, had market share increase, and opened new markets.

But what is design? Design is a focus on creating a new customer experience. A good design is the intersection of a business plan, what customers want, and a technologically-feasible solution, where all three cases come together. (At the SVPMA December event presented by David Webster of IDEO, David mentioned the same three as the main factors driving innovation and effective design.)

Sara continued by emphasizing that to design a good customer experience, one must touch different parts of the company such as Customer Service, Marketing, Tech Support, Sales, Finance, and Accounting. All these departments may have direct interface with the company's customers and define customer experience. All data indicate that companies put a lot of value on customer experience. Eighty-nine percent of decision-makers surveyed felt that customer experience is as critical to their firm's strategy this year as it was last year despite budget shortages during the recession.

Sara continued by focusing on core principles of cus-

tomer-focused designs and introduced a basic design thinking framework which toggled between abstract and concrete worlds and analysis and synthesis. This framework recommends approaching each problem in five steps.

First, you should remain focused on your customers' needs and deeply understand and observe them. Good designers forget about their own problems and focus on their customers' experience. Good designs focus on understanding needs in terms of level of use, usability, and meaning. For example, if you use Evite to invite friends and family to your wedding, the basic need is how to tell every one about the wedding and get responses. From the use and usability perspective, it may seem to be all right to use Evite for a wedding but from the meaning perspective, you may feel that it misses a personal touch. An alternative could be using a website instead of Evite so that you could give a personal touch to your invitations.

Second, you have to take your time and frame and reframe the underlying problem to get an insight into it. Framing is about decoding the stories you hear, understanding the context, and asking why. Framing examines industry orthodoxies and considers the broader market trends. A good design thinks about not
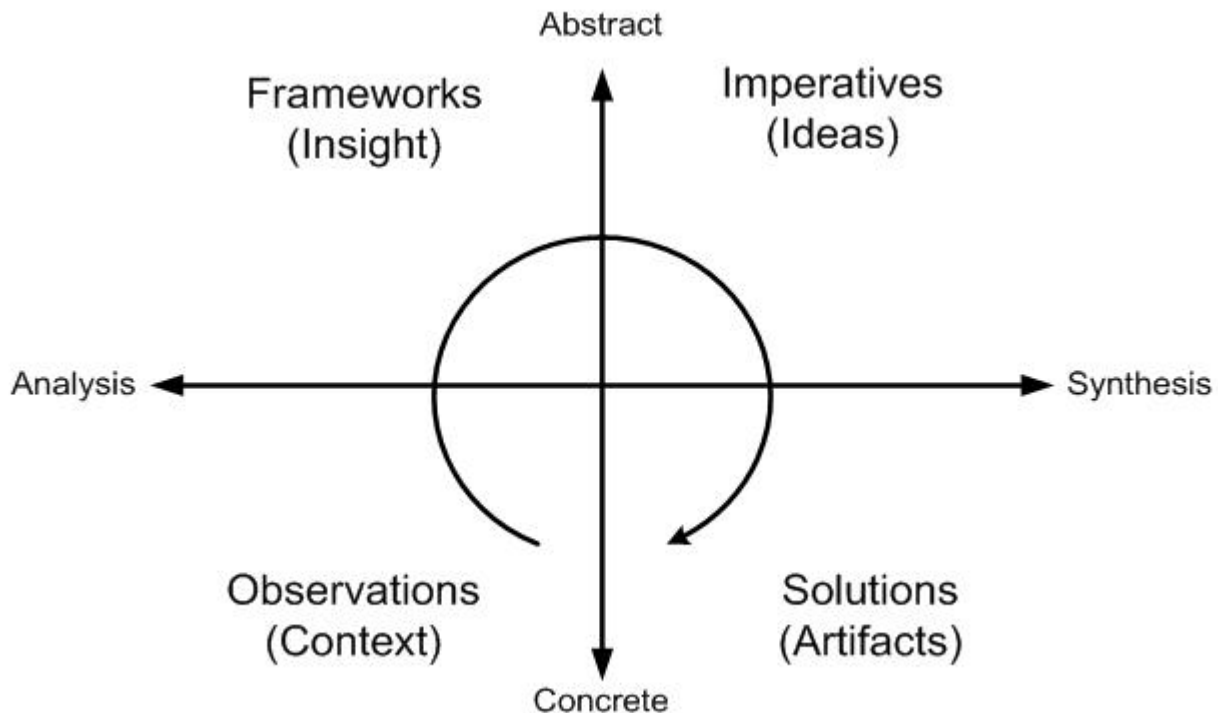
only the use and usability, but also what the user is trying to accomplish. A good product manager should always ask customers why they need this new feature or what they intend to do with it. An example is the cooperation between Alcoa and Coca-Cola bottlers to sell more aluminum and help customers better manage their beverages at home. They observed that customers usually buy a pack of Coke, put a few cans in the refrigerator and the rest somewhere far from the refrigerator, such as in the garage. By repackaging the cans in a better-suited pack, they let customers fit the whole package in the refrigerator. This way, customers did not have to look for Cokes when they ran out of cool cans. This addressed the underlying problem and ultimately aluminum usage went up and profit increased. In this case, aluminum manufacturers found the actual problem in the consumer side and tried to understand the context and all customer touch points.

Third, once you have figured out the old story, you have to tell a compelling new one through imperatives. Stories drive change in organizations. Stories are powerful and the most effective way to convey complex, multi-dimensional ideas supporting innovation and organizational change. Companies build features and customers seek benefits. Your story clearly describes the benefits and allows them to be connected to the features. So, make your imperatives compelling! Imperatives could take different forms such as design principles, metaphors (taking a shower is like hitting the reset button), or simple stories.

Forth, design uses play – rapid and frequent prototyping – to learn quickly about alternative concepts. Prototypes can be used throughout the design process.

Prototype early and often and use IDEO's three-step process: Inspire, Evolve, and Validate.

Fifth, you need four types of people for a good design team experience: *diverging* – those good at seeing concrete situations from multiple viewpoints; *assimilating* - those good at understanding a wide range of information and putting it in concise and logical form; *converging* - those good at finding practical uses for ideas and theories and solving problems; and *accommodating* – those good at learning from hands-on experience. Each of these types respectively fits one of the four categories in the framework.

To summarize, every product manager must follow five steps for his or her design:

• understanding the problem clearly and its use, usability, and meaning

• realizing why customers need it

• coming up with a compelling story

• experimenting with alternative solutions to find the right ones

• convening with the right people. ⌘

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The Missing Messaging Type

What's most often missing is great sales messaging. This type of customer messaging is persuasive. It provides compelling and persuasive answers to your prospective customer's primary buying questions, such as "Why should I meet with you?" and "Why should I change-out my current solution and buy a new solution?" and "Why should I buy this solution from you?", for each product or service your company offers.

High-Quality Marketing Messaging Is Low-Quality Sales Messaging

Sales teams need both descriptive marketing messaging and persuasive sales messaging to be successful. The problem is that most companies provide Sales, and customers, with only marketing messaging. They make this expensive mistake because they do not know about sales messaging and how it is different from the other customer messaging types.

5-Point Checklist to Assess the Effectiveness of Your Customer Messaging

To help you determine if your customer messaging is more descriptive than persuasive, consider doing one or more of the following assessments: a competitive collateral assessment, sales collateral assessment, a messaging assessment, a field sales time-use assessment, and/or a field/channel training assessment.

Assessment #1: Competitive Collateral

The competitive collateral assessment is quick, inexpensive, and often startling. Obtain one of your key competitor's company brochures and one of its product brochures. Black out all references to the competitor's company name and product name and replace it with your company and product names. How similar are the competitor's brochures to what you would or could say about your company and product? If they are more than 30 percent the same, then your sales team's effectiveness is suffering from low-quality marketing messaging.

Assessment #2: Sales Collateral

The sales collateral assessment will help you determine what percentage of your collateral is not considered useful in helping Sales generate revenue. Does your company's collateral fall into that 80 to 90 percent of marketing collateral that sales groups across the country consider useless? Is your marketing group part of that 70 percent of marketers who give themselves failing grades in the materials they provide to

Sales? If more than 30 percent of the collateral fails the usefulness test, it's likely you have a sales messaging problem.

Assessment #3: Customer Messaging Effectiveness

Another way to determine if you have the right messaging is by conducting a customer messaging effectiveness assessment. Our research indicates that U.S. companies alone waste more than $100 billion every year confusing sales messaging with other customer messaging types. To do this assessment, select one of your products and identify the buyer's key buying question. Is the key question "Why should I change-out my current solution for a new solution?" Is it "Why should I buy this solution from you?" Or, is it both? Next, evaluate your current messaging by reading the product brochure. Does the messaging provide a compelling and persuasive answer to the buyer's questions? If your company is like most, the answer is no, not really. The answer is often quite weak. It's another example of how sales and marketing effectiveness is dramatically reduced by using high-quality marketing messaging as if it's high-quality sales messaging.

Assessment #4: Field Sales Time-Use

If your collateral and messaging are not good, then a field sales time-use assessment will show that your field sales teams are spending a lot of selling time creating their own collateral and messaging — materials they feel they need to meet their sales objectives and that they aren't getting from Marketing. This problem is supported by a recent report from the Aberdeen Group, which states that "salespeople spend typically 30 to 50 hours each month searching for information and re-creating customer-facing content." We all know that sales reps are revenue-optimization machines, meaning that their objective is to do the least amount of work for the most amount of revenue. So, if your reps are spending any time creating customer-facing messaging and materials, then the reason they are doing it is because they need those materials in order to close deals. It's much more effective to have one or two marketing people create high-quality sales messaging, and then leverage that work over your entire sales team.

Assessment #5: Field/Channel Training

The last assessment is the field/channel training assessment. What percentage of the sales team feels the new product training is useful in helping the team effectively sell the product? The same question applies to competitive training and training on specific market opportunities. There is typically great friction in these training areas, between Sales who receives the training and Marketing who creates and delivers the training. Just think about your last annual sales meeting. How satisfied was Sales with the quality of the training?

How on earth can Sales and Marketing be effective at selling if the messaging, collateral and training do not help prospective customers, and sales people, understand your company and products in the context of how they help customers solve meaningful problems, and how they help customers generate meaningful business value, better than the competition? Great sales messaging has been proven to be quite effective in connecting these data points and dramatically increasing Sales, Marketing, and company effectiveness.

Recommended Resources to Improve Customer Messaging Quality:

- Free articles on sales messaging at http://www.silverbulletgroup.com/resources.shtml

- Top Ten Principles of Great Sales Messaging, a one-hour, on-demand audio training course with a 14-page workbook, available at www.top10principles.com

- 13-page eBriefing on how to implement great sales messaging, available at http://www.silverbulletgroup.com/ebriefing ⌘

Michael Cannon is an internationally renowned sales and marketing effectiveness expert and best-selling author on topics related to sales messaging and sales planning. For more information, visit www.silverbulletgroup.com or call 925-930-9436.