

Getting Structured Selling Right at [Redacted]

Product managers need to understand their users and their work. They may not be programming the software, but they need to be able to clearly and precisely answer questions as to how the system should behave when faced with user input. Such understanding requires significant clarity of thought, not unlike that which goes into well-done UML models. Nothing is more confusing and upsetting to developers if the product manager keeps changing terms and definitions. This case traces the steps of [Redacted], an interim CTO brought in to coach [Redacted], the main product manager of failing start-up [Redacted]. [Redacted] uses a structured selling approach to [Redacted]. Due to lack of clarity in terminology, sales commissions were incorrectly calculated and customers were lost in the web sales conversion channel. The case shows how an imprecise vision and details create problems with the software (and lead to loss of revenue) and how appropriate conceptual tools can solve these problems.

Work Results

The actual case:

- Introduction of the protagonists, the Product Manager and his Coach [Redacted]
- Background on structured selling, web shops, sales and conversion funnels
- Background on [Redacted] and the [Redacted] industry and its customers
- Structured into three steps
 - Step 1: A naïve approach with obvious problems and omissions
 - Provides PRD based on inconsistent terminology and prose
 - It is really nicely formatted, looking good, but full of holes
 - Step 2: A more professional coached solution with non-obvious problems and omissions
 - Provides the revised PRD after coaching using consistent terminology
 - Properly structured, list of feature, glossary included
 - Non-obvious problems and omissions to be constructed or provided by [Redacted]
 - Provides raw usage information from which to track down problems
 - Step 3: A final solution that gets it by and large right
 - Provides clear conceptual funnel model, terminology, glossary
 - Provides raw usage information of a well-working conversion funnel
 - Provides a UML class model that captures key domain abstractions
 - Students may receive these steps as separate documents in multiple sessions

Case concepts (examples from discussion, possibly more to be uncovered):

- Domain concepts
 - Sales and conversion funnel
 - Structure and dynamics
 - Typical numbers and relationships by industry, incl. structured selling of [Redacted]
- Product management

- Tools of the trade
 - Constructive tools
 - Benefits of precise terminology
 - Uses of glossary as a tool
 - Use of Product Requirements Document (PRD)
 - Feature specifications
 - Analytical tools
 - Methods for digging into this type of data
 - (We are not sure what they are but the student should find out)
- Suitable process
 - Model debugging; provisioning for feedback to steer process
 - Incremental iterative refinement of solution / model

Teaching guideline:

- A series of questions with links to the background (teaching) materials

The thesis is to be written in the style of a Harvard Business School case, leading to three deliverables: (a) the actual case, (b) background material on relevant economic concepts, and (c) a teaching guideline on how to approach teaching the case in class. (See <http://goo.gl/wG3oE>.)

The case needs to be released under CC-BY 3.0 license.

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