

A review of ProductCamp Austin

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So what was it that made ProductCamp Austin special this year? Was it the keynote presentation? Was there a session that was especially good that stood out more than the others? Was it the friendly way they greeted you at registration? Was it the opportunity to see who was hiring here in Austin, and talk to recruiters and HR people representing real opportunities for employment? Was it the live Google recordings? Was it the good sandwiches for lunch? Was it the opportunity to donate product management activities back to the community? Was it the gathering at the close of the sessions to discuss the day's events? Or maybe it was the Happy Hour after the sessions? Ah the weather, maybe it was the rainy weather, yes I did say rain in Austin, Texas, and that's something to celebrate. Many of our friends here in Austin were out sick, and we missed them. I'll tell you what, I just can't put my finger on it.

Let's review. My wife and I got there a little early, I don't know why, old people do that. They asked us if we were there to help with registration. My wife and I looked at each other and I told them sure we were. We spent the next hour registering about 300 people (I never heard the official number). I'm sure I frustrated the others who patiently fixed all the messes I made. Was it fun? Boy I'll tell you, it was GREAT! I've never shook so many hands in my life.

When I told them "Welcome to ProductCamp 8" and saw the smiles appear across the faces, I could tell we shared a mutual love. That right there spoke to the hard work and reputation of the folks at ProductCamp Austin and the effort they put into this year after year. They tell me it's all about the brand, well, ProductCamp Austin's product management team has been doing a great job, and their product shows it.

As with any product, the perceived value of the product must be maintained. Like all of us with our own products, they've increased the perceived value of ProductCamp through product differentiation. What I heard, and personally felt over and over again was at ProductCamp Austin, "You can make a difference". The product management team of the ProductCamp Austin made sure you had opportunities to make a difference to the whole conference. Whether as a resistor, a voter, a presenter, or a participant, when you left ProductCamp you knew you made a difference. You knew people would be looking for you in August at our next ProductCamp.

This year, the majority of attendees were not product managers. About half of the participants had been here before, but of all the demographic data, the number of young first-time product people was incredible. What they lacked in experience, they made up for in commitment and a good education. Yes, I said good education. More than ever before, they did not fall into product management by accident, they had actually gone to school to become a product person.

They understood the importance of market sensing, using the problem statement, analyzing market and business opportunities, defining outward facing product features, publishing a product roadmap, stating BASIC, PERFORMANCE, and EXCITEMENT market requirements, and launch definition and coordination. They not only understood, but they were prepared to do it. They could stand on their own, and contribute in an interdependent environment. Many were already in positions where they were practicing. So maybe what made ProductCamp Austin special was the hope that the young people brought to the profession. I've been in a few professional organizations like IEEE, PMI, PDMA, AMA, and SAVE, but nowhere have I seen so many up and coming professionals.

At the conclusion of any analysis, we must decide for ourselves if ProductCamp Austin 8 was worth it. Our sponsors will have to ask was the ROI sufficient to do it again? Each person attending gave up their Saturday to attend. The product management team who made this event what it was, gave up a lot more than one Saturday. Was it worth it to them?

Well, for me and mine, it was. Thanks in a large part to all of you.

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