

Pravin Gandhi

This Thing Called Marketing

“YOU must see our product. It is so capable. Everyone who has seen the demonstration has bought it immediately; but you see we are lacking in Marketing.”

This has been a common, though paradoxical, refrain among the scores of software developers I have met in the last few months. The reason for the lack of success in the market is almost always sought to be placed at the steps of an uncontrollable, external entity called “Marketing,” akin to the vagarious Nature, like a *force majeure*, but with all else being fine with themselves and their product. “If only we had this marketing...” as in: “If only we had rain...”

Some intonations are even sinister, as if marketing is not for the good guys. It is something one cannot do without these days, this is what the world has come to. Something that decent guys could never get into. Grudging complaints that guys with savvy walk away with the cake while companies with better products don’t.

Sometimes there are cries of foul: “That product is successful only because of its marketing.”

Or yet, marketing means money, and lots of it. The other company does well because it spends more money.

And on and on. Such are the attitudes, defences, apologies towards marketing or the lack of it. Marketing remains a grudgingly, secretly admired and coveted “quality” but still perceived merely as a quality, nothing more.

This thing called Marketing.

“Have Product, Will Sell”

Most software product developers start off believing the above refrain. Many a product arises out of the developer’s personal requirement or by extending a software solution originally devised for a specific customer. Alas, there is no software product in the world that I know of which was made from existing tailormade software, or which was not originally conceived to be a software product.

Everybody loves his product dearly—and there’s nothing wrong with that. The developer is usually an authority on the subject, knows what his customers want (and by generalisation, what the market wants) and calls the shots. Thus, most soft-



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ware product development in the country is mono-centric, that is, carries the personality of one person, whereas the product should have its own personality independent of the developer or the Company. Because product marketing as generally practised in the market today is centred around product development rather than Market Development, the product company could only keep on modifying or enhancing the product, while slipping into a coma on the marketing front.

On Marketing And Innovation

Whereas, in fact, marketing is a science—analytical, based on sound logic and hard data, measurable—and is an art in the sense that it gives ample scope for creativity and innovation.

Peter Drucker, the management guru, has said: “Marketing and innovation are the only two aspects of business that interest me. For, they produce results; all the rest are costs.” No wonder many software companies do not see light at the end of the tunnel

because of the vision that does not see beyond mere product development.

Basically, a software product life cycle is essentially 3-step:

1. Creating the product
2. Feeding it into the market
3. Working on product extension, enhancement, replacement.

Notice that I use the word “creating” instead of “developing,” because creating the product includes the development of the software, production, packaging, developing the product personality, its mission in the market, its unique selling proposition and the basic, consistent thread of communication to the market.

Marketing and innovation must be woven into each of the above steps. Take the example of Lotus 1-2-3, which may veritably be called the mother of all software products. It wasn’t the first spreadsheet software around, but it brought out the hidden needs of users like none else did, and created a wave on which it still rides to be the most popular spreadsheet software around. Lotus gave the software product

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a name, 1-2-3, which spelt out the personality of the product—simplicity of the highest degree. Compare this with the Multiplans and Visicalcs of that time. Lotus established the trend of usability in software, documentation, packaging, communication and retail distribution. What we take today for granted in software products, we owe to Lotus Corporation.

About This Column

Software Product Marketing is new business for the IT industry in India, though software products have been around for several years. Besides, the focus of the software industry has been on developing custom software. Therefore there has not been much experience in the industry with respect to software products. Custom software and product software are two differ-

