November Event with John Mansour
When the Tail Wags the Dog
By Greg Cohen

Mr. John Mansour, the founder and CEO of ZigZag Marketing, spoke about *When the Tail Wags the Dog* at the November 3, 2004 meeting of the SVPMA. Mr. Mansour's presentation explained how a product manager's world gets turned upside down and what can be done to set it right again.

Product managers get pulled in many directions, from sales demo, urgent customer issues, development problems, partner opportunities, and more. The pull of all these forces leads the product manager into a purely tactical role, trying to keep up with the day to days challenges and neglecting the long term direction of the product. To resolve this, Mr. Mansour recommends a

good offense is the best defense and has six steps to take control.

Balance your team
A balanced product team is one of the keys to success. There are seven macro steps in developing and marketing a product:

- Strategy and planning*
- Functional design*
- Develop, QA, and package
- Rollout & readiness*

The Gold Feature Technique
By Brian Lawley
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In a previous article (July/October 2004 SVPMA newsletter) we discussed how to use themes as a technique for writing MRDs (Market Requirements Documents) and keeping your team and product releases focused. Another powerful and useful approach is called the Gold Feature technique.

The idea behind the Gold Feature technique is that you choose a single feature that is the absolute most important priority for the release, and then you get the entire team to rally around it as the focus. This single feature provides enough customer value to hang the entire release on. It is compelling enough that all of your customers will want to upgrade (and some potential new customers will be further convinced to purchase). And it is simple enough to communicate from a marketing and competitive point of view that it gives your product a noticeable boost.

Ideally you should be able to describe the Gold Feature in one to five words. Some examples might include: 1) 30% Faster Performance 2) Import MS Word files or 3) Double your battery life. It has to be simple and very compelling - if your release has a

Letter from the President

Dear SVPMA Members,

As another busy year draws to a close, I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the reasons we can all be proud of the SVPMA's progress in the past year and let you know about some of the exciting things ahead.

This has been a year of many successes for the SVPMA. At the core of our mission is bringing you high quality speakers and networking opportunities. We had some fantastic sessions this year, including eBay and Adobe. Event highlights cover:

- *Product Design to Market Leadership* - John Addison, OPTIMARK
- *Maintaining Market Leadership Through Customer Focus* - Susan Wheeler, Pathfinder Consulting

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SVPMA is a non-profit association for Product Managers in Silicon Valley and around the San Francisco Bay area.

Our mission is
- To provide a forum to share day-to-day experiences and insights in Product Management
- To create a safe network of peers
- To promote research and education in Product Management

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- *Product Management as a Service Organization* - Judy Kirkpatrick, eBay
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- *Drive Product Development via User Research* - Dr. Sheryl Ehrlich, Adobe
- *How to Get Phenomenal Product Reviews* - Brian Lawley, 280 Group LLC
- *The Outsourcing Business, Is it Right for You?* - Sridhar Ramanathan, The Pacifica Group
- *When the Tail Wags the Dog* - John Mansour, ZIG-ZAG Marketing
- *PM Roundtable* - discussions by the membership

To assist with job hunting, we introduced a recruiter table at select events and brought in human resource managers from top employers, such as **Microsoft, eBay, Lexar Media, and IMPAC Medical Systems**. Further, we received a record number of product management posting on the SVPMA job board (http://www.svpma.org/forum/), including 20 in the month of December.

This was the second year of the workshop series, which is designed to provide more in-depth and hands-on education. Several of the sessions this year included:

- *Channel Marketing and Distribution Strategy* - John Addison, OPTIMARK
- *Pricing to New Markets* – Rich Mironov, AirMagnet, Inc.
- *Writing a Product Brief* – Michael Knowles, One Straight Line

This was the second full year of publishing our newsletter to keep you informed with session reviews, articles, and in-depth book reviews. We are always on the look out for contributions from members. Please let us know if you'd be interested in contributing an article, interview, or book review.

In areas that are less visible to the membership, this was our first full year operating at a 501(c)(6) non-profit. This status gives us additional flexibility in operating and lets us receive discounts that were previously unavailable to us. We also upgraded our back office systems and moved to 123Signup, an online event registration and member management solution. We can now

accept credit cards online, handle event pre-registration, and communicate more efficiently than ever before. We thank everyone for their patience as we switched over to this new system as it was not without a few hiccups.

I want to thank each of you who have signed-up or renewed as an SVPMA annual member for your commitment to the organization. The SVPMA couldn't be what it is today without the loyalty and dedication that you show to both this organization and to the profession of product management. To further thank you, we are rolling out a new **member's only** service to enable you to network outside of the SVPMA events. We have launched a LinkedIn group. You can register at: https://www.linkedin.com/e/gis/683/3867280F9336/ or look for the ad on page 10 of the newsletter for more details.

In the New Year, we're planning to have many more excellent speakers and workshop sessions, covering a wide range of relevant and interesting topics. We're also planning to increase our support from sponsors so that we can continue to provide you with the same level of services and resources without needing to increase the

annual membership costs. In addition, we'll be improving our efforts in marketing the SVPMA to reach a wider spectrum of Product Managers in the Bay Area who could benefit from the resources we provide.

I think you'll agree with me that the SVPMA Board of Directors has done an amazing job over the past year in building and growing this organization. We're proud of the product management resources that we're able to provide to you – from our monthly events to our newsletters and the extensive information on our website. I want to take a moment now to introduce you to the team behind the SVPMA – it is because of the dedication of this all-volunteer crew that the organization is what it is today. The members of the SVPMA board are:

Sachin Gangupantula - Business Development & Web (Sachin@svpma.org)
Ray Stendall – Finance (ray@svpma.org)
Gautam Patil – Events (Gautam@svpma.org)
Jamie O'Halloran – Workshops (Jamie@svpma.org)
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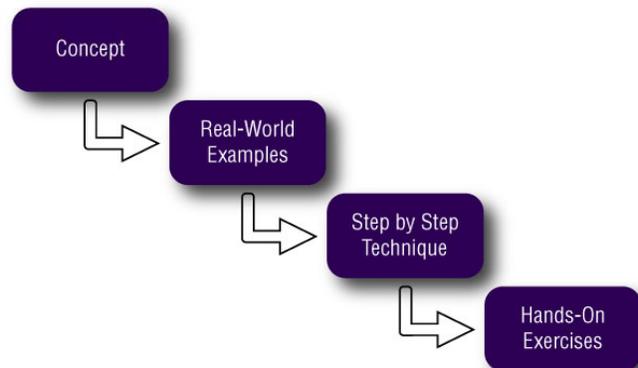
Special thanks to David Highbarger for managing the recruiters table and Mark Harnett for his many contributions throughout the year.

Please join me in thanking these dedicated individuals the next time you see them at an SVPMA event. We also always welcome ideas, suggestions and volunteers, so please feel free to share your thoughts with any one of us.

Wishing you and your families a happy new year,
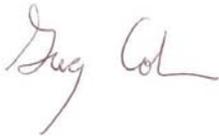
Greg Cohen
President, SVPMA
greg@svpma.org

December Event
Product Management Roundtable

Members and guests got together for the *Product Management Roundtable* at the December 8, 2004 meeting of the SVPMA. It was an evening of discussion on product management issues. After the group brainstormed topics ranging from "Remaining Relevant: can product management be outsourced" to "Different techniques in Market Research: when and how to apply," two tables formed to focus on "Marketing Yourself in the Current Job Market" and "Influence & Leadership in Product Management". The conversation was lively. At the end of the evening, each table shared the highlights from their discussions. Thanks to all who participated and special thanks to the table moderators, Neeta Godhwani and Mark Harnett, for keeping the conversations on track. ⌘

- Demonstrate solution*
- Customer implementation
- Technical support

Product management is usually responsible or deeply involved in Strategy and Planning, Functional Design, Rollout and Readiness, and Demonstrating the solution, which are indicated above with the asterisks. What is most often missing is a person to handle functional design. The speaker emphasized that this is a fulltime job, and the person must have domain expertise. Often this team member carries the title of Business Process Analyst. So what do you do if you are understaffed?

A single product manager cannot handle all four roles. If you are in this situation, good luck. If you have two product managers, however, John recommends splitting roles so one person takes Strategy & Planning and Functional Design and the other handles Rollout & readiness and Demonstrate solution. Another option is one person owning Strategy & Planning and Rollout and Readiness while the second person has responsibility for Functional Design and Demonstrate Solution.

With three people, the work can be split with one person each owning Strategy and Planning, Functional Design, and Rollout & readiness. Demonstrating solution would be handled by one of the three. With four, each roll is covered. If the product is new, the emphasis will be on the functional design; you might even put two people against this need. If the product is mature, the focus will be spread evenly.

Spread the knowledge
As product manager, you will always need to get involved in all areas of the product, sales, and support life cycle. But your goal should be to move from first string person to second or third. Thus it is essential to spread the knowledge throughout the company. This may be achieved by demonstrating the product to your internal teams, giving the customer training to members who need a more in depth understanding, and by having certification for those individuals who require the most knowledge, such as support.

Have a complete strategy
Like a travel vacation, you need to know where you are going, how you're going to get there, how long the trip will take, and how much you are going to spend. A typical strategy looks like a stack of bricks, where each stack represents a release and each brick a feature. A more comprehensive strategy looks out over 18 – 24

months and ties in with the corporate objectives and the entire product analysis and approval process.

Fence the sales force
Keep the sales force focused by pointing them towards the money. Be specific about the markets and target customer. This way they are chasing the deals that match with the product direction. Further, you need to align marketing and specifically lead generation as well. This way, the sales force is speaking to qualified leads pitching the correct value proposition, and staying focused on the correct market.

Validate early and often
At all stages of the product development, validate. The cost of an early, medium, and late design change is 1x, 50x, and 200x respectively. First, validate that you're solving the correct problem and understand its priority relative to other problems you could be solving. Once the functional design is fleshed out, validate how you intend to solve the problem. Then validate with a working prototype for software or a pre-production prototype for hardware. Finally, validate the final product with a few early adopters. Mr. Mansour mentioned the BMW iDrive as an example of what happens when a company does not validate its product with the cus-

tomer. Consumers found this joystick controller to be difficult to learn and use, especially while driving.

Communicate in plain simple English
Communicate your message in simple English. Don't try to be clever. Lastly, keep the message focused on the problem being solved.

To view John Mansour's presentation, go to: http://www.svpma.org/etc/jmansour.pdf

About the Speaker:
John Mansour is the founder and CEO of ZIGZAG Marketing, Inc. In 2001 John packaged 15 years of high-tech industry experience into a 10-step "How To" methodology focused on the execution phases of planning, developing, and marketing high-tech products. Over the course of his career, John functioned in roles ranging from pre-sales, product marketing, product management, director, and vice president with blue-chip companies including MSA and Dun & Bradstreet, mid-market companies including Geac and Symix Systems, and start-ups with really bad names never to be mentioned. John's product experience includes everything from managing a portfolio of legacy products to planning and launching a multitude of new products. To learn more about ZIGZAG Marketing's methodology, go to www.zigzagmarketing.com. ⌘

Applying Product Management Process to Managing Your Career
Part 2
By Patti Wilson
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In the previous article we compared Career Management to Product Management from a 30,000 foot perspective. You are not unlike a product in the world of employment. With companies competing globally, the acquisition, use and disposition of talent has made personnel more of a product or commodity than a human resource. Moving your career forward is much like bringing a product from conception and development through launch and establishment in the marketplace.

Like the product lifecycle there are three macro-phases of the career lifecycle: the front end (career choice), the middle (job search) and the back end (workplace success). This article will cover more detailed steps and deliverables to execute on within each phase that will enable you to successfully manage your career in the marketplace.

Front End: Career Choice and Development
Whenever you are considering a job/career move for the first time or later iterations, the process is the same as the product management lifecycle. The initial front end phase determines your career or job choice and target market.

Career choice is like the conceptual and development phase of product management where the decisions about the product's features and functionality are hammered out. Through competitive analysis and research, the product is designed to target to a specific market segment in a way that maximizes ROI (return on investment) to the company.

Similarly, in this phase you define your features and functionalities (skills, abilities and talents) as they would be expressed in your targeted job description. Through market research you would determine the market segments most apt to hire and provide you with a personal ROI.

Consider the following questions and your answers when determining your job and ROI in the career choice and development phase:

- Have you assessed your skills and abilities sufficiently to clearly identify your top job preferences?
- Can you translate your core competencies into a business solution that provide a competitive advantage to an employer?
- What is your unique advantage over competitors for the same position? What do you do better, different, with higher quality?
- What key criteria and priorities will guide your decision when faced with multiple options, opportunities or offers?
- Are you able to clearly define your personal ROI: the rewards, satisfactions and types of fulfillment you most need in an employment situation? Although money is important, it's not the only value to consider.
- Where would your ideal target market for opportunities lie geographically? In what industries? What kind of companies?
- Have you defined type of people, locales, environments, business cultures and activities that are optimal for your ROI to be realized?

Middle: Job Search
Once the product development decisions are made, the middle phase of product management is about delivering the product to the target market.

This phase includes the MRDs, marketing and sales collaterals, interface with stakeholders, and product rollout and negotiation.

Likewise, once the career choice and development decisions are made the middle phase involves delivering yourself to the targeted market via a job search. This includes: connecting and building a network of relationships; targeting and presenting to organizations; generating self-marketing collaterals both online and offline; and negotiating and closing on offers of employment, consulting contracts, etc.

Here would be things to consider when putting together the MRDs and product roll-out for you, the product:

Marketing and Sales Collaterals
- Do you have a definitive resume that highlights your accomplishments?
- Do your cover letters effectively express your identity and positioning strategy?
- Is your personal package and appearance a fit for your target market sector?
- Do you have an "audio commercial?" as a concise, powerful statement to expresses your abilities, experience and goals in a nutshell?
- Do you have a media plan including resume, website, weblog, voice mail message, phone scripts, business cards that creates a consistent image and message about you?
- Have you determined how to best approach your priority targets by conducting thorough market intelligence and data gathering? Are you using online research, resources and job sites to maximum advantage?

Your Personal MRDs
- Do you have a basic logistical plan with a well-organized system to track mailings, leads and contacts?
- Have you targeted 3-6 industries or business sectors with 20-30 companies each that may openings for the positions you desire?
- Have you identified any enhancements needed for new learning or training to facilitate your launch and reinforce your desirability to your market?
- Are you prepared to use flexible employment options such as contracting, consulting, freelancing to get your product into the hands of employers?

Interface with Your Key Stakeholders
- Have you compiled a complete list of your key contacts, and asked them for appropriate assistance?
- Have you provided them with clear information about your career goals to enable them to help you?
- Are you networking astutely to connect with new stakeholders in your career change or job search?
- Have you developed relationships with search firms and recruiters?
- Have you identified and contacted key people within your target market sector and companies?
- Can you address the situation, challenges, problems, vision and mission of your target companies and market?

Your Rollout and Negotiation
- Do you have the promotional language to bring a call from interest to action? These include answers to resume questions, accomplishment stories, comments, questions and closing statements.
- Do you know how to generate desire to hire you using success stories about your accomplishments that relate to an employer's needs and wants.
- Do you wait to take action or do you move forward? Do you ask for the next step?
- Have you prepared and asked questions during the interview to determine whether or not you want to take the opportunity if offered?
- Do you negotiate the entire compensation package including what they haven't offered?

Back End: Workplace Success
The last phase in product management is about fulfillment and the company's management of the product to enable it to fulfill its ROI and financial potential. This phase ends when the product has reached the end of its lifecycle and is being considered as candidates for retirement, renewal, and regeneration.

Our career lifecycles resonate to that of a product's. In your third phase of the career management process the focus too is on fulfillment and effectiveness. This covers from beginning a new position, your on-going self-management, personal productivity and interpersonal abilities in your attempt to fulfill your career ROI and financial potential. It ends when your efforts or services have reached the end of their useful lifecycle within this position or organization and you, too, become a candidate for retirement, renewal and regeneration.

The following questions and your answers when managing your career in the workplace may be worth considering.

Fullfilment of Your Career ROI
- Are you able to navigate the sometimes rough and choppy waters of organizational politics and culture?
- Could you improve on your workplace survival skills or management skills?
- Do you have an internal/external mentor or a resource bank of people who know the ropes and can help guide you?
- Do you know how to effectively communicate the added value you bring to the organization?

- Do you stay current and informed in your field, learning about new technology, trends and professional direction through reading, courses, seminars and additional degrees and certificates?
- Are you maintaining balance and perspective and avoiding burnout on a day-to-day basis?

Your Regeneration and Renewal
- Have you set up and maintained a professional development plan?
- Do you regularly maintain a log of your accomplishments, training, awards and feedback to prepare for your annual performance evaluation or your next gig?
- Do you know where you want to be and what you want to be doing in 5 or 10 years? What do you anticipate will be the challenges and life situations you will be facing and how are you preparing for them now?
- Do you have an immediate action plan should your job go away tomorrow?
- Do you monitor and evaluate your career direction against the compass of your ROI and proactively make corrections?
- Are you continuing to stay connected to your outside network maintaining your ties and associations with others in your profession on a regular basis?
- Are you cross-training: taking lateral moves and expanding your skill base on the job while building your internal network?
- Do you take sabbaticals and time off to explore, learn, volunteer and replenish?

Good career management and good product management rely on your ability to execute consistently and well through all the phases to ensure the success of you and the product. And the cycles will continue to repeat, hopefully with continuing interest, engagement and satisfaction on your end. ⌘

Patti Wilson is a well known Bay Area career counselor, coach and managing principal of the CareerCompany.com™. In July 2001, she founded an innovative online job and career networking and support group for high tech and bio tech professionals called the Wednesdayjobgroup.

November Workshop Report

On Saturday November 13th, 2004, Michael Knowles and David Leland from One Straight Line gave a workshop on Writing an Effective Product Brief. The effective product brief is an ideal way to both clarify your thinking about a proposed product, and communicate that thinking to a diverse audience. Participants worked through wirting their own product brief and left the workshop with a workbook and CD. ⌘

Looking for new opportunities in Product Management?

Check out the many job listings on the SVPMA Forum:

http://www.svpma.org/forum/

The SVPMA represents over 800 talented product management and marketing professionals!

Looking to hire an experienced Product Management or Marketing Professional?

Post your opening for <u>FREE </u>on the SVPMA Forum:

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BOOK REVIEW
Contextual Design
Review by Greg Cohen

Contextual Design: Defining Customer-Centered Systems is one of the classic texts of user-centered design. Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt published the book in 1998, and it remains as pertinent today as when it was first released. The reader is stepped through the phases of customer centered design, from gathering customer data to iterative proto-typing. The methods can be used in their entirety or in pieces and can be applied to large and small projects alike.

The book is divided into six sections. The first two deal with understanding the customer and "seeing work." The main focus is observing the customer in their work environment. This is a shift from more traditional interview techniques. You now spend time with the customer watching them work, asking questions as needed, and mapping out their work environment. The next task is to visually represent the work environment. There are five elements:

1. Flow model – how communications flow between people to get a job done.

2. Sequence model – what triggers an event, what steps does it go though, and what breakdowns occur.

3. Artifact model – the information and structure of information as it is used in a task. This might be a form or a report. Further, annotations that represent informal use of the artifact are also captured.

4. Cultural model – who has influence in the organization and how is that influence used. Further, are there any breakdowns between groups or people? This might be policy, power, emotion, etc.

5. Physical model – the physical environment and layout in which the work gets done. How are the room or rooms set-up Is the work done on a workstation or with paper copy? How is information (ie. Artifacts) moved? Does information move in spreadsheets, in folders, through interoffice mail, faxes, or email? What breakdowns occur because the physical environment impedes the work.

The next section deals with "Seeing across Customers" and how to interpret the data collected for common themes. The analysis leads to a unified representation of the customer and market. An entire chapter is devoted to consolidating the five models developed during the customer research sessions. The book even recommends the creation of a design room that is wallpapered with all the models and notes. Lastly, this part describes how to step other groups in the organization, including marketing, engineering, and management, through the findings.

Part four addresses turning the research into innovative design. This section covers storyboarding and how each of the five models contributes to the design. The fifth section drills into the system design. It covers how to break up the problems while keeping the user's work coherent. The section on User Environment Design shows the reader how to create a schematic version of the key elements of the user interface and how those elements connect. Each screen is mapped out, showing what functions can be performed, what objects the user can manipulate, and to where the screen links.

The final part of the book demonstrates how to take the User Environment Design and map it to a UI and proto-type. The authors provide instruction setting-up and running a prototype interview and iterating on the design through the process. The last chapter covers how to put Contextual design into practice.

At over 450 pages, *Contextual Design* is a serious work. And at $57.95 on Amazon it is dear as well. Nevertheless, if you spend the time to learn and apply the techniques, you will be rewarded and find yourself returning to this book again and again. ⌘

> "Don't expect to find requirements littering the landscape at the customer site"
>
> From *Contextual Design* by Hugh Beyer and Karen Holtzblatt

long list of features, but you can't find a one to five word value message to communicate, it's going to be very hard to build a marketing campaign and keep your product focus.

The Gold Feature technique is particularly effective if you are on short release cycles or are doing a point release (1.1, 1.2, etc). Many of your team members may want to include all kinds of other features that can be of varying interest and value to your customers. If you can get them focused on the one Gold Feature for the release (and in agreement that everything else is a "nice to have" priority but that you won't hold up the release for it), you'll have a much better chance of success. You'll also have a higher likelihood of meeting a tight schedule, as you can plan the release with more certainty if the Gold Feature is the only critical path item.

I've used this technique successfully several times when working with clients. One of the releases had a client-side piece of software that was downloaded from the

web, and the Gold Feature was "60% smaller download," resulting in more rapid adoption by new customers. Another was "Easier signup process", which led to 30% more customers completing the signup process to try out the product.

Using the Gold Feature technique is an easy and powerful way to keep your products and your team focused and on track. The result will be a great product delivered on schedule that provides value to your customers and a compelling marketing message. ⌘

Brian Lawley runs the 280 Group, which provides hand-picked Marketing and Product Management Consultants and Contractors to help clients define, launch and market their products more effectively. Visit www.280group.com or call 408-832-1119 for more information.