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The Science of Launching a New Product

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How many times have you been blind-sided when a new product launch doesn't go the way you planned? Doesn't it often seem that despite the attempts to organize the process, there are always a few contingencies you had not foreseen?

Breakdowns during a new product launch are the most common complaints we hear, and usually include:

- The marketing team didn't start early enough and now we have too much inventory.
- The marketing team started too early. Now we have all these backorders and our competitors are starting to offer a similar product.
- The sales team didn't really understand key attributes of the product, so sales have started off much slower than we expected.
- The packaging looks great, but it's late and it's missing some unique product features.
- One key customer looked at the product and said "Your product does the same thing as the xxx from XYZ Company, but is priced 20% higher."
- We missed the deadline for the catalog, so it will be months before our customers know how they can place an order.
- There was all this confusion about who signs off on product attributes, who manages the launch and how pricing gets approved.

These issues can certainly happen in any company. But, there's no need to repeat them. What if you could initiate a process that makes product launches far more effective?

A Product Launch That Worked - The Apple® iPhone™

Only on the market now for just over 45 days, many marketing gurus have already called Apple's iPhone the best example ever of a well-orchestrated product launch. Think about it: over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million phones sold and activated in 3 days! Remember all the buzz and hype? Do you know ANYONE who wasn't wondering what the iPhone would REALLY do? Was there ANYONE not talking about it! Hey, it's a phone, almost as ubiquitous as a brake pad, an oil filter or a Starbucks outlet.

It was fascinating watching people stand in line for a day or more to be sure they could buy a \$499 or \$599 cell phone before the retailer ran out (which almost none of them did). Heck, if you waited a few

hours in our neighborhood (San Francisco Bay Area, where technology RUNS our lives!), you could just walk up to the counter and walk away with the phone of your choice.

How did Apple do this? How can ANY company pull off this kind of seamless, highly exciting product launch, despite a number of well publicized glitches?

I learned from an associate I know at Apple that it all starts with a highly collaborative inter-departmental environment that focuses on communication and cooperation. The mechanism, an online project management tool, is the glue that held the whole iPhone launch process together -- and served multiple functions:

- It required interdepartmental collaboration from the inception.
 - By using a shared checklist, product management, sales, marketing, finance and customer service all had to share their input and stay on top of their roles.
- It helped focus marketing and other teams on deliverables and timelines.
 - Promises of "by when" and "by whom" required real-time communication and collaboration.
- Research came before action (remember Ready-Aim-Fire?).
 - Research needs to uncover competitive products, pricing and market timing so manufacturing would know the inventory required for the launch.
- The sales model was enhanced.
 - The sales team, sales reps, customer service and distributors need to be trained to ensure timely shipping, knowledgeable customer and technical support, and so on.
- Everyone knew where the process was at any given point in time.
 - Upper management and other stakeholders could access the same information in real-time, which meant when it came to revenue forecasting, there were few surprises.

This level of collaborative thinking is easier to implement than you might think. In fact, you do not have to be a multi-billion dollar enterprise like Apple to take advantage of the same kinds of collaborative technology. Software like Microsoft's Project and online collaborative databases like salesforce.com are available for almost every size company.

We're good at setting up and even managing this kind of process and we'd be happy to help. But whatever you do, do it now. Prevent those costly catastrophes from occurring - *before your next big launch!*