

Product Management: the Con

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The confidence element is the thing that hooks the mark and makes a good score possible, while at the same time it reduces the possibility of trouble resulting from the swindle. Product Managers need to have the confidence of customers and internal product investors. I'm sure I'm not the only one, who after evangelizing a product for two days at a user conference or budgeting & roadmapping session, might begin to wonder who they really were.

The tip is a game for con men who are also gamblers, for it requires some dexterity in the manipulation of the cards. It is really no more than a crooked poker game with the confidence element added. There is the mark who believes he's going to have help cheating. In product management who's the mark? Is it the investors, who continually dump money into product initiatives never knowing if or how much they'll ever get a return?

There's the roper, who'll bring the mark into the game by gaining the mark's confidence, and then convince the mark to gamble more and more. If that doesn't sound like product management I don't know what does. Does your product management team really know how your new feature set will generate returns? Oh really, how much will the next release bring back to your investors?

The insideman will be the pretend mark, and works with the roper to increase the stakes in the game. Now in the tip there are many variations, sometimes Marketing can play the role of the insideman, most of the time its development, but I've even seen Sales participate. Product management gets the investors to believe if there were just a few more features... Then marketing could say this, or Development could do that, or Sales could close all of these... When the stakes are high enough, the insideman using one of many methods of 'putting in the sting' takes the mark for all they have. Not a very friendly game in my book.

It doesn't have to be this way, and product management can be on the up-and-up. The investors in product initiatives don't have to feel like they're in a game of chance that they keep getting sucked into. Product investment doesn't have to be a bottomless pit. Product managers shouldn't have to be confidence men declaring to the organization's marks, "Trust me!" each quarter.

Good traceability from the market evidence through to market requirements prevents the roper from pushing his/her agenda; and let this be a warning, there's nothing more deadly than a well educated female roper. By doing opportunity definition and providing accountability, the mark can gain back a little control, and not be at the roper and insideman's mercy. Product Roadmap Definition locked-tied with good Opportunity Definition can remove the impact of

every insideman.

Just as following by the GAAP [Generally Accepted Accounting Principles], the accounting profession has been able to keep these undesirable elements out of finance, performing at least some activities in each of the Seven Pillars of Product Management can keep the con out of product initiatives.

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