

Rethinking Product Marketing

Saturday, April 2, 2011 was a beautiful spring day in Boston, MA. Along the Charles River, people were biking, jogging and blading. Despite the wonderful weekend weather, over 250 people stayed inside The Microsoft Northeast Research Development (NERD) Center. They were participating in ProductCamp Boston, an all day event focused on product marketing and product management. Attendance was more than double the previous year. Similar events were held on the same day in Chicago and Silicon Valley.

Why? What were these people doing inside on a beautiful day? This was a marketing and product management conference. What was going on?

The world of marketing communications is undergoing a well documented seismic shift. The relentless buzz is now all about social media and how to leverage FaceBook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

However, the enthusiasm for ProductCamp results from a renewed focus on the Product. While all of the hype has been about the impact of social media on communications, corporations are rethinking the role and importance of product marketing.

The reason they are paying attention: the best Twitter strategy won't matter if your Go To Market approach is flawed or your value proposition does not address critical customer needs. Product marketing owns the responsibility to figure this out.

However, in the past, the primary requirement to work in Product Marketing was technical knowledge of the product. Product marketing people are often former engineers who get promoted into product marketing because they know the product better than anyone else.

They are very smart people who can carry on a technical conversation with your customer's technologists. Since their contribution is based on their product knowledge, they pride themselves on being the sales resource of last resort. They are the "superheroes" who save the day by giving the technical presentation to the customer that no one else can give.

Both marketing communications and product marketing are important roles but they are often disconnected from sales.

The ProductCamp movement is a recognition that the role of product marketing is shifting. Superheroes are giving way to quarterbacks whose new role is coordinating the actions of a

variety of functional groups. Now, these new quarterbacks must lead the charge and break down the barriers between sales, marketing and product development.

This requires management to rethink who they hire as product marketing managers and how they measure their success. The primary hiring criteria will shift from product expertise to a proven track record of growing revenues and launching products. Product knowledge will take a back seat to the ability to connect with customers and understand their business issues. The ability to empower sales with training and tools to sell value rather than delivering the presentation themselves will become a key success metric.

I was honored that two of the most popular presentations at ProductCamp were my sessions on "Effective Go to Market Strategies" and "Creating Value Propositions that Matter". These presentations barely mentioned social media and were not overly technical.

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