

The importance of educating your market

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A step that product management teams often skip in the innovation process is working with customers so they have an idea of what to expect in the next product release. The success of a new product release often hinges on the relationship between the product management team and the existing customers.

When that relationship goes smoothly, a new product initiative does as well. There are many factors to keeping that relationship on track, but perhaps none is as important as educating the customers on what to expect.

Sometimes the amount of perceived change can be overwhelming to the customer. Sometimes, there is a lot for the customer to learn. Can you imagine the task a potentially new customer is facing in cases like this? Many times, the problem is that the product management team underestimated the complexity of the new release. This complexity can be more than the sum of the new changes introduced in a given release.

Without a clear understanding of this complexity, the product management relationships can become strained right at a time when everyone needs to be working together as closely as possible. For product managers, teaching customers and perspective customers is an investment in time and money, however; with the product management team stretched (both manpower and resources), is it worth the investment?

I love these kinds of questions. I've found that there exists a type of special questions that we shouldn't try to answer. The correct response to this type of question is to avoid the question all together. In this case, asking if you should invest in training the market for the release is the wrong question at the wrong time.

Truth is the product management team has a natural desire to keep concepts held close to their chest. The issue here is all about degrees. Of course some things you will never share with your

target market, but most things need to be reviewed and discussed over time.

You can never touch the customer without leaving a fingerprint, and this fingerprint should always be in the form of a well crafted message that nudges your market toward where you want them. If there remains a large gap when the release takes place, then you haven't touched them enough in the innovation process. With each validation step, with each marketing message, we nudge the market along.

At the release, there should never be a “tah-dah!” moment that the customers are surprised by what's being released. There are no SURPRISE requirements, only EXCITEMENT. And in the case of excitement, anticipation increases the level of excitement. Don't wait until the release to announce what will be in it. The ramp-up time, and low levels of excitement resulting from your lack of touching the market could cost you your market share.

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