June Event with Dipchand "Deep" Nishar

Product Management at Google – How to Bring Breakthrough Products to Market

By Greg Cohen

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.

1. **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.

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The Content-Free Buzzword-Compliant Vocabulary List

By Peter E. Cohan

"Our powerful software is flexible, intuitive, easy-to-use and integrates seamlessly with your other tools. Robust and scalable, your organization can enjoy the benefits of our best-of-breed world-class offering."

How many times have you read this in marketing materials for software? Does it provide you with any real information – or is it simply a string of meaningless buzzwords?

When you or your team uses these words and phrases in a presentation or software demonstration, you risk loss of credibility. Presentations and demos, in particular, need to focus on facts – not supposition – in order to achieve technical proof or generate a real vision in the customers' minds.

Working with Difficult Engineering Teams, Part III

By Brian Lawley

Ironically as I am writing this article about working with difficult teams I'm working with two excellent engineering teams. This is when Product Management is the best job in the world. As a Product Management professional you'll occasionally end up working with teams like this who are great to work with - they understand the value that you add, are incredibly talented and want to build great products that change the industry. In a future article I'll be writing about what to do to help build winning team situation like this, but for now I'll wrap up this series with a few more of what I call "Games Engineers Play".

In case you missed the first 2 articles in this series, here are the first five games that we covered:

Game # 1: Redefining Alpha or Beta criteria at the last minute
Game # 2: You get your choice
Game #3 Changing Feature Definitions
Game #4 Features, Schedule, Performance: Pick Two
Game #5 Using The MRD Process To Stall For Time

So on to the final two games (and these two I sincerely hope you never have to play)…

Game #6: Sorry, but we have the final word
One engineering VP that I used to work with brought me into his office at one point about halfway through a major project. As with any software development effort, there were several points of contention between Product Management and Engineering. We had been through one of the issues half a dozen times and I had voiced my opinion that the release would fail without a specific critical feature that Engineering had originally agreed on including but now did not want to deliver. The reality was that it was a very hard coding challenge, and would have put their schedule commitments at risk. Nonetheless, it was key for our customers, so I was insisting on it.

After politely explaining his position, the engineering VP informed me that he was "Sorry, but we have the final word on this. You will have to live with not getting what you want". I had suggested several reasonable alternatives - scaled down versions of the feature, pushing the schedule out if necessary and even funding a contractor to work on the feature. But he had made up his mind.

Defeated, I played the only card that I could. I cut the revenue forecast by 80% and let management know to lower their expectations. After all, this was a critical feature to drive upgrades, and without it there was little reason that customers would actually pay for a new version. Luckily I had a signed off MRD and spec as a backup that included the feature, but nonetheless I had been put in a difficult position.

In the end I lost on this one. The product shipped without the feature, and I was still held accountable for the original revenue forecast. But sometimes there are just some things that are out of your control.

By the way, this is the reason why Product Management should NEVER report into Engineering.

Game # 7: We Don't Talk To Marketing

Long ago when I was first starting my career in Product Management I actually had an engineering team that refused to talk to anyone in Marketing or Product Management. The previous Product Manager had been somewhat of a tyrant, making ridiculous demands, oftentimes having completely disregard for working as a team. As a result the engineers would hold secret meetings to discuss the feature set and ship dates. They would not answer the phone or reply to emails. They would keep documents hidden so that no one outside of the core engineering team could comment or even know what was in the release they were working on.

I have to admit, this was one of the most extreme cases of dysfunction I have had to deal with in my career. Nonetheless, I had to find a way to make it work. Luckily I had a very seasoned manager who supported me (and I also happened to be working on several other products concurrently.)

To solve the problem I pulled the engineering manager aside and informed him that my priorities had been changed to focus on the other products I was managing. As a result, even though I thought what they were working on had potential, I didn't think there was any way that the company would ship it since there wouldn't be any Product Management or customer input during development. I also added that even if it did ship the company wasn't likely to highlight it or market it, so few customer would end up using it in the end.

The product did end up shipping. It sucked. Customers were unhappy.

In the Product Management game you win some and you lose some.   ⌘

Brian Lawley runs the 280 Group, which provides hand-picked Product Management consultants and contractors to help companies ship breakthrough new products. See www.280group.com for more information .

May Event with Dennis Meister
Maximizing Customer Value through
Product Lifecycle Management and Marketing
By Greg Cohen

Dennis Meister, Vice President of Product Lifecycle Management at Siemens Medical Solutions, spoke at the May 4, 2005 meeting of the SVPMA. Mr. Meister presented on *Maximizing Customer Value through Product Lifecycle Management and Marketing.* The speaker has over 20 years of experience in the medical equipment space, specifically ultrasound imaging. His products have all enjoyed dominant market share and command a 30% premium to the market. He describes himself as a pragmatist, who uses process but only as a means to an end.

Mr. Meister views the field of Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) as still immature, but the next big thing. Businesses started with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), progressed to Supply Chain Management (SCM) to run the factory, then to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to get close to the customer, and now are tackling PLM to ensure the right product is made. PLM is a way to perform customer oriented product planning. For Siemens medical, this means organizing around clinical workflow of specific disease states rather than aligning by product. Further, PLM must include product planning after the release since ultrasound equipment can have a service life of 20 years. Thus, only 10% of a product's life is spent in development.

For discussion, the speaker broke up the product lifecycle into two generic phases – investment phase and the return phase. Activities that reduce investment or increase return will increase the ROI. Mr. Meister offered many suggestions in this area:

1. Minimize investment period by

- making faster decisions and using techniques like rapid prototyping to retire risk.
- Reduce cost – externalization/outsourcing and component reuse
- Accelerate time to market – quick development cycles, build in quality to reduce testing, have project transparency as a way to expose the dirty laundry while people can still correct the problem.

The customer impact of this is by making faster decisions; you become more responsive to the market. By using rapid prototyping, you involve the customer in the design.

2. Maximize return phase by

- Effective deployment and pre-selling
- Foster rapid mainstream adoption
- Price protection
- Increase volume by going after new markets and configurations
- Continue to look for ways to reduce costs
- Product updates
- Brand management

Here's the list of words that can get you and your team into trouble - we call it the "Content-Free Buzzword-Compliant Vocabulary List":

1. Robust
2. Powerful
3. Flexible
4. Integrated
5. Seamless
6. Extensible
7. Scalable
8. Interoperable
9. Easy-to-use
10. Intuitive
11. User-friendly
12. Comprehensive
13. Best-of-breed
14. World-class

How can you communicate the ideas behind these buzzwords and stay in the land of facts? Look for concrete, fact-based examples that illustrate the ideas.

For example, instead of saying, "Our software is robust," you might state "This software is deployed and in day-by-day production use by over 10,000 users around the world today." Or, alternatively, try "Our users enjoy a 99.98% uptime on a 24/7/365 basis." The more specifics and numbers you can provide make these statements more credible and support your claim.

Similarly, you can replace the trite and hackneyed "user-friendly", "easy-to-use" and "intuitive" claims by being focused and sticking to the facts. You can cite the specific number of mouse clicks necessary to complete a task, for example. Or, perhaps you can reference that users of your software out-of-the-box have never found the need to purchase training. Just the facts, Ma'am…no hyperbole!

A good test you can apply to your own material is to ask the question, "In whose opinion?" If it is a quote from a customer, then that's terrific, and you should identify the quote accordingly. However, if the answer is that it came from your marketing department (or your lips!), then you should find a way to rephrase.

For example, if you find a phrase in your literature or presentation materials such as "Our powerful software…," then you should ask in whose opinion is it powerful? You can turn this from useless fluff to real stuff by providing a working example: "Our customers state that our software reduces their typical workflow cycle time from several days to less than an hour."

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software is a key topic of discussion in many organizations today. Nearly every CRM software vendor says their tools are "powerful". In whose opinion? Are they able to lift tons of steel or send satellites into orbit? What makes their software powerful?

Replacing items on the Content-Free Buzzword-Compliant Vocabulary List with substantive claims provides you the

opportunity to differentiate from most competitors. Compare "Our powerful software is world-class…" with "Our software enables 10% increases in close rates, 14% reduction in sales cycles, and customers also report substantial increases in the quality of leads generated and pursued…"

Two of the worst offenders on the Content-Free Buzzword-Compliant Vocabulary list are "seamless" and "integrated". Everything, it seems, is "seamlessly integrated" with everything else. Why, then, is there so much work for companies that provide integration capabilities?!

Once again, providing real-life, fact-based examples is a solution that enables you and your team to rise above the competition and earn a positive reputation for being fact-based. "Our Sales Force Automation solution automatically enters all tasks, appointments, and telephone calls onto your Outlook calendar, without requiring a single mouse-click. Set it up once from the Preferences Menu and our software keeps all of your calendar operations synced and up-to-date with Outlook." <u>Much</u> better!

"Scalable" is easy to improve upon. With regards to the number of users, how about: "Implementations of our software range from single users in sole-proprietorships to over 2,500 users in Fortune-500 companies." If you are referring to concurrency, consider something like "Our ASP installation is currently supporting companies with a handful of daily transactions to organizations who are processing well beyond 10,000 transactions every hour."

When a vendor says their software is "flexible," are they talking about software capabilities, or their willingness to be flexible with their licensing policy or pricing? Use specific examples that are focused and relevant to the customer at hand, whenever possible. Using verifiable, real-life statements will encourage your customers to respond with a more positive, open attitude – which will help you in achieving your objectives.

Stick with the facts, avoid meaningless buzzwords, and enjoy increased success with your presentations and demonstrations!

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

3. **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.

4. **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.

5. **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.

6. **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.   ⌘

Greg Cohen is a Senior Product Manager at Instill Corporation and on the board of the Silicon Valley Product Management Association.

V.P. Product Management in Palo Alto, CA

Create and maintain company's enterprise system management product strategy in accordance with company goals and vision; develop product positioning and packaging; specify market requirements for current and future products by conducting primary research supported by on-going visits to customers and non-customers; translate customer/market needs into new features and functionality; manage entire product development lifecycle; ensure timely creation, testing and delivery of product and documentation deliverables; profile competition and substitute products; develop the product management and technical writing groups through recruitment and hiring and development of training/mentoring programs; prepare and present to the Board and management bi-monthly product plans; prepare and present special product documents and presentations including detailed future plans for strategic customers; work closely with R & D in Israel. Travel to Israel quarterly for at least a week for a total of 4-6 weeks/year.

Must have Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science or Engineering and 3 years of Software Product Management exp. in a customer facing role, including management of a product from concept to release and exp. translating customer needs into new features and functionality; 3 yrs. of software development experience including exp. developing software packages and Software Development Kits (SDK's); knowledge of structure, operations and common practices of enterprise data centers.

Interested applicants should mail cover letter and resume to: Yael Gila, Director of F&A, Qlusters, Inc., 1841 Page Mill Rd. Suite G-2; Palo Alto CA. 94304, or send via email to yaeli@glusters.com.

BOOK REVIEW
Confidence: How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin & End
Review by John Armstrong

Why does a sports team continue its winning ways even though recent teams lack the talent of their predecessors? Why are some companies always positively perceived by employees, customers, Wall Street analysts, and the media while others seem to be under a perpetual cloud? How does a company like Gillette or a team like the Chicago Cubs end a losing streak and breaks out of a circle of doom? What does it take to bring an organization like Continental Airlines or the BBC from mediocrity to magnificence?

These are some of the issues and examples that you will discover when you read "Confidence – How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin & End". Author Rosabeth Moss Kanter will convince you that the goal of winning is "not losing two times in a row". In her view, success and failure are not events, they are self-fulfilling tendencies. "Confidence is the sweet spot between arrogance and despair--consisting of positive expectations for favorable outcomes." says Kanter, a Harvard Business School professor.

She applies the discipline of cognitive psychology to explore the winning and losing streaks of a variety of organizations, including the BBC, Gillette, Seagate, Verizon, Continental Airlines, Target and sports teams such as the University of North Carolina women's soccer team, New England Patriots, Chicago Cubs, and Philadelphia Eagles. The result is an enlightening anatomy of the behaviors, decisions, and actions that build and restore confidence, and lead to positive outcomes.

Drawing on dozens of interviews, Kanter logically explains the role that confidence plays in the performance of institutions and individuals. Winning streaks are fueled by confident people who are secure in their own abilities and the ability of their leaders. Winning streaks are characterized by continuity and continued investment, while losing streaks are marked by disruption and a lack of investment that typically give way to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.

Losing streaks are often created and then perpetuated when people lose confidence in their leaders and systems. Combining theory with practical advice, Kanter details how losing organizations can instill accountability, collaboration and initiative—Kanter's three pillars of confidence—to help start a turnaround.

While the book is filled with helpful lessons for organizations, there is plenty for the individual to take away and integrate into his/her own life. That is, our own attitudes…positive or negative…contribute significantly to the outcome of specific situations within our lives. Success and failure can both be contagious. Small steps and accomplishments can have a big impact. Confidence can sometimes outweigh raw talent.

Even under the most challenging situations, confident leadership and behavior can help unleash positive energy. Whenever we find ourselves under trying circumstances, it is an inspiring reminder of the value of "Confidence", a book that I highly recommend to all readers.   ⌘

John Armstrong is a seasoned software marketing veteran who does consulting work through the 280 Group .

As examples, when Mr. Meister launched his last product, he spent generously on the launch and then created a second product to shield the premium offering from price erosion.

Mr. Meister concluded by emphasizing that PLM is much more than initial product planning. His track record speaks for itself on the benefits of well executed Product Life Cycle Management.

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Greg Cohen is a Senior Product Manager at Instill Corporation and on the board of the Silicon Valley Product Management Association.   He has over seven years in software and application services specifically with