SVPMA
Silicon Valley Product Management Association
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NEWS

November/December 2009 Volume 8, Issue 6

Market Requirements Documents (MRD) – Great in Theory, Not So Great in Practice

By John Mansour

No one would argue the value of connecting product features to market needs, the primary objective of an MRD. Yet the reality of how MRD's are created and used may actually defeat their purpose.

If MRD's are supposed to reflect the needs of the market, they should be market specific not product specific. Product specific MRD's reinforce a product silo mentality that breeds multiple disparate views of the market, conflicting priorities across products and greater internal competition for resources, all of which result in a fragmented product driven organization instead of a market driven solutions organization.

A typical MRD pays good lip service to market needs but in reality, the contents present a very tactical view of the market (customers need more flexibility when doing…) followed by a plethora of product features and specifications. Why is this bad?

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...and more

September 2009 Event with Yossi Zohar, Portfolio Marketing Director at Amdocs

By Greg Cohen

Yossi Zohar, Portfolio Marketing Director at Amdocs, presented at the September 2nd meeting of the SVPMA. He shared 10 Best Practices for Successful Product Management that he developed over his 22 year career in the IT and software industry. The speaker first defined the role of product management as the compass or navigator for the product. With the audience aligned, he started his top 10 ten list.

1. **Never compromise on having direct customer interaction**

   It is your role to understand customer needs and translate them into product requirements. You need direct customer interaction to gain this knowledge and should never go through intermediaries.

2. **Thoroughly prioritize your requirements**

   Because scope is always restricted by time and resources, requirement prioritization is key.

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How to Launch A Successful Blog In 90 Days
An informative excerpt from Rohit's "Influential Marketing Blog"

By Rohit Bhargava

Starting a blog is not for everyone. There are lots of reasons not to blog; including having the time to keep a blog up to date, having something to say, and the fact that blogging is becoming an increasingly crowded space making it far tougher to stand out than it may have been in the past. Why would I start a post about successful blogging with all these cautions against blogging? Mostly to make sure that if you are going to start a blog, you are getting into it without a false expectation that it can solve all your problems or how much work it will be.

Assuming you have the right idea in mind, the question I get asked most often is how you can make your blog as successful as possible. Here are some tips for new bloggers on what you may want to focus on in your first 90 days of blogging:

DAYS 1 to 15:

1. Find a good niche. Think hard about what you want to write about. It has to be something you are passionate about and interested in, otherwise it won't work. The more specific you can get, the better. You can also broaden it later, but in the beginning you need to find a subject that you can own.

2. Choose a name and URL. This is a tough thing, but just as many companies these days do, you should let available URLs drive how you name your blog. If you can't get the URL, don't use the name. And make sure you plan to put your blog on a specific URL, whether you are using Typepad or Blogspot or any other service. Trust me on this, you'll eventually wish you built your blog on your own URL, whether you think so today or not.

3. Grab a template and launch quickly. The biggest paralysis new bloggers have is wanting to get their new blog just right. In the first few weeks of your blog, the most important thing is to find your voice - so forget about design just launch it with a ready made template. Chances are remote that search engines will list it that quickly, and you'll have a few weeks to get it right.

4. Add Google Analytics. Google has a free tool called Google Analytics which gives you some great metrics on your blog all for free. It requires you to do a bit of tricky cutting and pasting to add certain code to your blog, but it is totally worth it to do it early so you'll have metrics from the first days of your blog to compare to and see how far you have come.

5. Create an editorial calendar. Some football coaches head into games scripting out their first 10 plays as part of their game plan. You should do the same. Figure out the topics for your first ten posts, and then write them steadily. Not only does this get you thinking ahead, it also gives you a sense of how many posts per week you can realistically write.

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DAYS 15 to 30:

6. Reevaluate your blog title. At this point, you will likely have several blog posts to look at and a better sense of what you enjoy writing about. It's the perfect time to check the title of your blog and theme that you set earlier and make sure it still accurately describes what you want to write about. If it doesn't, now is the perfect time to fix it.

7. Design your blog brand. Now that you have your theme and several posts, you can design your blog. At this stage, you may just want to add a logo to an existing template or do something more custom. Either way, by having your blog brand set and several posts in your archive, you can really see what your design will look like.

8. Get your blog listed. It's also time in these two weeks to get your blog listed on all the search engines by submitting it. You should also claim it on Technorati, and submit it to any other sites in your particular industry or area of focus. Remember, you don't need to focus on promotion right now; this is just about getting your site listed.

9. Set up your feeds. Many bloggers today (including me) are using Feedburner to syndicate their RSS feeds and offer email subscriptions to their blog. Whether you choose to use Feedburner or not, setting up your feeds and making them available to readers will be important as you start to grow your blog.

10. Learn the art of headlining. In blog posts, titles make a big difference. Particularly because many readers will be accessing your content through RSS and the title may be the only thing you see. To deal with this truth, you need to think like a copywriter and treat your blog post titles like headlines. Learning to write good blog post titles will be a major skill you will use all the time.

DAYS 30 to 60:

11. Set your targets. You'll probably be getting close to finishing your first ten posts by now, or at least worrying about what you'll write about next. Based on what you've been able to do in the first month, set a target for yourself of how many posts you will try to write per week. My target is three and I usually stick to it.

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12. Learn the 25 styles. More than a year ago, I wrote a presentation designed to answer the common question from bloggers of what to write about (available at www.personalitynotincluded.com/bloggingadvice). To help you fight "bloggers block" – view the presentation and learn the techniques. They will help you figure out what to write about, as they have helped me.

13. Contact your influencers. Now that you have a month of blogging experience, it's also time to start asking for advice and introducing yourself to those who inspire you. Create a list of bloggers that you look up to and then religiously email one person from that list after you do a post. Ideally it will be someone who would be interested in your post and likely to respond.

14. Actively share your posts. In addition to emailing them to your influencers, you should start finding appropriate social networks and sites on which to share your blog posts. This could mean submitting them to Digg, or posting them onto del.icio.us with keyword tags. Essentially, you want to try a few tools to get your blog posts out there tagged and saved.

15. Integrate your blog into your profiles. At the point when you start your blog, you are probably already using other social networks such as Facebook or LinkedIn. After the first month when you have some good activity on your blog, you can add the URL to your profiles and make sure that your network knows you have a blog.

DAYS 60 to 90:

In these days, your main focus should be on content and connections. Try to create the best blog posts you can. Those that have insights, a strong point of view, and are highly shareable. If you can really succeed at having this great content, people will pass it along and your blog will have the greatest chance of getting passed along too. At this stage you should also make sure that you are using all of your social networks to also spread the word about your blog and your posts. The reason I don't have specific lessons at this stage is that you're starting to get into the point where you will probably be finding your own way and techniques that work for you. The best advice I can offer at this stage and moving ahead beyond 90 days is to try and stay as consistent as possible, and continue to create the best content you can, and share it with people in your network most likely to help you spread the word. ⌘

Rohit Bhargava is a founding member of the 360 Digital Influence group at Ogilvy and author of the best selling new book Personality Not Included, a guide on how to use personality to reinvent your marketing that has been published globally in 8 languages. He writes the Influential Marketing blog, ranked by Ad-Age among the top 50 marketing blogs in the world, and has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, PBS, SkyNews, MarketingChina and Fast Company. Rohit teaches Global Communications at Georgetown University and is a frequent and "non-obvious" keynote speaker on marketing and business at events around the world.

Looking for new opportunities in Product Management?

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SVPMA Job Board Forum: http://www.svpma.org/forum.html

October Event Review: Product Management Productivity: How to get twice as much done in half the time with Brian Lawley CEO and founder, 280 Group

By Keith Rayner

This is a particularly timely topic for PMs as those lucky enough to still have their jobs have seen their already heavy workload increase with additional projects inherited from their less fortunate colleagues. However, strategies and tips on being productive at work, prioritizing tasks and meeting those deadlines amid a mass of distractions can benefit everyone in Silicon Valley.

To set the stage, Brian made the important distinction between being productive, and not just being busy. You can be busy on emails and in meetings all day, but the true measure of productivity is producing deliverables. And to achieve this while maintaining a positive attitude and not getting burnt out is key to a balanced work life and successful career.

Brian's talk contained quite a few gems to help us focus on what's truly important, free up time, and reduce stress, and the audience also threw in a few ideas for good measure. The presentation in the form of a Top 10 list can be viewed on the SVPMA website in all its bullet-pointed glory, but here's a quick synopsis.

1) Master emails

- Avoid constant email distractions by processing emails at three predetermined times a day (morning, after lunch, late afternoon, for example). Delete the rubbish, answer short responses immediately, and turn important emails into tasks (more about task lists later). Avoid getting involved in long email threads as much as possible. If you stay out of the thread they often resolve themselves. And answer personal emails at home (or lunch hour, if you have one).

2) Master Outlook (or your favorite email program)

- Your email apps get used so much that some up-front time spent learning all the features and shortcuts is a worthwhile investment.

3) Consolidate all your to-do's from all sources in one list of tasks

- Post-it notes, cell phone notes, emails, all get put into one to-do list. Outlook has a task section for example, but you can use your own favorite software.

4) Prioritize your task list

- Now that you have a single list, prioritize it: must do today, would like to do today, not important today. Set your priorities in the morning - any incoming tasks during the day get ranked against this list. Work on getting the a-list done today, and enjoy the sense of satisfaction at the end of the day when you actually achieve this!

5) Master meetings

- Opt out of meetings where possible (yeah!), schedule 30-minute meetings instead of one hour. Off-topic items are dealt with outside of the meeting. Start the meeting promptly - public humiliation of latecomers (humorous or otherwise) works wonders, although you might reconsider this if it's your boss who's late. Providing donuts is a good addition to meetings. Providing two less donuts than the planned number of attendees is a great incentive to arrive early. A more draconian measure is to lock the conference door two minutes after the start time. Take electronic meeting

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Mark your Calendars for these upcoming events:

- Nov. 4th - James Morehead, VP of Product Management, SupportSoft
- Nov. 7th - Workshop with Gary Katz, CEO & Founder, Marketing Operations Partners
- Dec. 2nd - Mike Schmidt, Brocade

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

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notes of discussion points and action items. Send out the meeting notes immediately at the end of the meeting.

6) Don't reinvent the wheel

- Use templates, white papers, books etc – there's a lot of good guides on the internet which incorporate a lot of tried and tested know-how. Explore industry and LinkedIn groups as well.

7) Use and master great tools

- Take time to learn them properly – this is a very valuable investment of a couple of hours that will pay off for years.

8) Learn to be politely rude to people who distract you such as salespeople and other timewasters

9) Stick to a routine

- Process emails three times a day, web twice a day, background reading once or twice a week. You can also set aside specific times for more strategic planning of large projects and critical deliverables to make sure you keep the big picture in perspective.

10) Get help!

- Consultants, admin, junior PMs, peers, etc. can all help to balance your workload. Don't try to conquer the world by yourself.

Conclusion

Getting your day and tasks structured and understanding what your priorities are allows you to more easily set deadlines for yourself, and actually meet them!.

There are bombshell days that can disrupt anyone's best intended schedule, but if you have a structure to your day you can better recover from firefighting diversions, and also react appropriately to calls for immediate attention to other tasks – if those are not more important than your number 1 task then it's just gonna have to wait – and with your list you can also justify that to your boss. Now there's a gem right there.

Resources

Having advocated the use of templates, whitepapers, tips and blogs, here's some links to get you going:

- SVPMA's very own resource pages at www.svpma.org/resources.html and 10 years of event archives at www.svpma.org/archives.html.
- The 280 Group's extensive set of templates and guides can be found at www.280group.com/resources.htm
- And last but certainly not least, Brian's new book, The Phenomenal Product Manager, contains these tips and much more! www.280group.com/blog/?xpRV8W9E ⌘

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- Multiply this scenario by two or twenty product managers and the result is a host of incremental enhancements across all products that do nothing to grow your revenue or market share because collectively, they make zero impact on the business outcomes of your target customers.

- Multiply this scenario by two or twenty product managers and you still don't have a grasp on the overall market dynamics driving the top-down strategy and spending priorities of your target buyers. The result is a distorted strategy for your company. Worse yet, it manifests itself into fragmented marketing and sales messages because your value propositions are too product specific and don't reflect the current spending mindset of your buyers.

- MRD's as they are typically written are too dense and therefore serve poorly as a vehicle to transfer domain knowledge from product management/marketing to the front lines of your organization. It's the single biggest reason product managers, designers and developers spend an excessive amount of time supporting other functions, leaving too little time to focus on the next set of priorities.

A Market Centric Approach to MRD's

Instead of creating dense, product-centric MRD's that blend fragments of market information and customer problems with loads of detailed product requirements, separate the two. You'll end up with better vehicles for driving more impactful product solutions as well as transferring knowledge to the front lines of the organization for greater self-sufficiency in sales, marketing, services and support.

Create market specific MRD's that can provide your entire organization with a single view of each target market segment, their strategic spending priorities, the operational areas most impacted and the specific work processes affected as a result.

With this level of market and target customer insight, all product managers can work as a team to produce an aggregate product plan with priorities determined collectively across all products based on impact to the customer. All subsequent product requirements and functional specifications (product specific) tie back to much clearer objectives using this approach and result in solutions that have far greater impact on the business outcomes of your target customers.

For example, a spike in oil prices prompted a series of fuel conservation and new revenue initiatives for airlines that then dictated spending priorities in engineering, marketing, customer service, and many other operational departments. Those spending priorities impacted various activities and work processes in each department. A host of product and service companies are still making big money from the airlines at a time when revenue is down because they fully understand the strategic impact oil prices have on operational issues and offer solutions that support fuel conservation initiatives, revenue growth initiatives or both. The most obvious benefits that come from separating market and product information are as follows:

- A greater level of market insight better aligns your company as a whole to the market segments that are most conducive to growth

- Product management and product marketing are perceived more as market and business experts and subsequently have more influence on the strategic direction of the company

- Higher impact solutions warrant higher price points to grow revenue faster

- Product teams work more closely to create integrated solutions that make better use of resources instead of competing with one another

- The knowledge transfer process becomes more efficient because market and product content can more easily be repurposed into sales, marketing, service, support and customer artifacts. The result is better performance on the front lines and less distracted product teams with greater focus on the next set of priorities.

The bottom line: a market centric approach to MRD's ensures one view of the market, one strategy and one set of priorities across the company. It's the easiest way to reduce excess churn in determining both strategic and tactical priorities, product or otherwise. It's also highly conducive to solving bigger problems for your target customers - the easiest way to grow your own revenue and market share. ⌘

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SVPMA Members and their families gathered for an autumn picnic on September 26th in Mountain View.

Thank you to all who joined and made it a success. A special thanks to Shyla Klinder for organizing the event and Amitabh Chakrabarty for the photograph.

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Part of this in ensuring that your requirements fall along a normal distribution when ranked by priority. If all requirements are "must haves," go back and reprioritize.

3. **Maintain a "Scope Dashboard" throughout the release cycle**

   Maintain a scope dashboard that looks at each feature in relation to priority, estimated cost, customer commitment/expectation, and business impact of removing the feature from the release. The dashboard also keeps the history of what has been categorized as out of scope for the release.

4. **Be ready to make hard de-scoping decisions quickly**

   When a de-scoping decision must be made, product management is the bottleneck. Have all the data ahead of time to make a quick decision. Time = Money here. Any delay will only require further scope reduction, a delay in the release, or reduction in quality.

5. **Do your homework so you can face your development manager with confidence**

   If your development manager has his or her own agenda, challenges your decisions, and seems more concerned with maximizing employee utilization rather than business impact, you need to counter with in-depth knowledge of the customer and the market plus provide sound business justification for your decisions.

6. **Thoroughly assess business impacts of foundation/architecture enhancements**

   Foundation changes and architectural enhancements consume significant resources and risk delivering little or no value to the customer. Ask tough questions before committing to a change, such as how it will improve the customer experience, lower total cost of ownership, and whether there will be migration and upgrade issues.

7. **Factor prototyping into your plan to mitigate "product revolution impacts"**

   Use prototyping to understand how the technology will interact with existing products and impact the customer. Prototyping is a way to mitigate risk and shorten the learning cycle and should be done before the development begins.

8. **Minimize the impact of the "Unexpected Key Account Requirement Syndrome" on your roadmap**

   Last minute requirements from key customer accounts may compromise the scope, quality, or time to market of a release. One way Mr. Zohar has coped with this is to place the cus-

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tomer on a limited availability version of the product and reintegrate the code in a future release. In this way, the main product release stays on track and on-budget.

9. **Be cautious of adopting new technology "hypes"**

   Adopting new technologies has risks. You have a responsibility to your customers and if they do not really need the new technology, it is better to take a "wait and see" approach. If you do introduce a new technology, remember to prototype.

10. **Always be prepared to justify your release scope through conflicting pressures**

    Evaluate multiple release options each with a different scope. Assess alternative scope proposals based on customer markets and R& D impacts. Use this to sell your decision about the compromise needed for the scope and release date.

Mr. Zohar also shared three extra bonus practices:

1. **Be persistent**

   Stick to your strategic goals. Reducing scope is not a sin, but frequent changes to the entire strategy will damage your credibility with customers and your co-workers.

2. **Define ROI-driven products**

   Think about the business metrics your product would improve for the customer and then design the product to monitor and report on those metrics. Also gather this data to for marketing to use in case studies.

3. **Hone in on your product's business performance**

   When pitching an idea have a business case that addresses the product, pricing, positioning, sales plan, and a 3 year P&L forecast. Then if approved, measure the product's business performance on an ongoing basis against plan.

Yossi Zohar's collected wisdom was truly appreciated by the audience and left everyone with a lot to consider. ⌘

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 nearly 15 years of product management and marketing experience, including Software-as-a-Service, open source software, and agile development. Greg can be reached at greg@280group.com.