

The Jazzed Up Product Marketer

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February 2007



Excerpt

What is product marketing all about in the technology world? Is it still relevant in today's context where customers are looking for business solutions? How can product marketers continue to flex their muscle as the driving factor behind the sale process of complex technologies? This article explores the continuing role of product marketing to ensure that businesses are aware of and benefit from the use of good technology.

In the high-tech world, product marketing is about promoting a specific product line. In plain English, it's about selling as many units of a product. And the product marketer plays a central role in ensuring predictability of revenues, and consistency of execution across all channels of sales. A good product marketer translates the great technology in their products to desirable user and business benefits – and accelerates the buying process.

Product marketing extends beyond just creating awareness and demand for the products. As a product marketing manager, you're typically expected to be the all-rounder – or even a catch-all expert for your product. Your responsibilities can range from pitching your business plan to HQ, to meeting partners and customers for feedback, to personally evangelising your products convincingly. Beyond implementing marketing plans, other typical product marketing responsibilities include:

- internal coordination & excitement
- market relations (including PR)
- partners programs & communication
- customer engagement & service
- business development initiatives

The nagging question: are product marketing roles still relevant in today's solution-based approach? You bet. Although overshadowed by solution-like messages, companies still rely on product experts to provide the depth of knowledge, and to drive focus. By listening to your clients' business challenges, and knowing which product features to match accordingly, you're selling your client a solution. As the product expert, you probably can achieve this effortlessly.

The problem is that you can't be everywhere. You're depending on your extended sales teams and partners to sell on your behalf every day. How do you ensure their consistency of providing compelling answers, and addressing concerns? That's when a good product marketer stands out.

In my 15 years in the IT industry, I have had the pleasure of working with great product marketers. The good ones passionately believe in their products – they enthuse about it at any given opportunity – converting prospects into raving fans. They also spend time with partners and customers to gather inputs on areas requiring improvements. And they act on it! I have admired these capable professionals for their zen-like ability to look at the big picture, and yet, feeling at home rolling up their sleeves to execute a marketing program. Over and above this, they are business savvy. By consistently delivering on all fronts, they are ensuring that as many people benefit from the use good technology.

And having held product marketing roles at globally admired technology companies, I'll be the first to say that the role has been good training for general management roles. Assuming your product development team is not in-country, you take the product when it comes out the factory line, and find ways to get it to market (internal sales, marketing, distributors, press coverage and so on). You regularly get exposed to various aspects of the company operations, and will begin to appreciate the unique challenges each supporting team has to go through.

One of the biggest challenges of being a product marketer is ensuring that all

strategies and tactics are executing to plan. Like a performing juggler, you have to keep all balls in the air at the same time. If you don't want the role to affect your work-life balance, you'll need strong multi-tasking and time management skills. You also can't do this alone. You'll need strong partnerships internally, having regular dialogues with other stakeholders to achieve mutual goals. Your external marketing agencies play important supporting roles too. Find the ones who match your work-style. An added bonus is agencies that have "skin in the game" – they share the risks and rewards of your marketing efforts.

Interestingly, many product marketers I have met (or worked with) had converted from technical roles. Many of them focus more on the "product" aspect of the role instead of the "marketing". While it is important to demonstrate your products and share its future directions, the reality is about selling the products on the shelves today. How do you create demand and convince your customers to buy today? On the other end of the spectrum rule the "promo kings" – those who habitually give discounts or offer freebies to move their products. These tactics generate opportunistic sales in the short term. To sustain sales of your product line, more needs to be done to create awareness and demand, as well as building an ecosystem of sales supporters – people who will help you sell. When the promotion period ends, other customers will need to be

convinced of considering and purchasing your products. A discount has no value if they don't even see a need of your offering.

Product marketing is not for everybody. Like sales, it is a very people-oriented role. You'll be briefing to your advertising agency in the morning, exchanging notes with a colleague on a joint project during lunch, and then liaising with your top reseller in the afternoon over an incentive program. It matters not if you don't have a technical background, but having it gives you confidence when required to explain a complex solution.

So what are some of the good competencies to have if you're considering a role in product marketing? While it's nearly impossible to be good in everything, having these traits will make your job a lot more enjoyable.

- passion for technology
- capable of multi-tasking and project managing
- have business acumen
- strong communication and presentation skills
- good time management

Product marketing is an important marketing discipline in the technology world. Since we are not short of high-quality technology in the market, what makes a way-cool product stands out lies in the hands of a great product marketing manager.

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