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Product Management at Google - How to rapidly bring breakthrough products to market

Speaker: Dipchand "Deep" Nishar, Director, Product Management, Google

Dipchand "Deep" Nishar, Director of Wireless Products at Google spoke to a sell out crowd at the June 8, 2005 meeting of the SVPMA. Deep spoke about "Product Management at Google - How to Bring Breakthrough Products to Market." The speaker discussed six ingredients that have contributed to Google's great success.

Break the Mold - Constantly innovate

a. Google is always looking for products that can be radically better. For example, prior to Gmail, web mail had little innovation since hotmail defined the category. Google looked at the problem and decided folders were inadequate to manage the 100+ emails that many of us receive per day. So they focused on search. They further innovated with threading, and then leveraged their competency at structuring large systems to give everyone a gigabyte of storage at launch.

b. Google maps focused on map quality, showing streets in 2-d and making scrolling smooth. Further, Google added satellite images. This is a novelty in the US but is necessary in other markets, such as China, Japan, and Brazil, where street signs do not exist and people navigate by landmarks.

Focus on the User. First and foremost, Google will not compromise its brand for money. If it does not help the user, Google won't do it. Secondly, Google's core mission is to organize all the world's information. Since only 5% of the world's information is on the web, Google has introduced other products such as desktop search.

Power of Small teams. Google employees are expected to spend 20% of their time working on a new idea. The team starts with 1 engineer or 1 product manager whose job it is to go out and prove the product by creating a successful prototype and recruiting others to devote their 20% time to the project. Once the prototype is created, it goes in front of the product council. If approved, the project grows to 1 Product Manager and 2 -3 Engineers to develop the product fully enough for a Google Lab Launch. If the product continues to be successful, it then gets a full team and is rolled out. This method of bubbling up projects ensures good projects make it to the top and weak projects get weeded out before any major investment.

It's not just the biology - it's also about the chemistry. Google knows it's more than just finding the smartest people. It must also find people who are a good cultural fit. They employ a rigorous (and somewhat unorthodox) interviewing process to make sure that the chemistry is a fit and that they hire people with whom the team is excited to work.

Think Big. Google didn't just try to create a better search, it set-out to organize the world information and make it universally acceptable. Google strives to understand what the user wants and retrieve it for them. Mr. Nishar's group, Google Mobile, is central to the company's mission because half the people in the world will access Google for the first time through a wireless device rather than a desktop computer.

PM is the GM without the title. The Product Manager has to act as the general manager of the product. He or She is tasked with understanding user's issues, defining the product, securing distribution, preparing sales, and working with any partners. Also, the PM must be a generalist because products move too fast.

About the Speaker

For the past two years Deep has driven the product strategy for Google's mobile products worldwide. Prior to Google, Deep worked at Siebel Systems where he was a member of the founding team of the Universal Application Network (UAN) business unit. He is a 15 year veteran of technology. He received his Bachelors in Technology with honors from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, where he was awarded the Institute Silver Medal. Deep also received a Masters of Science in Electrical Engineering from University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and a Masters in Business Administration from Harvard Business School where he graduated with highest honors as a Baker Scholar.