Gabriel Steinhardt

The Product Manager's Toolkit

Methodologies, Processes and Tasks in High-Tech Product Management

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Foreword

Product management in the high-tech industry has always experienced varied interpretation as to its character and internal structure. Often product management is performed informally or in a non-standardized form, and organized differently in each company – commonly located in the marketing department or sometimes in the engineering department. In addition, although the product management profession has existed for many years, there has not been a product management best-practice or standard that has been globally adopted. This book offers a holistic methodology as a solution to these concerns.

Product management is a discipline responsible for product planning (articulating the market problem) and product marketing (generating awareness, differentiation, and demand). Companies have come to appreciate the organizational value of other well-defined professional disciplines, such as project management, quality management, and business analysis as well as the results achieved by the orderly implementation of these disciplines. Accordingly, standardized product management done consistently well can greatly increase the probability of product success and profitability.

Product management practitioners frequently perform a broad spectrum of roles with varying responsibilities and skill sets, and communicate with both internal and external stakeholders like sales, marketing communications, engineering, customer support, customers, partners, and suppliers. Identifying the various roles and responsibilities in the product management domain is imperative to understand what needs to be accomplished in order to deliver a successful product. Product management is not a role performed in the interest of one or more product lines; it is a distributed set of roles and related responsibilities covering definitive aspects of the product delivery process.

Defining roles and responsibilities in product management is a very preliminary step. One also needs to understand how to do what needs to be done – creating deliverables that can be successfully used in the delivery of a product. In addition, a repeatable process that creates successful products needs to be documented, followed, audited, and improved upon. The product management models and templates in this book are intended to help facilitate the implementation of that process.

For over seven years I have assisted Gabriel Steinhardt in his development of the Blackblot product management body of knowledge, including the "Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit™" (PMTK). I have met few people as dedicated to defining and standardizing the product management profession as Gabriel Steinhardt, who has made it his professional goal. The primary purpose of the PMTK methodology is to help companies and their product management teams become more successful in their product delivery efforts. With the release of this book it is hoped that product management will mature further and be viewed as a structured and well-defined critical business function.

This book will help students of product management, product management practitioners, product management organizations, and corporations understand the value of product management and the distinct roles and responsibilities in product management. It will aid in the efforts to clarify role definitions, identify responsibilities, define processes and deliverables, and improve the ability to communicate with stakeholders.

Daniel Stadler
Business Consultant, MBA/Technology Management

About the Author

Gabriel Steinhardt is Blackblot's Managing Director, a recognized international high-tech product management expert, author, lecturer, and developer of practical tools and methodologies that increase product managers' productivity.

A marketing and information systems MBA with over a decade of experience in product management in the computer software and hardware industry, Gabriel has assumed diverse leadership roles with major corporations and start-ups in marketing, product management, and technical undertakings.

Gabriel created the highly successful "Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit™" (PMTK) professional template collection, designed Blackblot's entire product management training program, and wrote the "Blackblot Product Management Professional™" (BPMP) certification program.

Acknowledgments

I have been developing the Blackblot product management body of knowledge, including the "Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit™" (PMTK) professional template collection, for over fifteen years. Without the help and support of some very special people, my work and this book would have never become a reality.

Daniel Stadler, a product management expert and technology business advisor, has been providing me with insight, suggestions, critical review, commentary, advice, guidance, and support for several years during the development of PMTK and Blackblot's product management training and certification programs. A special note of gratitude is extended to him for his invaluable contribution.

My sincere thanks go to all my business partners, fellow instructors, and students worldwide whose feedback and creativity has challenged me. They had candidly shared their thoughts and I have gained much from each of them. I am grateful for their continued support.

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Gabriel Steinhardt

Introduction

Product management is an occupational domain which holds two professional disciplines: product planning and product marketing. This is because product functionality is built for the user via product planning and the product's value is presented to the buyer via product marketing. A somewhat more expanded interpretation would be to view product management as an occupational domain that is based on general management techniques which are focused on product planning and product marketing topics.

A high-tech company is a business entity that either develops technology that is incorporated in a product or is used in the assembly or manufacturing of a product, or manufactures a product that contains technology and that same product relies on that technology to perform its core function. In reality, most high-tech companies view product management as a collective term which describes the broad sum of diverse product related activities, excluding sales and development activities, which are performed in the interest of delivering a particular product to market. With such a vague and misleading definition it is possible to fit most anything (even product testing) into the realm of product management.

This commonly used vague definition of product management misleads and allows many people to place their own personal interpretation on the role of product management, and that accounts for the multitude of diverse definitions in the high-tech industry. Every company is different and handles product management differently – meaning that the product management discipline is not standardized as much as it could be across the high-tech industry. Further complicating the situation is that in each company there are individual stakeholders who often view and interpret product management very differently from each other.

For companies to be recurrently successful, other than just being lucky, a consistent understanding of product management must be present in the company and all aspects of product management must be fully addressed and handled efficiently. However, the contributing factors to both failure and success can be extremely complex to analyze. One can attempt to investigate why certain companies and products have failed, only to quickly realize that the cause is multifaceted and that many factors need to be considered.

Product management is comprised of activities that profoundly impact a product's chances of success. For example, providing incorrect market requirements, erroneous pricing, or an inaccurate profiling of the target market can all be detrimental and critical. If just one of these aspects of product management is amiss, then the product's chances of success are greatly diminished. Therefore, in order to succeed a company must execute all fundamental tasks and follow all key processes in product management. Even though there is still a chance of failure, the probability of success is increased if a company implements and consistently follows a complete product management methodology.

Companies with formal and well-defined product management practices are companies which realize that product management is a core strategic function to the organization. These companies also realize that there is greater importance in making sure that management processes are sound, properly staffed, and implemented.

Some products are successful because of external factors, timing, or merely good fortune. Not all successful products have had great product management behind them, but it is clear that many product failures have had poor or no guidance from product management. Companies will be more successful for each dollar they invest in product development if they improve in the area of product management. The obvious conclusion is that combining a definitive product management methodology with disciplined technology development practices is the key to commercial success in the high-tech world.

The product management profession and the related body of knowledge have reached a greater level of maturity and acceptance in the high-tech industry. However, across the high-tech industry drastically different duties and responsibilities are attributed to product management professionals. Diverse interpretations regarding the role of product management practitioners have only confused and stifled the ability to develop clear and consistent product management methodologies. This book provides a consistent and holistic managerial approach to product management and is based on Blackblot's applicable work models and practical methodology that covers nearly all aspects of product management.

This book, a companion to Blackblot's comprehensive product management training and certification programs, includes the "Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit™" (PMTK) professional template collection and offers companies and product management professionals with a practical primer for implementing an efficient product management practice in order to increase the practitioner's workplace productivity and improve a product's chances for commercial success.

Contents

Part I Product Management Concepts

1 Who's Driving Your Company? 3
1.1 Introduction 3
1.2 Technology-Driven: Take My Road 4
1.3 Sales-Driven: A Cruising Taxi 5
1.4 Market-Driven: Driven to Success 6
1.5 Summary 6

2 Product Management Team 9
2.1 Introduction 9
2.2 Your Role 9
2.3 Jack of All Roles, Master of None 10
2.4 Breaking It Down 11
2.5 Roles and Goals 12
2.6 Blackblot Product Management Team Model 13
2.7 Odd Couple(s) 14
2.8 Roles and Activities 16
2.9 Solution 16
2.10 Summary 17

3 Product Definition Team 19
3.1 Introduction 19
3.2 Key Concepts 20
3.3 Market Requirements 21
3.4 Blackblot Product Frames Model 22
3.5 Product Definition Foundation Documents 23
3.6 Blackblot Product Definition Team Model 24
3.7 Product Delivery Process 26
3.8 Conclusion 28

4 Crafting Market Requirements 29
4.1 Introduction 29
4.2 Voice of the Customer 29
4.3 Market Requirements Document 30
4.4 Blackblot Procedural Requirements Management Model 30
4.5 Directive 32
4.6 Constraints 33
4.7 Rationales and Sources 34
4.8 Presentment Modes 35
4.9 Whole Picture 36
4.10 Verifying Wholeness 36
4.11 Market Requirements and Engineering 37
4.12 Market Requirements Database 38
4.13 Summary 39

5 Concept of Marketing 41
5.1 Introduction 41
5.2 Business Domains 41
5.3 Marketing Domain 42
5.4 Marketing Domain Disciplines 44
5.5 Blackblot Marketing Model 45
5.6 Product Marketing Methods 46
5.7 Corporate Marketing Methods 47
5.8 Marketing Communications Methods 47
5.9 Corporate Organizational Structures 48
5.10 Marketing and Strategies 50
5.11 Marketing and Plans 51
5.12 Summary 52

6 Value-Marketing Model 53
6.1 Introduction 53
6.2 Value Concept 53
6.3 Value Formula Scale 54
6.4 Value Concept Application 56
6.5 Internal Value Marketing Dynamics 57
6.6 External Value Marketing Dynamics 58
6.7 Creating Superior Perceived Value 59
6.8 Product Marketing Messages 62
6.9 Value Messages' Foundational Knowledge 62
6.10 PMTK Market Messaging Model 64
6.11 PMTK Marketing Messages Model and Plan 65
6.12 Summary 66

7 Extending Product Life Cycle Stages 69
7.1 Introduction 69
7.2 Product Life Cycle Model Assumptions 70
7.3 Product Life Cycle Model Stages 70
7.4 Reasons for Extending the PLC 71
7.5 Strategies for Extending the PLC 71
7.6 Product Planning Strategies for Extending the PLC 71
7.7 Product Marketing Strategies for Extending the PLC 72
7.8 Strategy Application within the PLC Model 73
7.9 Limitations of the PLC Model 74
7.10 Benefits of the PLC Model 75
7.11 Conclusion 75

8 Product Management Glossary 77
8.1 Product Management Terms and Definitions 77
8.2 Product Management Glossary Description 85

Part II Product Manager's Toolkit

9 PMTK Introduction 89
9.1 PMTK Index 89
9.2 PMTK Overview 92
9.2.1 PMTK Synopsis 92
9.2.2 PMTK Background 92
9.2.3 PMTK Scope 93
9.2.4 PMTK Use Convention 93

10 PMTK Models 95
10.1 PMTK Core Models 95
10.1.1 PMTK Action Model 95
10.1.2 PMTK Flow Model 95
10.1.3 PMTK Task Model 98
10.2 PMTK Support Models 98
10.2.1 PMTK Action-Team Model 98
10.2.2 PMTK MVP Model 98
10.2.3 PMTK PRM Model 107
10.2.4 PMTK Problem Echelon Model 108
10.2.5 PMTK Product Tree Model 109
10.3 PMTK Concept Models 110
10.3.1 Blackblot Product Management Team Model 110
10.3.2 Blackblot Product Definition Team Model 112
10.3.3 Blackblot Product Frames Model 112
10.3.4 Blackblot Marketing Model 117

11 PMTK Templates 121
11.1 Product Planning 122
11.1.1 PRM Market Requirements Document (MRD) – Template V. 4.0 123
11.1.2 PRM Product Requirements Document (PRD) – Template V. 4.0 134
11.1.3 PMTK Market Requirements Document (MRD) – Template V. 4.0 141
11.1.4 Use Cases – Template V. 4.0 153
11.1.5 Product Roadmap – Template V. 4.0 159
11.1.6 MVP Pricing Model – Template V. 4.0 163
11.1.7 Win/Loss Analysis Questionnaire – Template V. 4.0 172
11.1.8 Win/Loss Analysis Report – Template V. 4.0 179
11.1.9 Customer Visit – Guidelines V. 4.0 183
11.2 Product Marketing 187
11.2.1 Business Case – Template V. 4.0 188
11.2.2 Competitor Analysis – Template V. 4.0 202
11.2.3 Product Comparison – Template V. 4.0 209
11.2.4 Corporate Mission – Template V. 4.0 215
11.2.5 Product Positioning – Template V. 4.0 219
11.2.6 Sales Axioms – Template V. 4.0 224
11.2.7 Problem/Solution/Feature/Benefit – Template V. 4.0 229
11.2.8 Unique Selling Proposition – Template V. 4.0 233
11.2.9 Market Plan – Template V. 4.0 237
11.2.10 Company Profile – Template V. 4.0 249
11.2.11 Product Backgrounder – Template V. 4.0 255
11.2.12 Collateral Matrix – Guidelines V. 4.0 259
11.2.13 Press Release Questionnaire – Template V. 4.0 267
11.2.14 Lead Generation – Template V. 4.0 270
11.3 Process Efficiency 275
11.3.1 Meeting Rules – Guidelines V. 4.0 276
11.3.2 Management by Objectives (MBO) – Guidelines V. 4.0 279
11.3.3 Decision Making – Guidelines V. 4.0 286
11.3.4 Deliverable Sign-Off – Guidelines V. 4.0 291
11.3.5 Generic Document – Template V. 4.0 296
11.3.6 Bundle Book – Guidelines V. 4.0 300
11.3.7 Gap Analysis – Template V. 4.0 301
11.3.8 Performance Review – Template V. 4.0 309
11.4 PMTK Personnel Management 314
11.4.1 Curriculum Vitae – Template V. 4.0 315
11.4.2 Professional Development Plan – Template V. 4.0 321
11.4.3 PMTK Role Descriptions – Guidelines V. 4.0 334
11.4.4 PMTK Job Description – Template V. 4.0 348
11.4.5 PMTK Interview Process – Guidelines V. 4.0 355

11.5 PMTK Implementation 365
11.5.1 PMTK Implementation Plan – Template V4.0. 366

Addendum 375
Online Reference 375
Blackblot Content Retention Tools 375
Blackblot Concept Presentations 376
Additional Services 376
Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit™ (Lifetime Subscription) 376
Blackblot Product Management Training Program 377
Blackblot Product Management Professional (BPMP) Certification Program 377
Blackblot Content Licensing 378