



Hurwitz BalancedView

Hurwitz Trend Watch

Reprint

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## Product Managers — Rejoice!

Pity the poor product manager. It's not that he or she deliberately thwarts both customers and the sales force by refusing to add the very features they most want and need. And contrary to popular belief, product managers don't delight in annoying development by asking for complex or difficult to develop functions. They really don't mean to miss the big trends or the latest features being touted by the competition. No, this much-maligned group, rather than being loathsome schemers hell-bent on foisting unusable products on unsuspecting customers, would dearly love to come up with the exact feature set that provides the optimum balance of functionality and R&D costs. They dream of quenching the field's thirst for the latest bell and/or whistle, while simultaneously satisfying existing customers' desire for steak-not-sizzle. The question is not "Why don't they just do it?"; it's actually "How can they possibly juggle all these conflicting demands with no tools?"

### The Hurwitz Take

Product managers have always been underserved by the software industry. Except for Excel, the Swiss Army knife of the software world, there was no tool that provided a repository for the product manager to store all the enhancement requests and ideas bombarding product management. Even in Excel, there was no easy way to catalog duplicate requests, track the source of requests, prioritize, or weight requests. Most importantly, there was no tool that allowed the product manager to simulate the results of decisions to ensure that the product plan reflected the optimum solution, especially across an entire product lineup.

Recently, several vendors have introduced applications for product portfolio management, designed to make product management a predictable science instead of an arcane black art. One of the most promising of these new applications is from ListenPoint of San Ramon, California. This PPM (product portfolio management) application allows Global 2000 companies to develop and manage product plans across an entire product lineup, a product family, or a single product. By tracking both enhancement ideas and sales inhibitors and systematically weighting them on a variety of factors, ListenPoint enables product managers to come up with a plan that helps to ensure the right mix of features, pricing, and time-to-market. While it may be a while before all companies realize how much more effective their product planning can be with such a tool, the really astute ones will “get it” right away. Sounds like ListenPoint has been listening to its customers.

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