

Prepare Like an NFL Coach

The Super Bowl is almost here. The father of a good family friend played for the Packers back in the days when Curly Lambeau was the coach. So even though we live in New England, on February 6, the Packers are my team.

While the game itself will last only a few hours, the Packers' and Steelers' preparations began months ago. Think about how much goes into getting ready for the season. The drafting and signing of players is in April. Player conditioning occurs throughout the year. Training camp starts in July. During the season, planning for that week's opponent is vital. No coach would allow his players to play without hours of preparation, practice and study.

Of course, choose the wrong players in April and even the best tactics won't enable you to win in December.

Companies when introducing new products can benefit by thinking about how NFL coaches prepare their teams. Many companies think of the launch as the moment when they tell the world about their new product. It is the equivalent of what happens on Sunday afternoons in NFL games. Except in business, success is based on hitting sales targets and not scoring more points than your opponent.

And yes. Companies do plan for these launches. Their planning consists of executing such tactics like ensuring the analysts are briefed, the spokespeople are trained and the demo works.

When best in class companies introduce new products, they must lay a strong foundation just like NFL teams do. Well before the launch, these companies utilize processes that enable them to:

- Understand their customer's business challenges
- Identify the right early adopters and put evaluation agreements in place with them
- Collect key data from the evaluations to build a compelling value proposition that is superior to the competition's.
- Ensure that services, the supply chain and infrastructure are in place to deliver the value proposition.
- Train the sales channel and empower them with tools that actually accelerate the sales process.

- Set appropriate financial metrics
- Involve the customer in the launch. Customers as your spokespeople are more credible than company executives.

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